

Journey

Fall 2020

A grief community publication
from Northern Illinois Hospice



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Coronavirus Changes How We Say Goodbye

By Roland Brown, M. Div., Chaplain

Many of you who are reading this may have experienced a loved one departing this life. The death of someone close to you is difficult. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has added another layer of grief to all who have had to bury or cremate someone they loved dearly.



Roland Brown, M.Div.

As a Hospice Chaplain and a Pastor of a church, it has been difficult for me to see people go through these challenging times. It is something none of us ever expected. I know some individuals are feeling helpless as they try to ensure their loved one rests in peace. Feelings of guilt, anger

and even depression can occur.

Since early spring, due to COVID-19 restrictions, visitors have not been allowed in nursing facilities due to the risk of exposing residents to the virus. Some facility residents passed away without family present. Additionally, limited or no funeral services have forced families to grieve in different ways. Social media platforms have provided an option for funeral homes to broadcast services online so mourners can pay their respect from home, but these new ways are different and not what families had in mind.

While many have suffered loss due to the Coronavirus, there are many others who are grieving a death unrelated to this virus. All are experiencing the same challenges with a lack of closure and no rituals to say goodbye. While there is a deep sadness with our

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First in *caring* for life's final months

From the Bereavement Coordinator

For some who are reading this column, you may be trying to come to grips with a loved one who died alone in a facility because of regulations imposed due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. Others may have been fortunate to be with a loved one as they died. In either case both sets of scenarios have something to teach each other.



The common denominator in both scenarios is LOVE. Love was not missing in either of these situations. The Roman poet, Sextus, is credited with an early version of the proverb, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” This describes the feeling of greater affection between friends who are kept apart. Over these months I have had the honor of listening to stories from both scenarios. Thank you for these stories.

There is another saying, “Adversity and loss make one wise.” As bereft humans, people who have stood with death (in her presence or in your heart), we have begun to overcome the pains of grief due to the death of a loved one. We have our days of “ups” and days of “downs,” along with moments of agony and joy.

Here are four ways to overcome adversity:

- Surround yourself with positive people. Be selective with the people you choose to be around (remember happy people will bring us up and sad people can zap us of our joy).
- Journal. Write. There is something so peaceful (and therapeutic) in writing down your thoughts.
- Take time to be in nature. Nature also is therapeutic.
- Begin investing in yourself. You have walked in some difficult shoes in some difficult times. Be gentle with yourself. This grief-work and journey is tough work, but YOU CAN DO IT.

Peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew J. Vitale". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Andrew J. Vitale, CT
Bereavement Coordinator/Spiritual Counselor

2020 Bereavement Support Groups & Workshops

Open to anyone who has experienced the death of someone close to them, our groups and workshops focus on learning, healing and encouragement. All are welcome. Pre-registration is required. Please email avitale@niha.org or call 779.774.9820 to RSVP. Events and opportunities are updated on the Northern Illinois Hospice website under the “Grief & Healing” tab — check them out!

Mindful Mondays: Grief & Resilience

Seven consecutive Monday mornings
10:30 a.m. – Noon
In-person at Anderson Japanese Gardens.
RSVP required.
We will follow Anderson Japanese Gardens guidelines, using masks and social distancing.

Finding our Way through COVID-19 and Grief Support Group

(circumstances will dictate if this will be in-person or virtual)
Six consecutive Tuesdays, time TBD based on RSVP's.
Beginning October 20, 2020.
RSVP required.

Legacy-Memorial Event

(circumstances will dictate if this will be in-person or virtual)
Sunday, November 8, 2020
2:00 p.m.
Our bi-annual opportunity to gather/remember our loved ones.
RSVP required.

Here Come the Holidays! – What about my Grief?

(circumstances will dictate if this will be in-person or virtual)
Friday, November 13, 2020,
Time: TBD based on RSVP's.
RSVP required.



Coronavirus Changes How We Say Goodbye

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being unable to comfort each other, we will get through this. The pandemic, the restrictions, and the stress that you have been going through is not your fault and you are not alone.

For many who have faced these difficult times, I would like to give you solace and share a true story. As a Hospice Chaplain, I was visiting with a patient at a local nursing facility who only had few months to live. This patient, "Steve," had a different view of God and faith than I have, but we still were able to talk about spirituality. One day, while I was visiting with Steve, he wanted to talk to me about something that was worrisome on his mind. He shared he had no family, no one to call, and no one to come when he died. He asked me to do him a favor. Understand, I only knew him for a few months. He said, "Chaplain Roland, when I die, will you promise me that you will scatter my ashes in Lake Michigan?" Steve was serious and wanted someone to care for him enough to do such an honor. I agreed and he was noticeably relieved.

Two weeks later, he passed away and I remembered my promise and I couldn't let him down. Thankfully, friends of Northern Illinois Hospice arranged for me to ride in a boat where we were able to cross into Lake Michigan and scatter his ashes to fulfill Steve's wish. This was a tribute to a man I didn't know well, but I was honored to bring him to his final resting place. I share this as a reminder that while we are living in unusual times, finding ways to celebrate the life of your loved ones in a meaningful way will help bring you comfort and peace.

Routines & Rituals in the Time of COVID-19

Fall is here and we're well into months of dealing with the Coronavirus and our individual grief losses. The Coronavirus has triggered many feelings, both positive and negative. It's easy to get swept up in the news which tends to fuel the fire of our minds, causing us to become restless and anxious. To help combat this, practicing mindfulness and meditation may help calm and resolve these feelings. Whether you recognize it or not, stress is affecting all of us.

Incorporating routines and rituals into your life may offer some sense of relief during these uncertain times. Many of our daily routines and rituals faded into the background when COVID-19 entered the storyline. Routines help us to relax and offer us a sense of control, stability, and security, by creating a feeling of order in the chaos of our everyday lives. Routines are our usual means of doing things and are predictable. It's how we do activities on a daily basis without too much thinking. Rituals offer us a sense of belonging, to a group, a community. Rituals are like routines, but they have more emotion attached to them. Family meal times, special occasions or activities, like walking or biking as a family, playing board games and, reading together are a few examples.

Here are some more ideas to integrate rituals and routines into your life:

- Create boundaries between work and home.
- Be creative in your weekly routine (don't be afraid to mix it up a bit).
- Think about the things you CAN control.
- Establish, and strengthen, routines that you can control.
- Don't give up on important events (maybe not in person, but virtual).
- Try to enjoy this change of routine.
- Don't over-do it, allow some free time just to relax.
- Maintain "you" time – it's still important to have "you" time.
- Remember you are NOT alone; we are all experiencing these feelings.
- It's okay (and encouraged) to talk with others about your feelings and reach out for help, if necessary.



Join us for a "safe space" to gather, ask questions, and share ideas about grief, loss, and bereavement.

Search The Grief Cafe on Facebook.



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Mindful Moment

Focus on your breathing while waiting at a stop sign or red light, or while waiting for your coffee to brew. Note if your breath is deep or shallow and how your breathing changes as you bring you attention to it.

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