Dear friends,

Here we are in spring time with its emphasis on renewal. Trees are leafing out and grass is turning green. Spring is also a time which inspires faith, as witnessed by the recent celebrations of Passover and Easter.

But if you are working through a time of deep grief, you may find faith to be difficult. I have often talked to people who have felt like they had lost their faith while they were in the midst of the normal confusion and craziness of bereavement. Some pray, yet they feel that their prayers never get past the ceiling. Some just can’t make themselves attend services, then feel guilty about not going. Others feel deeply let down by God because of the death of a loved one. Many believe that if their faith was just stronger they would not be feeling so sad or depressed or lonely.

Please know that IT IS NOT A SIGN OF A LACK OF FAITH, OR OF A WEAK FAITH, TO HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME WITH GRIEF. In fact, it is perfectly normal to feel angry at God, or at the pastor one feels didn’t visit enough. It is not unusual for people to find themselves unable to face the world, much less attend their own congregation. I believe it is important not to chastise oneself when struggling with such difficult spiritual issues. The grief itself is difficult enough without adding additional internal turmoil.

Strong emotional reactions at a time of loss are a hallmark of faithful people. King David, at the death of his son, Absalom, grieved openly and deeply, despite his “friends” insistence that his grief was not warranted. The psalmists often vented their frustration and anger to the Almighty, as if talking to a trusted friend. Remember, as well, Jesus weeping at the grave of Lazarus. These were not instances of weak faith but of faith being honest and realistic. The essence of faith is belief in a God who has led and will continue to lead us, not away from struggle, but rather through the storm, the turbulent sea, the “valley of the shadow of death,” to freedom, growth, and newness of life beyond.

Sincerely,

Mike Sweetman
The Diversity of Grief
By Mike Sweetman, M.Div, Chaplain

I have been working on this Bereavement Newsletter for over ten years, trying to provide people in our community with useful information, opportunities and perspective to help on their bereavement journey. I must confess that when I started putting this publication together each month, I thought I knew a lot more about grief than I actually did. Over these last 10 years, I have learned a few things I think mostly from the bereaved themselves. Let me share with you a few observations (and generalizations), about this thing we call grief.

The most important observation to share is that all people do not grieve the same. Some grieve more heavily than others. Some grieve very little. Some grieve very openly, others very quietly. There is no one way to grieve or a “right” way to grieve. Grief is as individual as are the people whose loss is being grieved.

Different relationships create a different kind of grief. If a relationship was troubled, the grieving survivor may have a difficult time with grief, because there are unresolved issues left behind. This can be especially true if there are things that needed to be said, or reconciled, which were never communicated. In such a case, anger may linger long into the grieving process. Grief over a healthy relationship may be characterized more by intense sadness than by protesting.

The circumstances of the loss make a big difference in how we grieve. A sudden or untimely death, such as an accident, usually leaves people unprepared and it may be difficult to accept the loss. On the other hand, if an illness was prolonged, there may be a real sense of relief that the loved one is no longer suffering, coupled with a loneliness because they are missed.

And each grieving person brings their own personality to the situation. A sensitive person will most likely be very expressive about their grief. A person who is generally stoic in life will most likely handle their grief inwardly. To paraphrase a common saying, you often grieve the way you live, drawing upon your own strengths and reaching out for help with your unique needs. Likewise, not everyone needs the same kind of support. Some process most of their grief internally, and do not desire a lot of outside input. Maybe just reading the newsletter and knowing other people care is plenty of support for them. Others need to talk, and talk, and talk about the grief, and the deceased, in order to come to terms with the reality of loss. They may find a support group offers them the kind of environment they need to work toward healing.

There are a lot more observations I could make, but these give you some idea of the diversity of grieving. What we try to address in these pages is a wide spectrum of grief. Not every article will connect with everyone, but it is surprising how often someone will tell one of our staff, “that article in the newsletter really hit home. It was just what I needed to hear.” That is what we hope to accomplish by publishing this newsletter—to touch your grief and offer you a healing perspective to help you find your way. Mike Sweetman

April showers bring May flowers.
Keen Grief

Keen is a word which is seldom heard these days. The original idea of “keen” is sharp, as in a keen edge. As an adjective it is sometimes used to describe something well developed or acute, as in a keen wit, or something intense, such as in a keen delight. In grief it reflects the intensity of the pain of loss.

“Keening” is a word which comes to us from an ancient Gaelic word for cry. It refers to an ancient Irish/Scottish mourning ritual in which a loud, long, intense cry of sorrow and pain is voiced by the mourner to express some of the deep pain of their loss. There are similar wordless laments practiced by mourners in cultures around the globe.

"The night is long, it is not endless, there will be a dawn. The pain is now, but not forever, there will be a healing. The path is hard, yet there is hope, you do not walk alone."

Grief is defined as keen mental suffering. That is a definition I can agree with. Over the past 4 years I have often wished I knew how to do the physical act of keening, just to cut the pain of grieving. I have learned that not everyone grieves at the same time, in the same manner, or for the same duration. Some of us wish to have someone sit with us and help share our grieving, while others want only to be alone.

My mother’s death at 71 was not totally unexpected. She smoked up to the last day of her life, even while wearing her oxygen. We had talked and visited while we began our process of letting go and saying goodbye. My grief over my dad’s passing came after a number of years of his dementia. He had changed over that time and faded away. I had grieved the changes in my dad as time passed because he was no longer the same man.

The grief for my husband out measures all the others. This was a man I had been married to for 36 years. There were differences in our personalities, which we had worked over and smoothed out. It just added spice to our marriage, and we had grown stronger as a result. Three children came as a result of that union and we basked in our pride of those three young adults. The last sixteen years of our marriage he had worked out of his office in our house. So we spent the lion’s share of each day together. We grew even tighter and closer.

But now he is gone and I am alone in my grief. Our children grieve him and miss him as much as I do. Our dogs are missing him at the same level, even responding to the sound of his name being said. I am thankful for the dogs, for, to some degree, they fill his void. They have listened to me ramble and cry and cuss with deep understanding in their eyes. They know when I grieve, for they will come from wherever they’ve been to sit with me, give me solace and diminish the pain.

I miss him when I watch TV, when I turn towards his chair to see his reaction to whatever
is showing on the screen. Or when I come home with news and gossip to share with him and he's not there. I miss the sound of his whistle around the house. His whistle was his barometer. I could tell his mood by how and what he whistled.

The strength of my grief grows less as time moves on. I know that anniversaries birthdays, weddings, good days and bad, bring him back to the forefront. Though these dates aren’t as strong with the passage of time, they still mark life without him. I try to keep it to myself, because I don’t want to be known as one of those old widow ladies who only moans and carries on about her long lost husband.

Recently I made the comment while at the HoNCO office that I will feel as though I’m doing better and over something that carries feelings pertaining to him, only to have my props knocked out from under me. I was informed that those feelings and happenings are known as "Grief Bursts" and could always cycle around the days of my life. Now I’ll be prepared and understand what’s happening.

I no longer watch the kitchen door in expectation of his coming through it. He doesn’t pop up in the middle of a crowd any longer with me thinking it’s him. He is truly gone, no matter how much I wish it to be otherwise.

Grief Conference To Focus on Veteran’s Needs

Having served in the military, and especially in armed conflicts such as WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, has a profound and lifelong impact on the service member and his or her family. Perhaps is this nowhere more evident than when facing end-of-life concerns and the bereavement process. Hospice of North Central Oklahoma recognizes this, and in association with American Legion Huff-Minor Post 14, will be hosting a grief conference on *Improving Care for Veterans Facing Illness and Death*, as part of its annual Living With Grief teleconference series.

The conference will be held Wednesday, April 17th, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the American Legion building, located at 407 W. South Avenue, Ponca City. It will include a DVD presentation of nationally recognized grief and bereavement educators who will discuss the special end-of-life and bereavement needs of our veteran population. A panel of local health care professionals and veteran representatives will be on hand for a 30 minute discussion session following the video presentation.

If you are a veteran, part of a veteran’s family, or are grieving the loss of someone who has served our country, this discussion can provide valuable information and insight to help you cope with the realities of loss and grief.

Pre-registration for the conference is appreciated. Refreshments will be served. There will be a special door prize drawing for those who pre-register by April 12. One can register by contacting Cathy Denning or Tom Howard at (580) 762-9102 or toll free (800) 814-9102.
Bereavement Tip

Go fly a kite! Please don’t be insulted, I’m serious. Doing something simple yet unusual—and even completely out of character—can give one a tremendous lift, especially after the long, dreary winter months. Go out and fly a kite, take bread crumbs out to the duck pond, jump on a merry-go-round at the park (careful, this gets me dizzy), try one of those coin operated video games in the store lobby. Do something zany or off beat. In the midst of grief it often helps to balance out the obvious and the routine with a little spontaneity, giving the brain and the heart a moment to recharge and reframe. Grief will always have a place in one’s life, but it does not have to claim every waking moment. Surprise yourself.

THE CHILDREN’S HOUR

This is a support group geared especially for elementary-age children who are experiencing loss due to death, deployment, divorce or separation. The group meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Parents and/or guardians are encouraged to attend with their children.

Please RSVP with Cathy Denning at (580) 762-9102 or toll free 1(800) 814-9102.

Common Threads

A bereavement program combining the therapeutic activity of knitting and crochet with the healing fellowship of a support group.

Will meet one Saturday a month, See calendar page 6 for dates! 10:00 a.m., at the Hospice office, 1904 N. Union, Suite 103. Ponca City

Contact Trish Wallace at (580) 762-9102, or toll free (800) 814-9102

Lunch Bunch is a meet and eat socializing support activity for anyone who has lost a loved one. It meets at Pizza Hut, 2301 N. 14th, Ponca City on the first Tuesday of the month, and at China King, 2605 N. 14th Ponca City, on the third Tuesday of each month. There is no need to pre-register, just show up, we’ll be looking you.

19th Annual Memorial Golf Tournament!

Friday, May 24th, 2013

Tee–Off at 8:00 a.m. at Lew Wentz course 18- hole Scramble, Shot Gun Start

The Awards Luncheon will be held at Ody’s Courtyard at 3700 Lake Road, Ponca City.

All proceeds go to support the Hospice of North Central Oklahoma mission to provide quality end-of-life care at no expense to the patient, while supporting their family and others in the community who are experiencing grief.

Questions, or to register, please contact Nesley Fortenberry, Director of Development & Education 580-762-9102 or toll free at 800-814-9102.

Email: nfortenberry@hospiceofnco.com
Bereavement News

1904 N. Union, Suite 103
Ponca City, OK  74601

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

HAPPENINGS...

April 2, Lunch Bunch, 11:30 a.m.
Pizza Hut, 2301 N. 14th Ponca City

April 3, 10 and 17, Adult Support
Group, 10 to 11 a.m. Hospice Office

April 9 and 23, Children’s Support
Group 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Hospice Office

April 15, HoNCO Annual Business
Meeting 6 p.m. Hospice Office

April 16, Lunch Bunch, 11:30 a.m.
China King Restaurant, 2605 N. 14th
Ponca City

April 16, Teen Support Group
6 p.m. to 7 p.m., Hospice Office

April 17, Veteran’s Teleconference
10 a.m. to 2 p.m. American Legion

April 27, Common Threads Support
Group 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Hospice Office

May 7, Lunch Bunch, 11:30 a.m.
Pizza Hut, 2301 N. 14th Ponca City

May 14 and 28, Children’s Support
Group 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Hospice Office

May 21, Lunch Bunch, 11:30 a.m.
China King Restaurant, 2605 N. 14th
Ponca City

May 21, Teen Support Group
6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Hospice Office

May 18, Common Threads Support
Group 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Hospice Office

May 24, Hospice Memorial Golf
Tournament 8 a.m. Wentz Golf Course

June 4, Lunch Bunch, 11:30 a.m.
Pizza Hut, 2301 N. 14th Ponca City

June 11 and 25, Children’s Support
Group 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Hospice Office

June 18, Lunch Bunch, 11:30 a.m.
China King Restaurant, 2605 N. 14th
Ponca City

June 18, Teen Support Group
6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Hospice Office

June 22, Common Threads Support
Group 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Hospice Office

May 27, Memorial Day Observance,
Hospice Office closed