

Contents



Foreword <i>by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.</i>	4
How to Use This Booklet.....	6
COPING WITH DEATH	7
Preparing for Death <i>by Rev. Kenneth Koehler</i>	7
After Loss—Putting the Pieces Back Together <i>by Steven V. Malec, BBA, NCBF</i>	8
Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust, Q&A: Catholic Funeral Practices <i>by Roxanne King</i>	12
Preparing Children for Funerals <i>by Rev. Kenneth Koehler</i>	15
Honoring Wishes for End-of-Life Care <i>by Dianne L. Josephson, RN, MSN</i>	17
Using Modern Technology and Social Media <i>by Rev. Kenneth Koehler with Amy Sander Montanez and Dirk deVries</i>	20
GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING A FUNERAL	22
Planning a Funeral <i>by Rev. Kenneth Koehler</i>	22
Guidelines for Giving a Eulogy at a Funeral Mass <i>by Rev. Kenneth Koehler</i>	25
The Vigil Service: Sharing the Reality of Life and Death <i>by Dianne L. Josephson, RN, MSN</i>	26
The Importance of the Vigil <i>by Anthony Haas</i>	28
Seven Tips about What to Say and Do to Comfort Others <i>by Steven V. Malec, BBA, NCBF</i>	30
SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR FUNERALS	31
MUSIC SUGGESTIONS FOR FUNERALS	44
INSTRUCTION FORMS	47
Vital Information for Survivors or Personal Representative	47
Financial Papers & Records.....	49
Vital Information for the Mortuary	51
Funeral Services	53
Vital Information for the Parish Church	55



After Loss—Putting the Pieces Back Together

by Steven V. Malec, BBA, NCBF, national speaker and Director of Bereavement Ministry for the Catholic Cemeteries Association in the Diocese of Cleveland, OH

Life and death are partners. At some point, all of us will face death: our own as well as those we love. To lose a loved one through death always causes changes for us and for our lives. Life is about change. Sometimes it is painful. Sometimes it is beautiful. Many times it can be both.

After the overwhelming loss of a loved one, it feels like your heart—and your entire world—is completely shattered into pieces. No one asks for life to change this way, but it does. We have no control over death, but we do have control over how we respond to death. How we respond is what counts. After a loss, we find out who we are as we go about putting the pieces of ourselves and our lives back together.

The First Piece: Recognize the Loss

If grief is to be healed, it must be identified, acknowledged, felt and expressed. Grief only destroys us when we deny it or refuse to deal with it. Admit and honor your feelings of loss. The psychologist and spiritual writer Henri Nouwen counsels that “The only feelings that do not heal are the ones you hide.” Therefore, the only cure for grief is to grieve. It is as simple and as difficult as that.

To begin grieving, you need to accept the full reality of your loss—in both the big and all the little ways. The primary loss is that of your loved one; however, there are always a host of other losses as well. You need to identify all the losses that the death of your loved one involves. Make a list and identify all your losses so you know exactly what you are dealing with.

The Second Piece: Express the Loss

Initially, a very important step in the healing process is to tell and retell the story of your loss, with all of its pain. We need to experience the pain and express it in order to heal. Pain and emotional feelings are essential ingredients in the healing process.

Sharing your loss helps to ease that pain. You can share your loss by talking, writing, crying and praying. Grief is not a problem that we fix or solve, but an experience that we must embrace and express in order to heal.

Grieving is not something that must be done alone either. Ask for help from your family, friends, church and professional agencies. Don't always wait for others to read your mind and offer help. Make a list of what you need and be willing to accept the help that others offer. Be gentle and patient with yourself and realistic with what you can and simply cannot do at this time. Keep in touch with supportive friends or others who have been in a similar situation. Think about attending a support group.

The Third Piece: Learn about Grief

Grief is the normal, natural and appropriate response to the loss of a loved one. It is essential for the healing process. You are not going crazy; you are grieving. You work through the loss of a loved one by moving from the deep pain, intense sorrow and distressing regret to healing, inner peace and even joy.

It helps to learn all you can about the grief process. Read literature on grief and loss and watch

the newspaper for articles about grief. Check with your church for support and resources. Look up Websites that have information on grief. Get on the mailing list for bereavement care newsletters from your cemetery, funeral home and area hospice.

The Fourth Piece: Face Your Loss

As you grieve, you are going to hurt. Grieving means living with pain. But that pain is the sign that you loved someone and someone loved you. You will always miss them and long to hear their voice one more time and that is okay. You cannot heal what you do not allow yourself to feel. Over time, each day will get a little better.

Each person's experience of loss is unique, but there are also common elements of grief. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, no orderly stages of progression. There are, however, healthy and unhealthy ways to cope with your grief.

Some healthy ways of coping include: talking about your loss with family, friends and others, writing in a journal, prayer, visiting the grave, looking at photos, honoring your feelings and taking good care of yourself physically and spiritually.

Doing these things often brings lots of tears. For both women and men, crying is a natural response to sorrow and can be extremely healing. Crying supports the immune system. Scientists have discovered that tears of sadness are chemically different from tears of joy. Crying these tears of sorrow flushes out depressants from the body.

You must also learn how to deal with the pain of your grief. The death of a loved one is the

greatest of hurts that you will ever endure, and healing is never easy. Grieving takes courage, patience, endurance and faith. And though grieving is healthy and necessary, still it takes a huge toll on your body, mind and soul. So make sure to get proper rest, nutrition and exercise.

The Fifth Piece: Work through Your Grief

Grief has many different names and faces. When grieving a loss, it is normal to experience any of the following: shock/disbelief/numbness; loneliness/emptiness; fear/anxiety; anger/hostility; deep sadness/situational depression; a lack of purpose; a lack of energy; inability to concentrate; change in eating habits; change in sleeping habits; guilt/regret/relief; searching; envy of others; a strengthening or weakening of faith; acceptance/survival/healing.

Be determined to take time, notice and work through your grief even if others may want to hurry you through it. The funeral and burial may be finished in a week, but grieving goes on for a much longer time. The initial grief reactions of shock and disbelief are not the most painful or enduring ones. The five main grief reactions that usually remain the longest are anger, guilt, fear, sadness and loneliness. As you work through your grief, these acute grief reactions often lessen in intensity and soften. But you will have feelings of grief and will keep having them until you no longer need to.

There comes a time in your grief process when you will need to press through your emotions and grief reactions. Do not allow the "whys," the guilt or the regret to paralyze you in your grieving. If you do become stuck in your grief or if there is an issue that you cannot resolve, you

Preparing a Catholic Funeral

may want to seek professional help. Also, let your faith help to heal you—in prayer give these unresolved areas to God as a seed and you will discover that God will bring you a harvest.

The Sixth Piece: Manage Your Loss

There is no easy way to bypass the experience of grief when a loved one dies. You must learn to manage your loss and not have your loss manage you. Bad things do happen to good people. You are still fragile, yet strong. Your heart is shattered, your bones ache and there are knots in your stomach.

Time alone does not heal all wounds, but rather what you do with your time does. Your heart is deeply wounded, and it will take time and hard work for healing to occur. While there is no set time schedule for the grief process, research shows that most grief reactions will be experienced and healed within 2-4 years for an anticipated loss and 4-7 years for a sudden loss. Although we usually want to know how long our grief will last, it is better to ask how willing are we to accept the reality of pain and truly work toward healing it.

Gradually, you will not only reclaim aspects of your old life but also add new ones, too. You will never really “get over it,” but you can get through it. Through grieving, “moving on” is really moving back to former activities that you used to do and enjoy—dining out, going to the movies, doing hobbies, shopping, singing in church, among others.

We never really “let go” of our loved ones, but we do loosen our grip a little bit and let go of some of the pain. They are still a part of you and

always will be! Take time to make a little connection with them every day.

The Seventh Piece: Hope for Healing

At the root of our faith is an unshakeable hope. Death is not the end. We believe that with Christ, there is life after death—“for your faithful people life has changed, not ended” (Preface of Christian Death, 1). Knowing and experiencing this makes our grief much different. It may not be any easier, but it is different.

We are like the Israelites who, when faced with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, did not despair but dared to hope and cried out in their grief: “My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is. My soul continually thinks of my affliction and is bowed down within me. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end” (Lamentations 3:17, 20-22).

We too dare to hope in the Lord. When a loved one dies, we grieve their loss. Christians grieve like everyone else, but we also grieve with faith and look to the crucified and risen Jesus for our hope. St. Paul encourages us to trust in the power of Christ’s resurrection: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died so that you may not grieve as others who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

There is life after death for your loved one. There is also life after loss for you! After the death of a loved one, your life has been changed

because of your loss. Over time, your grief will change, too. It will soften. You will not always feel as you do at this moment.

But just because your life has changed, this doesn't mean it is ruined. There is hope and healing. First you must allow yourself to feel the pain of loss and grieve. Then in time and with hard work, the good days will begin to outnumber the bad days.

Let faith be your consolation and eternal life your hope. Jesus can help you heal if you invite him into the process. Through Jesus' suffering and death, we find hope and healing. It is an unrealistic expectation, however, to think that healing will restore your life back exactly the way it was before your loss. There is no full recovery. Some part of your loss may remain unrecovered for the rest of your life.

This doesn't mean that you cannot have peace and joy within you. Healing involves making peace with your life and even finding joy again. There is always loss before gain. Through this healing process, you will emerge a new person—stronger, more compassionate, more understanding and loving, with a life full of renewed meaning, purpose and love.

Putting the Pieces Back Together

Although this life has to end, love doesn't. A heart can be broken; but it still keeps beating. You can feel shattered, but you can put the pieces together again. Healing is a daily journey and a constant choice to go on and to look forward. Healing comes not from the forgetting, but from the remembering. Piece by piece, you will be healing.

May you experience the peace of Jesus Christ, which is beyond all understanding, as you journey through your loss to healing and anticipate your joyful reunion with all your loved ones.