



Coping with Grief and Loss in Uncertain Times



Spectrum Health Hospice and Palliative Care
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Dying is a natural process that can be one of life's most difficult and most precious experiences. Like every birth, every death is unique. In the same way, as with birth, there are some commonalities in the human experience of death.

The pandemic of Covid-19 is affecting every aspect of our lives, including how we deal with end of life. This presents us all with new challenges.

We have put together this booklet to offer you information and comfort as you and the people you love go through the physical, emotional and spiritual experience of grief in this unique time. We encourage you, as you are able, to connect via speakerphone or video chat with your family members and faith leaders to spend virtual time together, to share music and offer prayer and words of encouragement.

May you find in these pages some guidance and some hope. We are here for you.

Spectrum Health Hospice Chaplains and Bereavement Support 616.391.4200

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Blessings and Poems

A Blessing for Washing Hands During a Pandemic

Trisha Arlin, Liturgist

As we wash our hands

We pray,

Blessed is the Soul of the Universe,
Breathing us in and breathing us out.

May our breaths continue
And our health and the health of all
Be preserved
In this time of sickness and fear of sickness.

Holy Wholeness,
We take as much responsibility for this as we can
By observing the obligation to wash our hands

Thoroughly:
For as long as it takes to say this prayer.

Amen

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Honoring Blessing for the Dying

Adapted ceremony by Debra Rodgers, Debbie Rith and Beth Calmes, Cottage Health, Santa Barbara CA.

As each body part is mentioned, it may be touched or shown on video. Please use your loved ones name if you wish.

We honor your eyes that have looked at us with love and viewed the beauty of the earth.

We honor your nostrils, the gateway of breath.

We honor your ears that listened for our voices.

We honor your lips that have spoken truth.

We honor your shoulders that have born burdens and strength.

We honor your heart that has loved us.

We honor your arms that have embraced us.

We honor your hands that have held our hands and done so many things in this life.

We honor your legs that carried you into new places of new challenge.

We honor your feet that walked your own path through our life.

We give thanks to the gifts that you have given us in our lifetime.

We give thanks for the memories that we created together.

We have been honored to be a part of your life.

Loved ones may wish to say what they specifically are thankful for in conclusion.

Apache Grief Blessing

May the sun bring you energy every day, bringing light into the darkness of your soul.

May the moon softly restore you by light bathing you in the glow of restful sleep and peaceful dreams.

May the rain wash away your worries and cleanse the hurt that sits in your heart.

May the breeze blow new strength into your being, and may you believe in the courage of yourself .

May you walk gently through the world, keeping your loved one with you always, knowing that you are never parted in the beating of your heart.

In Pastures Green

H. H. Barry

In pastures green? Not always; sometimes He
Who knoweth best, in kindness leadeth me
In weary ways, where heavy shadows be.

And by still waters? No, not always so;
Of times the heavy tempests round me blow,
And o'er my soul the waves and billows go.

But when the storms beat loudest, and I cry
Aloud for help, the Master standeth by,
And whispers to my soul, Lo, it is I.

So where He leads me I can safely go,
And in the blest hereafter I shall know
Why in His wisdom He hath led me so.

A Farewell

Alfred Lord Tennyson

Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea,
Thy tribute wave deliver:
No more by thee my steps shall be,
Forever and forever.

Flow, softly flow, by lawn and lea,
A rivulet then a river:
Nowhere by thee my steps shall be
Forever and forever.

But here will sigh thine alder tree
And here thine aspen shiver;
And here by thee will hum the bee
Forever and forever.

A thousand suns will stream on thee,
A thousand moons will quiver;
But not by thee my steps shall be,
Forever and forever.

Death Is Nothing at All

Henry Scott-Holland

Death is nothing at all.

It does not count.

I have only slipped away into the next room.

Nothing has happened.

Everything remains exactly as it was.

I am I, and you are you, and the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched, unchanged.

Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Call me by the old familiar name.

Speak of me in the easy way which you always used.

Put no difference into your tone.

Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes that we enjoyed together.

Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.

Let it be spoken without an effort, without the ghost of a shadow upon it.

Life means all that it ever meant.

It is the same as it ever was.

There is absolute and unbroken continuity.

What is this death but a negligible accident?

Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?

I am but waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just round the corner.

All is well.

Nothing is hurt; nothing is lost.

One brief moment and all will be as it was before.

How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!

For Whom the Bell Tolls

John Donne

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.

Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.

As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.

Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.

Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

I love you.

I know you love me.

I forgive you.

I know you forgive me.

I'll miss you.

Prayers and Readings

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul;
he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my
enemies; you anoint my head with oil;
my cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the
Lord forever.

The Blessing of St. Francis of Assisi

The Lord bless you and keep you.

May He show His face to you
and have mercy.

May He turn His countenance
to you and give you peace.

The Lord bless you!

A Prayer Remembering God is with Us

Lord God, you are always with me.

You are with me in the day and in the night.

You are with me when I'm happy and when I'm sad.

You are with me when I'm healthy and when I am ill.

You are with me when I am peaceful and when I
am worried.

Today I am feeling (name how you are feeling) because
(reasons you are feeling this way).

Help me to remember that you love me and are with me in
everything today.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

[For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory
Forever.]

Amen.

From Mishkan Tefillah, A Reform Prayerbook

Mi Shebeirach Avoteinu M'Kor Hab'rachah L'imoteinu

May the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us
help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing and let
us say, Amen.

Mi Shebeirach Imoteinu M'Kor Hab'rachah Laavoteinu

Bless those in need of healing with R'fuah Sh'leima, the
renewal of body, the renewal of spirit, and let us say, Amen.

Prayer for Healing

Alden Solovy

God of love,
Cast the light of health and well-being on me
(and on my family)
And all who are injured, infirm or insecure.

We yearn for Your healing hand.

Bless us with healing of body,
Healing of soul,
And healing of spirit.

Grant all in need of a full and complete recovery.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu, M'Kor Chayim
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of Life

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Metta Prayer, or Buddhist Loving Kindness Prayer

May you be peaceful and at ease
May you be filled with loving kindness
May you be safe, and free from fear
May you be happy.

Tibetan Prayer of the Dying

Through your blessing, grace, and guidance,
through the power of the light that streams from you:

May all the negative results from my prior actions and
history, my destructive emotions,
obscurations and blockages be purified and removed.

May I know myself forgiven
for all the harm I may have thought and done.

May I die a good and peaceful death,
and through the triumph of my death,
may I be able to benefit all other beings, living or dead.

From St. Patrick's Breastplate

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples,
'I am with you always'.

Be with me today, as I offer myself to you.
Hear my prayers for others and for myself,
and keep me in your care.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Making Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart ... I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary,
Full of Grace,
The Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary,
Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now,
and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone
who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help, or sought thine
intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come,
before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my
petitions, but in thy mercy hear
and answer me.

Amen.

Prayer of Commendation

Go forth, Christian soul, from this world
in the name of God the almighty Father,
who created you,
in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,
who suffered for you,
in the name of the Holy Spirit,
who was poured out upon you,
go forth, faithful Christian.

May you live in peace this day,
may your home be with God,
with Mary, the virgin Mother of God,
with Joseph, and all the angels and saints.

Aaron's Blessing

May the Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face shine up on you,
And be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you;
And give you peace.

Gathering in the Presence of the Body, a Catholic Prayer

When the family first gathers around the body, before or after it is prepared for burial, all or some of the following prayers may be used. It is most fitting that, where possible, family members take part in preparing the body for burial.

All make the Sign of the Cross. Then one member of the family reads:

My brothers and sisters, Jesus says:
"Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened,
and I will give you rest.
Shoulder my yoke and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light."

The body may then be sprinkled with holy water:

The Lord God lives in his holy temple yet abides in our midst. Since in Baptism, N. became God's temple and the Spirit of God lived in him/her, with reverence we bless his/her mortal body.

Then one member of the family may say:

With God there is mercy and fullness of redemption; let us pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father...

Then this prayer is said:

Into your hands, O Lord,
we humbly entrust our brother/sister N.
In this life you embraced him/her with your tender love;
deliver him/her now from every evil and bid him/her
enter eternal rest.

The old order has passed away:
welcome him/her then into paradise,
where there will be no sorrow, no weeping nor pain,
but the fullness of peace and joy
with your Son and the Holy Spirit forever and ever.
R/. Amen.

All may sign the forehead of the deceased with the Sign of the Cross. One member of the family says:

Blessed are those who have died in the Lord;
let them rest from their labors
for their good deeds go with them.

V/. Eternal rest grant unto him/her, O Lord.

R/. And let perpetual light shine upon him/her.

V/. May he/she rest in peace.

R/. Amen.

V/. May his/her soul and the souls of all the faithful
departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

R/. Amen.

All make the Sign of the Cross as one member of the family says:

May the love of God and the peace of the Lord Jesus
Christ bless and console us
and gently wipe every tear from our eyes:
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

R/. Amen.

The Dying Experience

Dying is a physical, spiritual and emotional process. Though not everyone will experience all these symptoms, it can be helpful to know what is normal.

If you are not able to spend time with your loved one in person due to visitor restrictions, it may be helpful to look at pictures, photo albums, or videos of your loved one as a way to connect with him or her.

Withdrawal

It is common for people in the dying process to become more sleepy and less interactive even when they are awake. As a dying person becomes more detached, perhaps in preparation for letting go, they may appear unresponsive. However, a person's sense of touch and hearing remain until the end, so engaging with touch if possible or by speaking, playing music, reading aloud or re-telling old stories can be very comforting.

Appetite Changes

It is common for people in the dying process to lose interest in food or be unable to eat or drink. This is a natural part of the body slowing down. Ask your healthcare provider if your loved one is able to safely enjoy ice chips or a taste of a favorite food or beverage.

Breathing Changes

Changes in breathing can be some of the most difficult for loved ones to observe. Breathing can become more rapid or more shallow, sometimes with pauses in between breaths from 5 to 60 seconds. These changes are not uncomfortable for the dying person, they are part of the normal process of a body weakening and slowing down.

Some dying people are too weak to swallow and saliva will gather at the back of their throat. This can lead to a gurgling or rattling sound and is not helped by suctioning as this only causes discomfort and can increase secretions. These sounds can be uncomfortable to hear, but they do not indicate that your loved one is suffering or uncomfortable.

If your loved one used a ventilator for life support prior to their death, please remember that a person does not die because the ventilator was discontinued. They will have died as a result of their severe illness, and allowing a natural death is a very dignified choice.

Restlessness

Sometimes people in the dying process will be restless and seem unable to be still. Please ask your healthcare provider if you are concerned that this is related to physical discomfort. For some people, this restlessness may be related to emotional or spiritual discomfort. This is normal. Reassurance, the opportunity to say or hear goodbyes, and activities that increase spiritual peace can be helpful.

After Death

No one can predict exactly when death will occur. Even when a death is expected, people are often surprised by how they feel when someone they love dies. Reach out to your healthcare provider, who will confirm death. You may wish to have a final time saying goodbye, to offer a blessing or a prayer at the bedside, or to spend a few quiet moments.

The funeral home you choose will help you and your family with next steps.

Every death and every grieving process is different. Given the challenging circumstances of the pandemic, it is vital that we are gracious with one another and with ourselves. These will be challenging times. While we may continue to practice social-distancing, we can also learn new ways to connect with our families and communities.

Please reach out to our Bereavement team for more information and support.

On Funerals

At the time of this printing, memorial gatherings are restricted to 50 attendees or fewer.

In a time when large gatherings are not possible, you might be asking how you can honor your loved one with a service or celebration. Many funeral homes offer the option of live-streaming a service. Some families use social media to gather digitally. Others have met in a small family group while practicing social distancing and good handwashing.

Many are doing one or both of the above, and planning for a more public gathering, a memorial service or celebration of life, when the pandemic is over. Some families plan to do this on the one year anniversary of their loved one's death.

Especially in times like these, anyone can officiate a service for your loved one. No special qualifications are needed, just your willingness. In some faiths, there needs to be an official service at some time. Please consult with your own faith leader for guidance. Particularly in times like these, heartfelt expressions are more important than carefully delivered words. The idea is to have an opportunity to share your feelings, honor your loved one and look to whatever sources of strength you find helpful.

If you think it would be helpful, and if one has been prepared, you might read your loved one's obituary or otherwise summarize his or her life. You might ask those present in person or online to share a memory. Friends and family might choose to read poems, Scriptures, prayers, or other readings that were meaningful to your loved one, or to this time.

If you have not been able to spend time with your loved one before their death, it may be very important to have the opportunity at the funeral home to see their body. This can be very difficult but also very important as you mourn.

Keeping a written record of this time may be helpful. Many people and their loved ones find this meaningful later on.

Planning a funeral or memorial service is often difficult, especially if the your loved one had shared what they hoped their service might look like. Because of Covid-19 many things will be different than we had hoped. However, if your loved one did specify ways they would like their life memorialized, there may be creative ways to honor those wishes now or to plan a more full gathering later on when this time has passed.

On Grief

What is grief? As human beings, whenever our attachments are threatened, harmed, or severed, we naturally grieve. Grief is everything we think and feel inside of us when this happens. We experience shock and disbelief. We worry, which is a form of fear. We become sad and possibly lonely. We get angry. We feel guilty or regretful. All these and any other thoughts and feelings we are experiencing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic is our grief.

There are some important things to understand about pandemic grief. First, it is normal and natural. It is simply a part of your love and attachment. And second, grief responds to awareness, attention, and expression.

You will feel better if you mourn. Mourning is being aware of your grief, giving it the attention it needs and deserves, and expressing it outside of yourself.

We have all heard a lot about how to take care of ourselves physically with this virus, but it is also important to care for our emotional and social health. During this time of great grief, mourning is a key aspect of self-care.

When we are feeling the emotional pain of our coronavirus grief, we can tune into it and allow it to teach us what we are really worried, sad, angry, etc. about. And then we can express it. We can talk to others about it, in our household, on the phone, or online. We can write about it in a journal. We can listen to music or watch movies that help us access,

understand, and share our feelings. Mourning our grief in these ways helps soften it and gives us the emergency emotional release and sustenance we need to survive.

Socially, we can't congregate in person right now. But we can continue to make efforts to reach out to the people we care about. Video calls, voice calls, emails, texting, and social media all can help us connect. And don't forget the power of the handwritten letter! Find people you can be open and honest with in those communications about whatever it is you are feeling or struggling with at the moment. Your openness will encourage others to be honest as well, creating the opportunity for mutual support and kindness.

Grief Healing - If you are anticipating or coping with a significant loss in your life and wish to better understand the grief that accompanies such loss, this site has been created to offer you the information, comfort and support that you need - <https://griefhealing.com>

Center for Loss and Transition - A well-known organization dedicated to helping people who are grieving and those who care for them - <https://www.centerforloss.com>

Suggested Bible Readings

Many of these may bring you comfort during this difficult time or make appropriate funeral readings.

- Psalm 23
- John 11:25-2
- 1 Corinthians 4:13-18
- John 14:1-7
- 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, 17
- Job 19:23-2
- Psalm 91
- Psalm 12
- 1 John 4:16
- Revelation 21:1-7
- Matthew 25:1-13
- Luke 22:39-46
- Luke 23:44-49
- Luke 24:1-8
- John 6:37-40
- John 14:16, 23, 27

A Note for Catholics

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick may not be available to you or your loved one due to visitor restrictions while healthcare facilities deal with Covid-19. This can be very distressing. It is important to remember that our salvation is not dependent upon reception of this sacrament.

Remember that we are able to make spiritual confession, spiritual communion, and to pray over our loved ones while practicing healthy social distancing.

Please reach out to your parish priest to pray with you over the phone or reach out to your care team if you need assistance connecting with a priest.

You will find several appropriate prayers in this booklet which you and your family can pray with and for your loved ones at this time.

Michigan Department of Health Guidelines for Protecting Yourself and Others

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds OR use an alcohol-based sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Immediately discard tissues after use.
- Avoid close contact with sick individuals (maintain at least 6 feet of distance).
- Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces such as: tables, doorknobs, light switches, toilets, faucets, cell phones.
- Stay home as much as possible. Avoid crowds and avoid touching high-touch surfaces if you must go in public (handrails, elevator buttons, etc).

Music Resources

Our hospice chaplains and music therapists have been collaborating to offer a variety of songs, hymns, and spiritual resources for patients and families to view on YouTube. The link below will take you to all of the videos. You can also click the tab at the top that says "Playlist" and that will take you to where we have put everything into categories. We just started this, so it is still in the works. More content will be added regularly. We hope this resource will help to support you at this time.

<https://tinyurl.com/SHMusicResources>

