

Dear Fellow Pastor,

These are moments when the undeserved (and sometimes undesired) privilege of ministry can appear stark as we step into the sacred moment of grief in an environment that may also be layered with trauma. A trauma steeped in unusual circumstances including physical restrictions that hinder loved ones from caring for the sick, saying their final goodbyes in person, or grieving together.

None of us want to be “oracles” in how to handle such moments, but some may be called to step into grief in brand new ways.

It is possible through online live chat options to enable a group of people to begin the grief process. I had this privilege when a friend and honored congregant died of cancer in the middle of the current stay at home requirements in Connecticut. She knew she was dying and had requested that a service be held when people can meet in person again. As her family grieved privately, I worked with their small group. Through a zoom call, each member was able to express things that they loved about her, I shared a word from scripture, we prayed together and I closed with a blessing.

Since then, I have had conversations with hospice and hospital workers who grieve the loss of patients yet are consumed by the overwhelming needs of this heightened season. I know of an increasing number of congregants praying for sick loved ones, and others being tested for the virus.

There are articles coming out online about how to do biblical counseling online and ideas for online funeral services. I haven't done enough to be an expert! My sense is that we need to be willing to be creative. If funeral directors are allowing close family graveside burials, how do we make that meaningful without physical touch? If private cremations are taking place, do we need online remembrance moments for the family? We may not be able to take meals, but what about emails, texts or cards that express love? The challenge is to help our communities be willing to show love in different ways.

Ultimately, I do not believe “care” is an activity of our mind or hands but an expression of our hearts. I have felt deeply weary in the midst of my own grief for a dear friend, yet aware of the wave of need from others that threatens to engulf me. As Pastors, I believe we are called to dive into the wave and point those swept away to the only one who can save. I am increasingly convinced that the only way we can do this is to be cared for ourselves!

So, What brings you joy? How can you reconnect with your Heavenly Father in the grief and pressure of this moment? As we do this, I believe our loving God by His Spirit will provide all the wisdom, grace, patience, and love that we need to care for His people, while encouraging those who seemed far off, to respond to Him.

This is a unique moment in time, but we are called for the long haul. So when the crisis is over, may we still have the strength, compassion, and courage to reach out to others.

I am grateful that God has called us as brothers and sisters to stand together and see His Kingdom come!

May God continue to give you peace – and may you be a bringer of His peace to others, always.

Victoria Kowarick
Pastor of Evangelism and Spiritual Growth, and Care Team Leader
Walnut Hill Community Church