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**Grieving Our Losses
#4 in the Series, "How We Care"**

Congregational Care Committee
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"People have been thinking, writing and philosophizing on the topic of grief since the beginning of time; it would be impossible to condense everything into a few pages. But...you have to start somewhere." - Navigating Grief: A Beginners' Guide

Sometimes when we speak of a loss, we think of the death of a person. There are other ways to experience a loss: loss of a pet, a job, and more. Each has something in common – it hurts.

We have long relied on our religious organizations to offer immediate care and to help us heal over time. With our pastors, the Congregational Care Committee continues that tradition with special services; gifts of prayer, food, and memorial gifts; and particular ways of staying in touch. In the last few years, and in January 2022, we have added some new ways to help.

We want to be present when grief is new.

- Holding a funeral, a memorial service, or other liturgy.

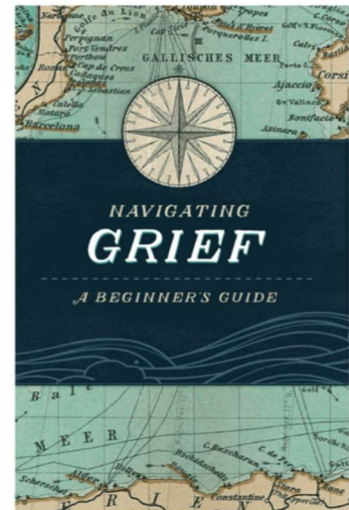
"I feel, when I leave a funeral or memorial service, that I really got to know someone. There are many ways for that to happen. Having led services, I often sat down with families, even before a death, and asked: 'What do you want the service to be? How do you want your beloved to be known, maybe in a genuine, deep, or different way?' Our conversations helped us all with taking leave." - Miriam Jackson

A funeral or memorial service is often an important step in acknowledging the reality that there is a hole in your life (and your heart.) The decision to hold one is up to family, friends, or individuals making plans before or after a death. You and our pastors choose the setting, liturgy, and music together. In the past, receptions might have been potluck or, if they were catered, families covered costs. When Covid struck, we decided it was safer to do our own food preparation. We have a Reception Coordinator who oversees a light meal, with a team of volunteers. The Congregational Care Committee often helps with flowers, fills in where needed, and pays for the cost of the food. That may change, but only with advance notice so no one is surprised. (For our outdoor services, families have rented tents.)

- Offering our new bereavement program.

"I was 10 when my best friend died. I was embarrassed, wearing a bright red winter coat to her funeral but I had no other. In my family, we never spoke of Lois again." - Phyllis Windle

Now we know that funerals are just the beginning of grieving. The Committee began a new effort in January 2022 to stay in touch as losses unfold. It involves a call, inviting those who have experienced the death of someone close to take part. If you agree, you'll receive a letter from our pastors, including a booklet, "Navigating Grief: A Beginners Guide." Committee member Bunny O'Dell, who is also a trained bereavement counselor leads the program. She follows up after the letter and makes quarterly check-in calls for one year. You'll find her calls gentle and she'll urge you to be gentle with yourself as you grieve, too.



We want to remember with you.

"My father died at 28 years old. I was two weeks shy of my first birthday. My memory is not in my recollections of him. My memory is of his touch. His hand held my hand. That is enough to comfort me until I see him again one day." - Bunny O'Dell

- Making a memorial gift.

Just search a store's racks of sympathy cards and you'll see how often they refer to the comfort of memories. Several months after a death, we'll ask if you'd like us to make a \$50 gift to a favorite group in memory of the person who died. That is often a time for sharing memories. We have made gifts to a wide range of groups: a college scholarship fund, a home-town church, a hospice, and a children's camp. Several of Community Reach's services have received gifts, along with Living Faith Lutheran Church's Food Pantry, the ACLU, the American Cancer Society, etc. A group of gifts were sent to RUC; several purchased new native trees. Pets are part of RUC, too, and we hold a service to bless them each year. Last year, the Committee used the occasion to make a combined gift to two animal charities, in memory of more than a dozen pets who were named in the service.

We help you mark a significant date.

- Sending a special card on the first anniversary of a death.

“When I opened the card, I was overwhelmed with love and gratitude that our beloved community of RUC remembered him and our family. John’s spirit lives on and you have honored him. Thank you!” - Beth Pattison

Anniversaries are often hard times for those who grieve, whether they are birthdays, holidays, or the date of a loss. We designed a special rainbow card to send one year after a death, to remind you that “We’re remembering you...remembering...”, where we add the name of the one who died.



We hope that all of us thrive after loss.

“My brother, 16 months younger than I, ended his life at age 39, after years of dealing with depression. A woman who had been my spiritual director sent me a card that I have read over and over in the many years since. She had helped me through another sudden death in my large family. In part her very supportive message read: ...’I was thinking today of how much you’re struggling to come to some honest convictions out of which you live your life. Well, something like this puts things so starkly. No matter what, you have to choose to live life, and to accept death.’ Taken out of context the message cannot convey how understood and comforted I felt reading it, and not long after I was able to make the life-changing decision that I have never regretted.” - Carroll Saussy

We know that the navigating grief is different for everyone, for every death, and for every kind of loss. It doesn’t end after 365 days. Many of us have found that healing after loss is possible, and sometimes changes our lives in amazing ways. We wish that for us all.

If you experience a loss, we invite you to reach out to either of our pastors or members of the Congregational Care Committee. As a part of your church community, we are here to listen, guide, comfort and support to you on your particular journey through grief.