



Pastoral Support for Grieving a Violent Death

A guide for clergy, lay ministers, and community helpers

*“Lord, my God, I call out by day; at night I cry aloud in your presence,
Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry.”*

Psalm 88: 1-3

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Pastoral Support after a Traumatic Death: a guide for clergy, lay ministers, and community helpers

Introduction

Death is an inevitable human experience which affects us all. Our response to this impending reality varies uniquely depending on unique circumstances. We struggle to grasp and understand this reality, searching for meaning.

The past year of pain and loss associated with the Coronavirus Pandemic has shown us how essential community support, meaningful ritual and grief processing is for us all. The absence of these essential experiences has been felt by so many in the months of forced separation. Our empathy is heightened in shared worldwide trauma for those who have or may lose a loved one to a tragic, violent death.

As a Christian community, we strive to support those affected by this reality using a holistic approach enabling healing throughout this time. While considering the clinical model of grieving stages, Bereavement Ministry tries to respect the cognitive, physical, and spiritual components which are an integral reality during this time.

In light of this, we try to assist families to find meaning, support and restoration utilizing professional resources and liturgical rituals which lend support during this process.

We understand that certain death and dying experiences uniquely affect each of us. It is our task to help families embrace their reality, helping them to put into perspective feelings of guilt, anger and or despair.

We hope that this Guide provides pastoral care providers in many ministerial settings the basic tools and resources to be of compassionate support to individuals and families who find themselves the victims of an unthinkable loss. It is intended to be a useful reference and is not an exhaustive listing of all that is available in this area of care.

Included in this Guide are tools for helpful crisis response, funeral liturgy resources for complicated circumstances, and suggestions for continuing care. Along with God's grace, we hope it will assist you in offering comfort to the brokenhearted, defense of the vulnerable, and encouragement for the weary.

Preparing for pastoral care of traumatic death

When an individual or family walks through your church doors soon after a traumatic death, you will be called upon to respond with wisdom, faith, and love in circumstances when those gifts may be in short supply. The perception of the Church is such that Catholics and non-Catholics alike see it as a safe place to turn to in times of spiritual and physical distress.

Don't avoid the "sticky". This is when God's people need you most. To the best of your ability, make yourself aware of the emotional differences of a death by suicide, homicide, or tragic accident. Know your local community enough to be aware of historical grief and its effects on a current situation. Pay special attention to elders, children, and those whose grieving affects other vulnerable members.

Traumatic situations are not predictable. Each circumstance is different; each family, culture and individual are different. The Catholic Church may, in fact, be called upon as pastoral helpers for victims who practice other religions or no religion at all. The diversity of perspectives from which we come seeking ritual, comfort and support both transcend and define different cultural systems. You know your community best. This guide is a framework.

Despite the challenges, risk a caring response in order to facilitate the possibility for future healing.

In the model of the Good Samaritan, we hope that this guide will provide a framework for your inspired pastoral care. Inquire and research cultural patterns for grieving that may be normative for your particular community. Adapt the contents of this guide to your community's language, traditions, and grief behaviors. When helpful, consider enlisting a translator to ease counseling dialogue.

It is important for all bereavement ministers to be sensitive to victims' thoughts, beliefs, values, and practices. Assume nothing. Ask questions, keeping a firm stance of non-judgement and compassion. When in doubt, seek the advice of an elder in the community to advise you in cultural traditions. Younger members of the community will often follow the lead of community elders who grieve with the wisdom of years and life experience.

This is a difficult pastoral road to attempt to travel alone. Human life is precious and messy. Call upon the Holy Spirit and trusted or experienced pastoral advisors to guide and encourage you. Seeking training ahead of time for your pastoral team can be immensely beneficial. Armed with information and practiced skills, you and your staff will be prepared to respond with confidence and compassion in complicated circumstances so that everyone who enters your doors will be received as the face of Christ and find the face of Christ.

Prepare to... Offer Presence

Death occurs at all hours. If you are not on-site at the Parish at all times, be sure your emergency line goes directly to a phone which is always answered. You may be called upon to report to the location of the death for the Prayers for the Dead. Or, the family may need you at their home. If arriving at the scene, follow all guidance from safety officers. Identify yourself and ask for a safe place to offer pastoral support. If children are present, set their care as a priority in a visible location with a second party present, preferably someone identified by the family as a trusted person or a social worker. If you know the family, remind the children of times you have shared together at church or parish school so they can easily identify you.

If you know the family well, you may be asked by peace officers to accompany grieving members to the police station while they provide statements.

If the individual or family has come directly to the parish, arrange for a private place to meet with a second parish staff person present.

LISTEN! Do not fill the air with trite explanations or predictions. Sit and listen.

Ask permission. With family's blessing, love them, pray for them, give them space.

Keep showing concern. With time, if appropriate or necessary, introduce and delegate to a new primary contact (pastoral associate, parish bereavement minister, for example).

Prepare to... Offer Stability

Violent death, expected or unexpected, often results in shock—familiarize yourself with common reactions or stages of grief. Expect grieving individuals to be potentially numb, distracted, hysterical or ill. Be prepared to offer a safe space for nausea, hyperventilation, or fainting. Provide a prayerful exercise in mindfulness (paced breathing, body scan or reciting a rote prayer). Despite your own emotional or physical response to the trauma that has occurred, do your best to display a trust in God's enveloping presence. Call upon the Lord for your own strength in the presence of raw emotion.

Prepare to... Offer Privacy

Create a safe, private space to protect the needs and reputation of the grieving. Consider a private entrance/exit and easy access to non-public restrooms. Do not announce prayers for

the dead or the survivors until the family agrees. Do NOT speak with news teams. Confirm the family has a trusted spokesperson.

Prepare to... Offer Neutrality

While your primary role may be catechizing, now is not a time for judgement, correction, or warning. As a representative of the Church, you are needed in this moment to offer the love of Christ. Keep the interaction with the family or loved ones to comforting their grief and experience of traumatic loss. If questions arise about salvation, speak of the loving arms of God for all of God's children. While not pushing or demanding forgiveness, encourage prayers for the peaceful repose of the soul of their loved one. Maintain focus on the promises of everlasting life and away from the circumstances of the death.

"No judgement Zone" The Church has a history of judging character or behavior based in sin. The Church of the 21st Century has matured. We look to Christ as our model for compassion, not judgement.

Prepare to... Offer Consolation

Familiarity with how grief is affected by different causes of traumatic death or how historical grief may return or exacerbate the most recent loss will better equip the minister to offer a calm and assuring presence in "unreal" circumstances and special awareness of the needs of children, elderly or those with compromised health.

Prepare to... Offer Practical Assistance or referrals

Create and maintain resource lists for local services related to loss, grief, trauma, legal support, and municipal services.

Planning a Funeral or Memorial after traumatic death

While each family's situation varies depending on the circumstances surrounding the death of their loved one, parish priests/deacons must be prepared to respond to them. The parish priest/deacon must learn to respond with sensitivity and empathy to the families who have experienced sudden, tragic painful deaths caused by illness, accident, homicide, or suicide. Whether the deceased was young or old, the death expected or unexpected, he must accompany the family with love and kindness. He must become vulnerable with those who suffer, listening to their pain, not knowing all the answers nor qualifying the experience with judgmental attitudes.

Pastoral Counseling

Clergy should avail themselves to provide support in the moment of crisis as well as follow up family care. Helping families to grieve and move past anger: groups feed on anger; counseling that sincerely acknowledges feelings without trite responses of forgiveness and or superficial patronization. Pastoral Care should be about: healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling.

Faith community support can be additionally grounding and reassuring during legal proceedings, trials, and setbacks. Consistent reminders of God's loving presence from trusted members of the faith community can make all the difference in maintaining the potential for restoration and healing. Faith friends can offer true presence when initial memorial events have finished, and others have drifted away. The ability to "accompany" without expectation, at odd hours, just to listen, will model Christ's healing of broken hearts.

The Catholic Funeral Mass/Liturgy Planning

The Liturgy begins when the grieving family comes into the parish office. Ideally, the parish priest or deacon should personally welcome the family (in Persona Christi) along with the Bereavement Minister. The family should be able to feel the embrace of God during our interaction with them. Oftentimes, families feel unwelcome or as if they are a nuisance coming in to PAY for a service. While a donation is welcome, prudence, sensitivity and sound judgement are needed to assist families in need. (God will provide for the good that we do.)

Bereavement Ministers must be cognizant of the fact that there are families with varying degrees of participation or familiarity with their belonging to a church community. While family

participation is welcomed, some families may not want to be involved as lector's or even selecting the scripture readings. The priest/ deacon or bereavement Ministers may pray with the families during the initial meeting and assure them that the scripture readings will be selected to allow the Lord to speak to us.

Good healing liturgies include prayer, scripture, music, and compassionate homilies/sermons. Healing homilies should convey compassion for the hurting, respect for the dead, gentleness for the pain of suicide, murder, violence, abuse, overdose. Following are liturgical elements which can involve the family as their participation in the selections can aid their healing.

Scripture

The parish priest or funeral coordinator can provide support and exposure to many appropriate scripture readings that can bring comfort and reassurance in the form of the Word of the Lord. Family members and close friends are encouraged to read these scriptures in the funeral Mass if they are willing and able. However, due to certain family circumstances they may be unwilling or unable to proclaim the Word of God with clarity and with authority. A qualified lector/reader may be selected in such cases.

The Scripture readings often taken from the Funeral Lectionaries are limited and may not address the types of situations being faced by grieving families. Below are listed some passages that have been helpful in difficult pastoral situations. The parish priest/deacon must prayerfully prepare himself and exhaust all the Bible to extrapolate passages which can impact families' suffering with issues of pain, loss, *forgiveness*, anger, guilt retribution and fear of letting go. Hope leads to healing.

Within the protocols of the Catholic Church, the General Instruction for the Roman Missal (G.I.R.M.) governs the options for scripture options in the Mass. Under certain circumstances, the USCCB may authorize alternate practices, words, and so forth to those contained in the Missal or Lectionary "in the case of pastoral necessity". Consult with the parish pastor and diocesan bishop for questions in need of pastoral discretion. For more information on funeral guidelines, etc. visit the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website at: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/bereavement-and-funerals>

The following scripture may or may not be approved for use in Mass, but will be appropriate in the context of pastoral counseling, prayer services and other gatherings:

Old Testament

Proverbs 10-13- Violence
Proverbs 4:10-18- Violence
Ecclesiastes 3:1-16- God's Wisdom
Sirach 3
Sirach 3:1-16- Honor of Parents
Sirach 4:11-19
Sirach 6:5-17- Friendship
Sirach 7:1-17- Good Behavior
Sirach 7:18-37- Advice for good
Sirach 11:1-6- Don't Judge Appearances
Sirach 28:1-11-Don't seek vengeance
Ecclesiastes 11:7-10- Brevity of Life
Job 1:1-22-sudden Death
Isaiah 30:18-21-God Comforts
Isaiah 35:1-10- Restoration
Isaiah 49:1-6- We are created for God
Isaiah 52:7-11- For those in Ministry
Isaiah 25:6-10- Tears will be no more
Daniel 12:1-3
Daniel 12:1-3
Samuel 3:1-10-
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Jeremiah 17:5-10
Micah 6:8-9
Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13
Ephesians 1:3-5
Ephesians 1:1-14
Sirach 27:30-28:7
Judith 8:25-27
James 4:11-12
Revelations 7:15-16
Wisdom 9:1-7

Psalms (usually sung, but can also be proclaimed as spoken reading)

Psalm 90
Psalm 139- Uniquely Created by God

New Testament

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
Colossians 3:1-4,12-17

Corinthians 15:12,16-20
New Testament (continued)

1 Corinthians 6:19-20
Peter 2:20-25
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Revelations 21:1-7
Romans 5:5-11
Romans 14:7-12

Gospel

John 3:13-21
John 6:35-40
John 6:47-59
John 11:1-44
John 15:1-6
Matthew 5:13-16
Matthew 6:25-33
Matthew 11:28-30- Suicides
Matthew 18:23-35
Matthew 20:1-16
Matthew 22:1-14
Matthew 24:42-51
Matthew 25:14-30
Matthew 25:31-46
Luke 24:13-35

Homily helps

<https://romancatholicomilies.com/funeral-homilies/>
<https://www.chausa.org/prayers/homilies/homily-aids-archive>

Music

While secular (popular) music can offer meaningful, healing words, it is not approved for liturgies in the Church. However, with the approval of the pastor, families may be able to request specific songs to be played before the mass begins or after the closing of the mass. *See Appendix for some commonly used traditional funeral songs.*

Opportunities for family and friends to participate in a funeral mass:

Hand out worship aids, programs, prayer cards
Usher/Welcome guests
Pall Bearers
Placing of the Pall
Eulogy
Lector/Proclaim the First and Second Readings
Proclaim Prayers of the Faithful (Intercessions)
Present the Gifts to the altar (bread and wine)

A member of the parish bereavement ministry team should be at mass to touch base with the family before, during and after the services have taken place.

Other pastoral events

Candlelight Vigils

Public events (vigils, etc.) Blessing the site upon the death of someone through gang / violence. A priest or deacon, as an official representative of the Christian community or parish, should be there on site to pray with the mourners, to bless them and to commemorate the site of one whose life was suddenly taken.

Vigils/Rosaries at church or funeral home

Vigils/Rosaries are traditional in the Catholic Church to begin the Rite of Christian Burial with prayer and visitation the night before the Mass of the Resurrection. A similar gathering can be common in other faith and/or cultural traditions as well. While a member of the clergy may assist with the prayers, bereavement ministers normally participate with the families at this time, allowing family members to eulogize their loved ones. It may be helpful to consider some elements in advance:

- Use caution when communicating obituary, social media, word of mouth notices of vigil timing if privacy is needed.
- Open-casket viewing may or may not be possible based on circumstances surrounding the death. Viewing of the body is usually available at a funeral home or church.
- Determine in advance the potential attendance of services and whether the venue/location can accommodate the expected crowd. In the case of an intentional or violent death, consideration must be given to potential attendees who may pose a threat.
- Traditional Vigil Services include the invitation for open microphone sharing of

memories, poetry, songs, words of eulogy from family, friends, and guests. Counsel family on whether this would be appropriate. A “closed” speaker list may be more emotionally safe and realistic for time constraints at the venue.

Crime Victims Bill of Rights

On November 4, 2008, the voters of the State of California approved Proposition 9, the Victims’ Bill of Rights Act of 2008: Marsy’s Law. A measure to provide all victims with rights and due process, a printable card of Marsy’s Law is available here:

https://oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/victimservices/marsy_pocket_en_res.pdf

CRIME VICTIMS BILL OF RIGHTS

- (1) THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED WITH FAIRNESS AND WITH RESPECT OF THE VICTIM'S DIGNITY AND PRIVACY.
- (2) THE RIGHT TO BE REASONABLY PROTECTED FROM THE ACCUSED OFFENDER.
- (3) THE RIGHT TO BE NOTIFIED OF COURT PROCEEDINGS.
- (4) THE RIGHT TO BE PRESENT AT ALL PUBLIC COURT PROCEEDINGS RELATED TO THE OFFENSE UNLESS THE COURT DETERMINES THAT TESTIMONY BY THE VICTIM WOULD BE MATERIALLY AFFECTED IF THE VICTIM HEARD OTHER TESTIMONY AT TRIAL.
- (5) THE RIGHT TO CONFER WITH AN ATTORNEY FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN THE CASE.
- (6) THE RIGHT TO RESTITUTION.
- (7) THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONVICTION, SENTENCING, IMPRISONMENT, AND THE RELEASE OF THE OFFENDER.

The Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services (OVSRS) maintains a comprehensive victim services program and establishes justice practices to ensure crime victims and survivors are afforded the utmost respect in exercising their legal rights. This website will provide valuable information for victims, survivors, or witnesses to a crime and the offender was sentenced to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) either in an adult or juvenile facility: <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/victim-services/> .

Pastoral checklist in the event of a traumatic death

Active members of a faith community may ask their priest or pastoral care staff to report to the scene of the traumatic death. The parish may be the first place they go after being contacted about the death out of town. This helpful checklist keeps things simple:

<p>At the Scene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Receive emergency call or office visit.<input type="checkbox"/> Report to the crime scene if called upon and approved by safety officers.<input type="checkbox"/> Report to the home of the survivors if applicable.<input type="checkbox"/> Identify members of the family, especially children for priority care.<input type="checkbox"/> Follow all instructions of police and fire on scene, if applicable.<input type="checkbox"/> Use intake form for very basic clerical data (name of deceased, DOB, primary contacts, phone numbers, emails). This documentation can provide a moment for breathing, concentration and a sense of order and safety.<input type="checkbox"/> Referrals for local cleaning services.<input type="checkbox"/> Referral to reliable and sensitive funeral home.<input type="checkbox"/> Ask permission before public Prayers of the Faithful/Intercessions.<input type="checkbox"/> Ask permission to share of death with close parish friend(s). Honor privacy until otherwise advised.	<p>In the Parish Office:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> When appropriate, invite bereavement minister to join in-person meeting and record notes. Recall expectations of pastoral confidentiality.<input type="checkbox"/> Identify location of restroom and trash can as stomachs can be uneasy.<input type="checkbox"/> Provide tissues and drinking water.<input type="checkbox"/> Begin with compassionate prayers for the loss BEFORE asking for details of the death. Offer a blessing for protection and strength.<input type="checkbox"/> Use intake form for very basic data (name of deceased, DOB, primary contacts, phone numbers, emails). This documentation can provide a moment for calming breathing, concentration and a sense of order and safety.<input type="checkbox"/> LISTEN in non-judgement. Offer pastoral compassion and care.<input type="checkbox"/> Provide referrals to local resources, as needed (see appendix): funeral home, crisis counselors, etc.<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss dates for religious services, if desired.<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm a safe, private place to stay the night. Safety for victims and survivors is essential.
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Timely Support

While funerals are normally scheduled and celebrated soon after a death, a loss that involves traumatic circumstances may be significantly delayed by legal investigation and County coroner's process. In the meantime, Parish support is still essential in the days following death. While privacy is to be regarded as the highest priority, pastoral support can reassure family and loved ones that others are present to walk the difficult road with them. While victims and families may have other support, you may be called upon to make recommendations or referrals. The following guidance may be needed in the first days/weeks following a loss.

Week One

- A reliable primary contact: To maintain accurate updates on the needs of the survivors, agree upon one primary spokesperson for the family and, respectively, one primary contact at the church to ensure messages are conveyed and requests are fulfilled.
- Be present for and participate when possible in public gatherings (on-site vigils, etc.) memorializing the deceased. Group gatherings can show support through healing ritual but can also be environments that fuel expressions of resentment and anger. Be a presence of peace, patience, and love, using healing words that facilitate peaceful remembrances, especially if a neighborhood has collateral grief. Resource: <https://172430notohatecrime.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/quick-tips-to-organising-a-candlelight-vigil.pdf>
- Grieving rituals can help process and make sense of the reality of what has just occurred. Encourage the use of battery-operated candles, flowers, and portraits as memorial spaces in the home. (Candles, Holy Water, flowers, incense.) Some cultures will ask for a Prayer Service in the home. This can feel like a safe way to worship in the early days following the loss. It can gather family and close friends in an environment that does not put them at risk for public view, criticism, or media frenzy.
- Food: While food sharing has been a common way to show our support to grieving families, some may prefer not to be bothered. Sensitivity and prudence should be used depending on the wishes of each family. If welcomed, assign a pastoral volunteer to create a meal sign-up document using an online tool such as SignupGenius.com or MealTrain.com. One family contact can dictate food

preferences, allergies, and amount of food. A large cooler should be stationed on the porch. Family contact should dictate drop off times by cooks or designated delivery friends. For privacy, delivery of food should be drop/run. No interaction with family should be necessary or expected. Tape heating or assembly instructions to the meal containers.

- Cards/letters: At times of traumatic loss, handwritten notes are preferable to in-person visits from people outside the family unless the family specifically approves. Guide well-meaning church community members by encouraging prayers and brief notes of support. Discourage phone calls and texting as families will be overwhelmed by inquiries and may experience difficulty with prioritizing tasks and the necessary energy. Written communication can be answered in due time as possible, but the messages of support will be helpful to a sense of community and care.
- Begin or continue planning a funeral or memorial with family, primary family representative, or designated advocate.

Week Two

- Continue Prayer Support: Continue Intercessory prayers, Rosary Group prayers and other prayer ministries, if approved by family.
- Funeral/Memorial Planning: Coordinate scheduling, locations and details with the funeral home selected by the family. Empower the victims/families to make decisions for themselves. Begin with the small decisions about scripture and music that match the deceased or the situation. If they defer, honor their request, but encourage them to participate in decision-making for its healing benefits.
- Bereavement Ministers: Allow the family to seek out and work out the details. Suggest support tasks. The parish bereavement minister may assist the primary family contact person with the names and addresses of good quality funeral directors in the local community that provide professional/ ethical services.
- As ministers of the Church, we need to refrain from assisting families with personal information regarding financial or legal matters to avoid impropriety or conflict of interest. Recognizing our competence, we must be aware of our limitations. The parish should have a list of qualified clinical counselors/ therapists and psychology

professionals in the area that can assist families during their grieving process. Parishes should also provide families with information about parish bereavement ministries and a list of other support groups (including community-based organizations, faith-based and clinical resources) in the local area in order to assist families move through their grief.

Continuing Care

In most cases, the grieving period following a traumatic death may extend far beyond the completion of legal proceedings and benefits greatly from continued pastoral support and recollection. The following memorial rituals bond victims and families in supporting one another in the long-term healing process:

National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims: September 25th. This commemorative day was established as a result of unanimously passed resolutions by the U.S. Senate on October 16, 2007 (S. Res. 326) and the U.S. House of Representatives on May 14, 2007 (H. Res. 223)

The National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims not only recognizes murder victims but also honors those organizations throughout the United States that provide services such as support, advocacy, and counsel to loved ones of murder victims. Look for local events.

National Crime Victims' Rights Week, every April. Since 1981, National Crime Victims' Rights Week is a time to renew our collective commitment to serving all victims of crime, to acknowledge the achievements in victim services and allied professions, to honor those who have gone above and beyond in their service to others, and to remember crime victims and survivors. Visit <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/national-crime-victims-rights-week/overview> for specific dates for each year.

Wall of Remembrance: Add the name of a loved one to the “virtual” **Wall of Remembrance** at California Catholic Conference Restorative Justice website: <https://restorejustice.com/wall-remembrance>. To add a loved one's name, email the name, location, and date of death to dmcdermott@cacatholic.org.

Grief Anniversaries: Grief is full of painful milestones: birthdays, Christmas, weddings, etc. A death anniversary, while painful, can also help with remembering our loved ones and the blessing they were to us. Some cultures celebrate with a mass or religious service on the one month, 40 days, or 1-year dates. Some suggestions for families to find healing on significant days:

- Visit the gravesite, place flowers or other meaningful items
- Plant a tree, rose bush or other growing thing in their memory
- Light a candle
- Write a poem or letter
- Look through photos, frame a portrait or make a scrapbook
- Do an activity the loved one enjoyed
- Host a dinner honoring the loved one
- Attend a religious service
- Do volunteer work for an organization the loved one supported
- Do a charity run/triathlon, etc.
- Visit someone else missing the loved one to share stories together

Memorial, markers, tributes: Survivors and families may wish to memorialize their loved one with a physical reminder. While a cemetery marker is one obvious memorial location, other opportunities exist for visible reminders of the gift of a loved one. Items might be as simple as engraving a stone for the garden, sponsoring a bench in a local park or significant public space, or planting a tree in a forest.

Perhaps the loved one was a member of an organization that will add their name to a posted list of leaders or members who have died. Some municipalities have memorial statues or courtyard paving stones that can receive new names for remembrance.

Creative persons may sew a quilt, create a piece of public art, or compose a song.

Grief Basics

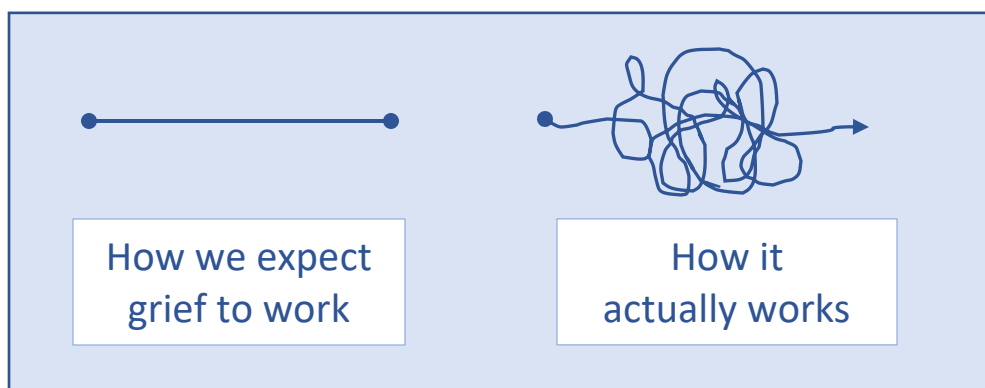
Grief is often misunderstood and comes with complicated, overwhelming emotions. There are many useful resources outlining the Stages of Grief, and it is helpful to develop a working knowledge of them in order to work with the grieving family more effectively or loved ones to work through them to the extent possible:

Five Stages of Grief

In her 1969 book “On Death and Dying, scientist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross first articulated her grief theory, the Kubler-Ross Model, which identified five linear stages of grief. While these stages were defined for people who were ill, they have since been adapted to many situations of loss. These stages may help assist those in the complicated grief after a traumatic loss, bearing in mind that current thought acknowledges that the stages do not necessarily follow an exact order.

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Kubler-Ross noted that everyone experiences at least two of the five stages of grief and acknowledged that some people may revisit certain stages over many years or throughout life. In fact, grief can be so complicated that no clear stages are even observable.



Stages of Grief Expanded

A more complex model of ten grief stages is outlined in the pioneering book “Good Grief” by Granger E. Westberg (Fortress Press, copyright 1962, 1971, 1997, 2011).

- Stage 1:** Shock
- Stage 2:** Emotional Release
- Stage 3:** Depression and Isolation
- Stage 4:** Physical Symptoms
- Stage 5:** Panic (Anxiety)
- Stage 6:** Guilt
- Stage 7:** Anger and Resentment
- Stage 8:** Resistance
- Stage 9:** Hope
- Stage 10:** Affirming Reality

The Mourner’s Bill of Rights

Grieving is a difficult process in any situation. When someone is suffering from a loss of a loved one due to violent crime, they may not follow “normal” patterns of grieving. While people are generally well meaning, help well-meaning community members understand that grieving individuals have a right to their own feelings.

- You have the right to experience your own unique grief.
- You have the right to talk about your grief.
- You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.
- You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.
- You have the right to experience “grief bursts.”
- You have the right to make use of ritual.
- You have the right to embrace your spirituality.
- You have the right to search for meaning.
- You have the right to treasure your memories.
- You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.

Created by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD, Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition, Ft. Collins, CO
© 2007–2013, Center for Loss and Life Transition <https://www.centerforloss.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MBR.pdf>

Prayers and Intercessions

A faith community can be the most transformative influence in the ability to heal from traumatic loss. Cultivate prayer support ministries that offer long-term commitment to hurting families: e.g. Prayer Warriors, Prayer Partners, Trained Bereavement Ministers, Stephen's Ministers.

Prayer for the Victims of Violence

Loving God, you are the author and sustainer of our lives. You know the anguish of the sorrowful, you are attentive to the prayers of the brokenhearted. Hear your people who cry out to you in their need; strengthen their hope in your lasting goodness.

We pray today for those who have died because of violence, of terrorism. Draw them to yourself; let your face shine upon them. May they be greeted with choirs of angels and experience your eternal peace and joy.

Be near to all those who have been touched by violence: those who have been hurt, lost their loved ones or lost their sense of security. Be for them a steady comfort and safe resting place.

Softening the hearts and steady of the minds of those who would do violence to others. May hate be replaced with love, violence with peace and darkness with your light.

Amen.

(Permission granted by The Catholic Health Association of the United States, 2.2021:

<https://www.chausa.org/prayers/general-prayers-and-prayer-services/healing-and-health/prayer-for-the-victims-of-violence>)

Order for the Blessing of a Victim of Crime or Oppression

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/sacramentals-blessings/persons/order-for-the-blessing-of-a-victim-of-crime-or-oppression>

Prayer for Healing & the Restoration of Justice

We pray for those who aspire to break down walls that separate offender from offended, and to reconcile those who have brought harm with those who have suffered as a result of their actions.

May victims of violence be treated with compassion and mercy, and may perpetrators of violence learn to respect all persons and find a path to peaceful action.

May all be blessed with courage, openness, and trust as they search together for a merciful justice that heals and restores.

Written and prayed daily by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Belmont, California

(Permission granted. You can also find this prayer on our Wall of Remembrance at www.restorejustice.com)

Prayer for the Grieving

Lord, at the moment nothing seems to be able to help the loss I feel.

My heart is broken, and my spirit mourns.

All I know is that Your grace is sufficient.

This day, this hour

Moment by moment

I choose to lean on You,

For when I am at my weakest Your strength is strongest.

I pour out my grief to You

And praise You that on one glorious day

When all suffering is extinguished, and love has conquered

We shall walk together again.

(More prayers at: http://www.lords-prayer-words.com/prayers_before/prayer_for_comfort.html#ixzz56uypFrZ8)

(Permission granted by: https://www.lords-prayer-words.com/admin/copyright_information.html)

Prayer for Grieving during Holidays

Such a loss! Such a keen and tearing pain! Even when I am in a crowded room, there is a loneliness I never knew existed. Comforting God, I have turned to you so many times for solace, and I come again. While the world is bright and sparkling, my heart feels leaden and has an emptiness that cannot be filled.

Lord, how can I enter into this season of joy? In my head I celebrate your birth into this world, but in my everyday life, I am filled with a grief that runs so very deep. You blessed me with a

loving relationship and now it is gone from my life. How can I be faithful to that love and the memory of that love and my sorrow in this season of "Rejoice!"??

Tears are so close to the surface all the time and helpful friends who want to "keep me busy" don't seem to really understand that I need to embrace my grief. I am afraid of letting go of the sadness and losing the deep love connection I had. Instead of entering into the rejoice of Christmas, I long for the sorrow of Lent. I beg you, Lord, show me how the two are connected. I ponder the name "Emmanuel" and know that it means "God with us." With us. With me in this world, in this sorrow. If I look beyond my pain, I know that you, too, suffered so much in this world. I never understood so clearly before that Emmanuel is what your nativity is really about.

You are in my world, in my pain.

Thank you, Lord, for the loved one you blessed my life with. Grant me now in my grief, a peace. Give me a comfort that might not make the tears go away, but that lets me feel your presence as you take up a place deep in my heart, with me.

—Unknown

*(Used with permission from Praying Advent, on Creighton University's Online Ministries web site:
<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html>)*

On the Death of a Loved One

O God, in your mercy and compassion, remember our loved ones whom you have called to new and everlasting life. You promise eternal salvation to all who believe in you. O Lord, we are yours, and you are with us. In your infinite goodness, please grant eternal rest to our loved ones and may your light shine upon them.

Amen.

En la Muerta de un Ser Amado

Oh Dios, en tu misericordia y compasión, recuerda a nuestros seres amados aquellos a quienes has llamado a la vida eterna. Tú prometiste la salvación eterna a todos aquellos que creen en ti. Oh Señor, somos tuyos, y tú estás con nosotros. En tu infinita bondad, por favor dales eterno descanso a nuestros seres amados y que tu luz brille sobre ellos.

Amén.

(Used with permission by the Office of Restorative Justice, Diocese of San Bernardino, CA)

Sample Intercessions/Prayers of the Faithful for Funeral Mass (Adult)

In baptism N/. received the light of Christ. Scatter the darkness now and lead him/her over the waters of death. Let us pray to the Lord.

Our brother/sister N/. was nourished at the table of the Savior. Welcome him/her into the halls of the heavenly banquet. Let us pray to the Lord.

For N/. that God will reward him/her with peace and joy for the good he/she did during his/her life. Let us pray to the Lord.

For the gift of eternal life. That N/. may be received into the Lord's loving embrace. Let us pray to the Lord.

For our deceased relatives and friends and for all who have helped us, that they may have the reward of their goodness. We especially remember N./. Let us pray to the Lord.

Those who trusted in the Lord now sleep in the Lord. Give refreshment, rest, and peace to all whose faith is known to you alone. Let us pray to the Lord.

The family and friends of N/. seek comfort and consolation. Heal their pain and dispel the darkness and doubt that come from grief. Let us pray to the Lord.

For our community gathered here in prayer. That we may be a source of encouragement and healing to those in sorrow. Let us pray to the Lord.

Many people die by violence, war, and famine each day. Show your mercy to those who suffer so unjustly these sins against your love, and gather them to the eternal kingdom of peace. Let us pray to the Lord.

For all who have undergone a tragic and violent death...that the fear of the moment may have been transformed into peace and joy upon meeting our good and loving God. Let us pray to the Lord.

For those, who experience real sorrow as we give N/. into the Lord's hands...that they may not mourn as those who have no hope, but be firm in faith. Let us pray to the Lord.

(from Order of Christian Funerals, International Commission on English in the Liturgy/A joint commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1989).

Prayers of the Faithful for the Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities

For an end to the violence perpetrated by harsh words, deadly weapons, or cold indifference. May our homes, our nation, and countries around the world become havens of peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the grace to see every human being as a child of God, regardless of race, language, or culture, let us pray to the Lord.

For the wisdom to receive the stories and experiences of those different from ourselves and to respond with respect, let us pray to the Lord.

For the strength to teach our children how to resolve differences non-violently and respectfully, and the courage to model it in our own behavior, let us pray to the Lord.

For our faith community, that we may celebrate and welcome the diverse faces of Christ in our worship, our ministries, and our leaders, let us pray to the Lord.

For our faith community, that we may respond boldly to the Holy Spirit's call to act together to end violence and racism, let us pray to the Lord.

For healing and justice for all those who have experienced violence and racism, let us pray to the Lord.

For the protection of all police and first responders who risk their lives daily to ensure our safety; for fair and just policing that will promote peace and wellbeing in all our neighborhoods, let us pray to the Lord.

For our public officials, that they will strive to work for fair education, adequate housing, and equal opportunities for employment for all, let us pray to the Lord.

For our parish, that we may cultivate welcome, extend hospitality, and encourage the participation of people of all cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds, let us pray to the Lord.

For the courage to have difficult conversations about racism, and for a better appreciation of how our words and actions – or even our silence – can impact our communities, let us pray to the Lord.

For solidarity in our global human family, that we may work together to protect those who are most vulnerable and most in need, let us pray to the Lord.

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/prayer-faithful-day-prayer-peace-our-communities-0>)

Sample Funeral Liturgy Song List

Gathering

- Amazing Grace
- For All the Saints
- Gather Your People
- Holy God We Praise They Name
- How Can I Keep from Singing?
- I Am the Bread of Life
- I Know That My Redeemer Lives
- Prayer of St. Francis
- Soon and Very Soon

Psalm

- As the Deer Longs
- Because the Lord Is My Shepherd
- I Rejoiced*
- I Shall Not Want
- Loving and Forgiving
- My Soul Is Thirsting
- Our Blessing Cup
- The Lord Is Kind and Merciful
- The Lord Is My Light
- To You O Lord, I Lift Up My Soul
- With the Lord there is Mercy

Presentation of the Gifts

- Be Not Afraid
- Center of My Life
- Eye Has Not Seen
- I Shall Not Want
- O God You Search Me
- Parable
- Pescador De Hombres (Lord, You Have Come)
- Prayer of St. Francis
- You Are Near

Communion

- Because the Lord Is My Shepherd
- Be Not Afraid
- Blest Are They
- Center of My Life
- Eat This Bread
- I Am the Bread of Life
- On Eagle's Wings
- Shelter Me O God
- The Lord Is My Light
- The Supper of The Lord
- You Are Mine
- You Are Near

Meditation

- Ave Maria
- Be Still
- Go in Peace

Recessional

- Alleluia No. 1
- Go in Peace
- How Great Thou Art
- In the Day of The Lord*
- On Eagle's Wings
- Soon and Very Soon
- We Will Rise Again

Suggested Reading after a Major Loss

The local public library, parish library, bookstores, grief support groups and friends can be good sources of excellent books on grieving. Specific books may not make sense to the victims or families at this moment but may ask to try again later.

A Grief Like No Other: Surviving the Violent Death of Someone You Love. K. O'Hara. Marlowe & Co., 2006.

A Grief Observed. C. S. Lewis. Bantam, 1983.

A Time to Grieve: Meditations for Healing After the Death of a Loved One. C Staudacher. HarperOne, 1994.

Befriend the Darkness, Welcome the Light. J. Rupp. Ave Maria Press, 2006.

Children Mourning, Mourning Children. Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D., editor. Hospice Foundation of America, 1995.

Coping with Traumatic Death: Homicide. B. Baugher. Caring People Press, 2015

Don't Take my Grief Away: What to Do when you lose a Loved One. D. Manning. HarperSanFrancisco, 1984.

Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies. M. Felber. Ave Maria Press, 2000.

Good Grief. G Westberg. Augsburg Fortress, 1997.

Grieving the Death of a Friend. H. Smith. Augsburg Fortress. 1996.

Healing After loss: Daily Meditations for Working through Grief. M. Hickman. Avon Books, 1994.

Healing the Greatest Hurt: Healing Grief & the Family Tree. D. Linn, S. Fabricant, M. Linn. Paulist Press, 1985.

How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies. T. A. Rando. Bantam, 1991.

Into the Light: For Women Experiencing the Transformative Nature of Grief. S. Olson. Seasons, 1993.

Journey to the Heart. M. Beattie. HarperCollins, 1996.

Living When a Loved One Has Died. E. Grollman. Beacon Press, 1997.

Men and Grief. C. Staudacher. New Harbinger, 1991.

Murder Survivor's Handbook: Real-Life Stories, Tips and Resources. Connie Saindon. Wigeon Publishing, 2014

Saving Graces: Finding Solace and Strength from Friends and Strangers. E. Edwards. Broadway, 2007.

Transforming Traumatic Grief. K. O'Hara. Artemecia Press, 2011

For additional resources visit <https://restorejustice.com/books-and-videos>.

Court trials and legal proceedings

Financial Assistance

Help may be available to pay bills and expenses that result from violent crime. Call to determine eligibility: California Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB) 1-800-777-9229

Victim Assistance/Victim Support Networks

Victims or those related to a victim may feel:

Isolated or alone—as if no one understands their feelings
Frustrated with a lack of information provided to them
Angry with “the System”
Helpless in “fixing” the situation

Seek out local support groups for victims grieving a loss from violence, homicide, suicide, or accidental death. Groups are often run by law enforcement agencies, county offices, churches, and non-profit organizations. Using a browser search, look for options that suit the current circumstances by searching terms like “victim assistance” or “victim support” or “victim support groups near me”, utilizing the GPS feature to list resources close by. Following is a sample list of common national agencies that *may* be available in your municipality:

- OVC (Office for Victims of Crime, National) <https://ovc.ojp.gov/>
- Local police department (police, sheriff, etc.)
- County court system (District attorney, probation department, county hospital, etc.)
- Churches/faith community (local Catholic diocese, your own church/temple/community)
- MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers) <https://www.madd.org/>
- MAM (Mothers Against Murder) <https://mothersagainstmurder.org/>
- NOVA (National Organization for Victims Assistance) <https://www.trynova.org/>
- POMC (Parents of Murdered Children) <https://pomc.org/>
- Restorative Justice Projects
- Victim Witness Assistance <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/victimwitness-assistance-program>
- YWCA <http://www.ywca.org>

Support groups

- <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/>

- <http://www.victimsofcrime.org>
- <http://www.victimsupportservices.org>
- Support groups and faith-sharing groups provide and promote faith, trust, hope and healing.
- Forgiveness and closure (restorative justice) <https://restorejustice.com/>
- “Meet them where they’re at.”
- Family survivors may one day become skilled facilitators themselves
- Peacemaking Circles: As with the restorative processes of mediation and conferencing, circles provide a healing space for encounter between the victim, offender, and the community. Depending on the model being used, the community participants may range from justice system personnel to anyone in the community concerned about the crime. Everyone present has a voice in the proceedings. Participants typically speak as they pass a "talking piece" around the circle.

“Traumatic events are extraordinary; not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations of life.”

--Judith Herman

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