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Annual Memorial Service
Sunday, May 20
Myers Park United Methodist Church
Francis Chapel
1501 Queens Road
Charlotte, NC 28207

Weeding Your Garden of Grief
By Larry Dawalt, M.Div.

What do you think of when you hear the term Garden of Grief?

For many in Arizona, Garden of Grief refers to the place outside the University Medical Center in Tucson where an attack on January 8, 2010 left six people dead and 13 wounded, including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. Visitors arrived day and night to pay tribute, covering the lawn with hundreds of bouquets, balloons, get well cards, and thousands of messages left on everything from paper plates and posterboard, to tiles and rocks.

For Garland Williams, former owner of a well-known garden center in Maryland, a Garden of Grief was something he could help the students and faculty of a middle school construct to take a step toward redirecting their grief over the sudden loss of two classmates.

I know a mother and father in Gastonia who have a Garden of Grief. It was planted over ten years ago to honor the memory of a daughter gone too soon. It has flowers, shrubs, a few herbs every now and then, and lots of angels. It is a place to reflect, remember, smile, cry, and experience a flood of emotions, both comforting and painful.

What all three of these gardens have in common is that they pay tribute to, and honor, a loss. One loss was very public. Another was a community loss. The third was private and personal, though just as worthy of honor to those who knew the dear girl, including me.

A garden is a wonderful metaphor for the grief experience.

Like a garden, grief is a process. There is an initial period of sorrow and barrenness; questioning and wondering if it will ever get better. There is a time of small appearances of hope, like the blooming and sprouting of new growth. It’s a time of coping, to learn more about this new normal. Progress is slow but

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Have You Checked Your Vision Lately?

By Marge Brokaw, LPC

“When your eyes are tired the world is tired also.
When your vision has gone no part of the world can find you.”

This quote by poet David Whyte helps describe how many people feel after a loved one dies. There is almost a feeling of sleep-walking or numbness, as if you are in a dream state from which you are hoping to wake up. If this sounds familiar, know that you are not alone and that what you are experiencing is a normal part of the grieving process. In the months to follow, the “walking in a fog” feeling often starts to replace itself with a search for a “new normal”. A new normal suggests that while life has changed in many significant ways, there is still a life to be explored and hopefully enjoyed.

So how can one begin to create a vision for a new normal?

As Spring arrives, perhaps you might try getting outdoors more and accepting opportunities to participate in activities again. While saying “Yes” to an invitation might initially feel difficult, if you push through your resistance you may find some pleasant and even fun experiences waiting for you. In her book, Merry Recluse, author Caroline Knapp describes this process in the following way:

“What to do to manage my fear, my anxiety, my sleepless nights instead of mindlessly eating, drinking, or binge shopping? What helps to foster feelings of well-being and safety and meaning? What kind of relationships will I seek out, what kind of hobbies, what kind of physical and psychic nourishment? This involves another form of trial and error, one based on acting rather than consuming, and it’s a good bit trickier.

I am still collecting data, still struggling to answer the most elemental questions of Self: How do I like to spend free evenings and weekends? What’s the right mix of solitude and companionship for me? How much do I want to be touched or loved or even depended on? What do I really hunger for? What’s fun for me, what’s soothing, what’s engaging? Trial and error; data collection: this is painstaking and hard. Seven hundred walks with my dog through the park and I’ve discovered: okay, I like this, this feels good, being out in the woods with my dog. Nine hundred failed battles with the sewing machine and I can say: okay, I don’t like this, I don’t have the patience for sewing, it makes me feel incompetent. These are the small building blocks on which a new sense of Self is built. I am this sort of person, these are my needs, these are my particular strengths and weaknesses.”

So as you take a step forward into your changed life, maybe it is time to check your vision.

Can you permit yourself to see a new normal emerging, little by little, step by step?
sure, and it continues. Memories of things said, promises made, qualities instilled, inspiration, motivation, and gratitude rise above the pain of the early days of barrenness and sorrow. With this reflection also comes the work of distinguishing between a plant and a weed. Is this something beautiful and nourishing or is this something distressing and detrimental? Is this helping me make progress, or is this something I don’t really need right now? Is it a flower, or is it a weed? Family can be both, friends can be both, and certain memories can be both. The question to ask is whether or not you are seeing beauty and gaining nourishment. If not, it’s probably a weed. Clean it out. Get it out of your garden; if not permanently, at least temporarily until your garden is strong and you know it’s going to survive.

The move from sorrow and barrenness to stability and fertility will probably take many hours in the garden of grief. Sit in it. Work it. Weed it. And do whatever it takes to make your garden grow.

In Good Company

“Hearts Healing & Hoping Together”
(All are welcome!)

Meet Us for Coffee & Conversation
4th Tuesday of each month at 10am
Julia’s Coffee
1133 North Wendover Road, Charlotte 28211
Contact Marge Brokaw, Grief Counselor, at 704.335.4308

Lunch Grief Support Group
4th Thursday of each month at 11:30am
Bob Evans Restaurant
16707 Northcross Drive, Huntersville 28078
Contact Amy Thomas, Grief Counselor, at 704.602.0930

Dinner Grief Support Group
2nd Thursday of each month at 6pm
Bob Evans Restaurant
16707 Northcross Drive, Huntersville 28078
Contact Amy Thomas, Grief Counselor, at 704.602.0930
Support Groups

Groups are forming now for “Grief: The Reluctant Journey” support groups, beginning late spring 2012, at our various HPCCR locations. A pre-group interview with one of our grief counselors is required prior to registration for the grief support groups. To find out more about them, and to schedule an interview, please email Cummingsg@hpccr.org, or call 704.335.4334. For our Lincoln support groups, email Journigan-Douglas@hpccr.org, or call 704.732.6146.

Please join us for our Annual Spring Memorial Service as we celebrate and remember those we have loved and lost.

Sunday, May 20
2:30pm
Myers Park United Methodist Church
Francis Chapel
1501 Queens Road
Charlotte, NC 28207
For additional information, please call 704.335.4334.

You are welcome to bring a photo or other memento of your loved one.

Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region

The mission of Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region is to relieve suffering and improve the quality and dignity of life through compassionate hospice care for those at the end of life, palliative care for those with advanced illness, and through community education.

How we care for you: Hospice Care, Palliative Medicine Consultations, Pediatric Care, Kids Path, Grief Care.