



What is life like if you or someone in your family is bereaved or has suffered a loss? And what can your parish do to make a difference?

What is Life Like?

After the funeral or after the separation or divorce and the busyness of the first few weeks, the isolation and loneliness of the bereaved can become very intense.

'How can I talk about it? How can we talk about it when everyone seems to have forgotten my loss?'

During Listening 2004 we heard a great deal about the loneliness of individuals and the isolation they feel especially after the loss of someone they love.

'I'm a widow. It's lonely very often'.

'There is a dying inside when we do not share one another's burdens'.

'I just wish there was somewhere I could go where the hurt and pain and loneliness would be accepted.'

'I thought I was in a caring parish but I felt so alone. Everything had changed for me and I had become a stranger where I had previously felt at home'.

'Because I am divorced they did not want me'.

'It's hard to cope when someone dies but together we can help each other.'

As a Church we are very good at responding in a crisis but what do we offer the bereaved once the initial shock has passed?

Challenges for the Parish

During Listening 2004 people expressed a need for "more sharing and fellowship". This is especially true for those who have been bereaved. How can we provide this?

- People exclude themselves because they do not think they will be accepted eg the divorced and the separated. What can we do to ensure that they always feel included?
- Many people thought that divorce prevented them from receiving Holy Communion. How can we share the clear teaching that exists?

It is important to emphasise that seeking or receiving a divorce, where there are serious and objective reasons for it, is not in itself a barrier to receiving communion. [Cherishing Life](#) #136

- How well do we know each other? What more can we do to recognise the signs of loneliness, isolation, guilt and anger in others?
 - What can we do to help our parish grow in trust so that it becomes a place where everyone can experience being listened to, understood and accepted; a place where we feel free to share?
 - How can we build a community where forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and acceptance are lived and experienced by all?
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Practical Actions

- Create social and liturgical opportunities for people to gather for sharing and mutual support, both in church and in the home
 - Provide support groups for the bereaved, divorced and separated, on a deanery if not a parish basis
 - Identify, gather and train teams to visit, listen to and befriend the bereaved
 - Prepare help sheets with appropriate information eg legal, financial, useful helplines, information services etc.
 - Formulate a grief support programme
 - Offer practical help in the home
 - Arrange shared lunches
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Prayer and Liturgical Opportunities

Homilies and bidding prayers are opportunities to raise and reflect concern for those affected by loss.

Healing Masses and non-sacramental liturgies can be opportunities to personally invite those who feel isolated.

Lord,
Be with us today when life is difficult and uncertain.
Help us to feel the security of Your presence,
the comfort of your love and the calm of your peace.
Amen.

(Prayer by Marlene Moore)

The Church prays that no one should be lost: 'Lord, let me never be parted from you.' If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God 'desires all men to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:4), and that for God 'all things are possible' (Mt.19:26).

Helpful Resources

Catholic Trust for England & Wales. 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX Registered in England & Wales. Registered Charity Number: 1097482 Company Number: 4734592

Association of Separated and Divorced Catholics (ASDC)
www.asdcengland.org.uk

Beginning Experience.
Support for those who have lost a spouse through death, separation or divorce.
www.beginningexperience.org

Care for the Family. Promotes healthy family life and helps those hurting because of family breakdown.
www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Compassionate Friends Helpline (for bereaved parents)
Tel: 0845 123 2304
www.tcf.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care.
Helpline Tel: 0844 477 9400
Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk
www.cruse.org.uk

Grief Net. An Internet community of persons dealing with grief, death, and major loss. www.griefnet.org

Rainbows for all God's Children (for children affected by loss)
www.rainbowsgb.org

SANDS: Supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby. Helpline: 020 7436 5881
www.uk-sands.org

SOBS: Bereaved by Suicide
Helpline: 0844 561 6855 (9am-9pm)
www.uk-sobs.org.uk

This leaflet is one of a series devised to assist parishes to become more welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive.

For further information contact:
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