

# KANSAS PARISH NURSE MINISTRY FAITH COMMUNITY NURSING

## Quarterly Newsletter

Summer 2020

*"Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you." Psalm 86:4*

### **From the Desk of your District Representative**

*Pray for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Ephesians 6:19-20.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

How would we have known what the last few months would have been? This is a once in a lifetime experience for those in the nursing and healthcare professions to serve in various capacities with such a new and dreadful pandemic.

Some of us worked from home and felt some of the same feelings including anxiety, depression and grief. As a whole, nurses are "people-persons" helping those in need. I had the feeling of helplessness; things were happening and all I could do was make phone calls to members, send cards and pray. My prayers were that God would give strength and good health to all of those working the full and chaotic clinical settings. I also prayed for the patients and the families who were affected, and I prayed for the scientist to find a "cure", a vaccine, to provide the supplies that were so desperately needed and so much more!

As Parish Nurses, we could assist our pastors while they were trying to figure out how to share the message with congregational members. At Prince of Peace our Vacancy Pastor has been depending on me as I know the members and the support that each needs.

There were many activities cancelled because of the safe distancing order, including the annual District Representative meeting and Parish Nurse Conference on Concordia University campus in Mequon, Wisconsin, which had been scheduled in May, the

LWML convention, the Older Adult Symposium and Saints Alive meetings were all cancelled.

Share with others, through this newsletter, how the recent pandemic has affected you and your ministry. For me, I was not able to be with those who were dying, not of the virus, but of their individual illnesses. I was not able to comfort the families at the time and that we (the church) were not able to have traditional funeral services. How did you and your pastor work together to assist members? The pastors were overwhelmed with the changes in preparing and presenting nontraditional services, virtual meetings and more. We want to thank the pastors for their service through this difficult time.

*Heavenly Father, let me know your compassion in my work today and share it with those in my care. Amen.*

Blessings as you minister to others  
Mary Hume, Parish Nurse

### **Spiritual Support During an Epidemic**

Rather than attending the District Representative meeting on the Concordia University Wisconsin campus due to the COVID-19, we had a meeting on Zoom. Most all of the District Parish Nurses attended. Rev. Fred Zimmermann, Pastoral Advisor for the parish nurses, opened with a devotion from John 3:16 followed by a number of other relevant verses. Rev. Dr. James Coyle discussed "HELP (Hope Encouragement Lifelines Purpose): Compassion Fatigue" using 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7. He discussed the acronyms of HOPE (Hope, Opens, Peoples, Eyes), FAITH (Fear Ain't In This House) and LOVE (Living Outside Vulnerable Experience). Compassion Fatigue can stare you in the face and because it "creeps up" you might not recognize it.

The symptoms of Compassion Fatigue can include exhaustion, physical ailments, emotional shifts,

changes in thought patterns, behavioral changes, and relationship difficulties. In reality, it feels like “running on empty” with just nothing more to give to yourself or to others.

What can one do to avert Compassion Fatigue, to fill “your tank” before it is completely dry? One can practice self-care which is very important!

1. Be aware of what is going on with you, that you are “out of gas”.
2. Debriefing; talking about the trauma you have experienced.
3. Be proactive by eating healthy, exercising regularly and getting adequate rest.
4. Be intentional to recognize the attributes that contribute to your professional success. Request assistance to help implement change and redirect thoughts that you do not have to be perfect.

We do have the lifeline of Jesus and of others when we feel we are in the “mudhole” of Compassion Fatigue, our lifeline is HOPE from Jesus.

## **Grief and COVID-19: Mourning our bygone lives**

**By Kirsten Weir**

The COVID-19 pandemic is an epidemiological crisis, but also a psychological one. While the situation provokes anxiety, stress and sadness, it is also a time of collective sorrow, says Sherry Cormier, PhD, a psychologist who specializes in grief and grief mentoring. “It’s important that we start recognizing that we’re in the middle of this collective grief. We are all losing something now.”

Many people are reckoning with individual losses, including illness and death due to the novel coronavirus, or loss of employment as a result of economic upheaval. But even people who haven’t lost anything so concrete as a job or a loved one are affected, Cormier says. “There is a communal grief as we watch our work, healthcare, education and economic systems — all of these systems we depend on — destabilize,” she says.

The crisis isn’t just shaking our faith in those systems. It’s upending our understanding of the world around us, says Robert Neimeyer, PhD, Director of the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition and Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Memphis. “The losses include our sense of predictability, control, justice, and the belief that we can protect our children or elderly loved ones,” he says. “Those are among the losses that can be

addressed by mental health professionals.” Grief and loss experts share what they know about the ways we’re mourning now — and how to help those who are grieving.

### ***Grief is natural, and most people are resilient***

Though grief is difficult, it helps to recognize that it is natural and useful, says George Bonanno, PhD, a psychologist who heads the Loss, Trauma and Emotion Lab at Teachers College, Columbia University. “Grief is really about turning inward and recalibrating, and thinking: ‘This is not the way the world is anymore, and I need to adapt,’” he says. “It’s okay to feel grief over what we’re losing. When we do that, it allows us to let grief do its job, so that we can move on.”

His research suggests that once a crisis has passed, most people are able to bounce back and move on with their lives. Grief is also transient, even when we’re in the midst of its clutches. People should expect to fluctuate between moments of sadness and mourning, and moments of acceptance or even happiness, he says. “People who cope well with loss usually move in and out of those states. It’s OK to allow yourself to be distracted and entertained, and even to laugh.”

### ***Shaking our sense of self***

Research from the bereavement literature shows that the nature of a person’s attachments has an effect on their grief reactions. Of course, we aren’t only attached to other humans, Neimeyer says. “We’re capable of losing places, projects, possessions, professions and protections, all of which we may be powerfully attached to,” he says. “This pandemic forces us to confront the frailty of such attachments, whether it’s to our local bookstore or the routines that sustain us through our days.”

Many of the losses we’re experiencing now are so-called ambiguous losses. “These lack the clarity and definition of a single point like a death,” Neimeyer explains. And that lack of clarity can make it hard to move forward. As the pandemic has evolved, people have had to confront a series of losses: The loss of a sense of safety, of social connections and personal freedoms, of jobs and financial security. Going forward, people will experience new losses we can’t yet predict. “We’re talking about grieving a living loss — one that keeps going and going,” he says.

We don’t only grieve for what’s missing, but also for the ways in which those losses affect our senses of

self, Bonanno says. "You can experience grief over anything that feels like a loss of identity." Research shows, for instance, that losing a job can trigger a period of prolonged grief distinct from anxiety or depression. That prolonged grief seems to be related to the impacts of job loss on self-esteem and belief in a just world (Papa, A., et. al., *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2013).

It helps to "name and claim" our grief. With almost the whole world confronting losses large and small, how can people cope with grief? For starters, mental health providers can help patients "name it and claim it," Neimeyer says. "People often have a vague sense of anxiety or wordless suffering. We can help them wrap language around that," he explains. "We can ask people to consider what they're losing in the context of this pandemic, what they can do to strengthen those ties."

It's not a fatalistic view, he says. Rather, it's an organized way of taking action to help people cope with their losses, whether that's their jobs, relationships, sources of self-worth, self-efficacy or other.

Cormier suggests people keep journals to put words to losses, and to help identify ways to move forward. As the work of psychologist James Pennebaker, PhD, at the University of Texas at Austin, has shown, writing about emotional upheavals can improve both physical and mental health (*Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2018).

"Name what you're losing, individually and collectively, and write about your personal strengths and coping skills," Cormier suggests. "Most of us have never been through anything like this, but we've been through other challenging transitions. It can help to write about how you got through a divorce, or losing your job, or other challenging transitions. How did you heal and recover?"

### ***Social connections are still important***

It's well established that social support can be critical in helping move on from grief, rather than get stuck in it. That poses a problem in an age of physical distancing, when people are isolated in their homes away from loved ones. "During this time, there may be an erosion of social support and the meaningful social roles that buttress our identities," Neimeyer says. Psychologists can encourage people to stay connected with their social support networks through phone calls, text messages, video chat and social media. And those reminders should continue even after we

emerge from isolation, says Erika Felix, PhD, a psychologist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who treats and studies survivors of trauma and disasters.

"One thing we've learned from disasters is the ongoing importance of social supports. The lesson is to keep checking in on people, and keep the support going even after this period of lockdown ends," she says. "For some people the stress will continue after quarantine ends, especially if their jobs or relationships are affected."

### ***Psychology can embrace its purpose***

While many people will be resilient to the changes wrought by COVID-19, this global crisis will test others in major ways, says Felix. "As things return to normal, most of us will also return to a kind of normal, albeit changed by going through this experience. But there is a subset of people who will be chronically disrupted and will need support in recovery," she says.

Psychologists may have to build their expertise on grief and trauma to meet that need, through continuing education in areas such as disaster mental health, psychological first aid and trauma-focused therapies, Felix adds. "When working with people who have experienced trauma, it's important to know your strengths and to know what you can and can't do."

But the field is up to the challenge, Neimeyer adds. "One thing about crisis is that it can galvanize creativity and commitment," he says. "Psychology has a purpose and direction in this crisis that is quite clear. We can retreat from it, or we can embrace that moment."

This article was published online:

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/04/grief-covid-19>.

## **Ideas for Health Articles**

Health topics vary each month, information for a newsletter article, bulletin insert, or for a bulletin board. Check the websites ([www.health.gov](http://www.health.gov); [www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov). or [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)) to find more ideas, and to follow links to articles and information. Many of the health organizations have literature and posters available at little or no cost.

- \* **June**— National HIV Testing, National Safety Month, Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness
- \* **July** – Cord Blood Awareness, Juvenile Arthritis Awareness
- \* **August** – National Immunization Awareness, Psoriasis Awareness

\* **September** – Baby Safety, Health Aging, National Cholesterol Education

## Educational Opportunities

**Ongoing:** LCMS Health Ministry. Videos are available for on-line viewing.

A distance learning option is available through the collaboration of the LCMS Parish Nurse Council and the Lutheran Nurses Association of Australia. Marcy Schnorr serves as the Coordinator and Mentor for the USA version. She also serves as the Education Consultant and International Liaison on the LCMS Parish Nurse Council.

For more information, contact Marcy Schnorr at ([marcyschnorr2009@gmail.com](mailto:marcyschnorr2009@gmail.com))

## LCMS Kansas District Parish Nurse Representative

*As your representative, I am available to assist you with information such as the newsletter, printed materials about the ministry and much more. Please keep me informed of changes in your life, such as address change, email address change, status of the ministry in your congregation, etc. If you know of others who would like the newsletter and other information, please let me know. If you prefer to*

*receive the newsletter electronically, that can be arranged.*

Kansas District information is available at [www.kslcms.org](http://www.kslcms.org). Click on *Caring Ministry* and then *Parish Nurse*. The history of Parish Nursing in Kansas and past newsletters are available.

The Lutheran Parish Nurses International ([LPNI.org](http://LPNI.org)) site has health articles, devotions and a Bible Study that are published monthly. The site is available for us to learn from other parish nurses throughout the world and to grow spiritually. The April Health Topic discusses Organ Donation, the May Health Topic discusses Mental Health, and the May Devotion is on “Milestones, Pandemic and Thankfulness”

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*“Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.” Ephesians 6:24*

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