

HOPE COTTAGE COMPANIONS: BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT FOR ADULTS
BASED ON THE PRACTICES OF BLESSING BASED SPIRITUAL NURTURE AND
THE TEACHINGS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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“Cry. Cry if you must. But do not complain. The path chose you. And in the end you will say, thank you.”¹ It is with a grateful heart that I acknowledge the following people: Michael Conzett, my best friend and husband, Christopher, Andrew and Margaret, our children, and Nel Noddings, professor emeritus, Stanford University. Thank you for being Holy Listeners.

¹ Dag Hammarskjöld, *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest*, ed. Donald B. Cozzens (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 189.

ABSTRACT

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Hope Cottage Companions addressed the need for adults, particularly within the Roman Catholic Church, to have a pastoral care setting that extended the hospitality of Christ through parish based grief support. Held weekly and open to the larger community, six ninety-minute sessions integrated selected practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture with relevant and authentic teachings of the Catholic faith. Narrative-based qualitative research indicated that participants experienced high levels of bereavement support, increased understanding of the Catholic faith, and deeper awareness of and compassion for others working through grief and loss due to death.

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INTRODUCTION

Hope Cottage Companions will be the name given to a grief support ministry offered especially for adults within a Roman Catholic parish setting. Development of this ministry will be guided by the knowledge gained from research aimed at discovering if there is truth in the following hypothesis. When relevant and authentic teachings of the Roman Catholic faith are intentionally joined with selected practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture adults who grieve due to death will develop a deeper and more active faith and be spiritually transformed along with members of the larger faith community.

This document will include information regarding the life journey leading the researcher to pursue doctoral studies at United Theological Seminary and to pursue development of this particular ministry within the context of the Archdiocese of Omaha, Nebraska. A broad overview of chosen historic efforts which provide support for those who grieve the death of a loved one will be presented along with a current literature review. This information will be provided through biblical, theological, historical and theoretical foundations that will guide the ongoing development of this particular ministry. Research methodology used to design, measure, challenge and form the proposed hypothesis will be qualitative in nature. Ministry outcomes will be presented through documentation of the actual field experience and reflection, summary and conclusions around this act of ministry. A bibliography will be part of this written work along with an appendix containing examples of ministry-specific materials and ministry session design templates.

Hope Cottage Companions will address a gap in the array of local bereavement ministries available to adults, particularly those who are Roman Catholic. It will also

serve as a model for other like to like ministry development. It will provide, in the short term, small group pastoral care in a parish setting for adults who have experienced the death of a loved one during the past year. Hope Cottage Companions will be offered to the faith community of St. Gerald Roman Catholic Church, Ralston, Nebraska. The practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture (BBSN) will be drawn upon as a resource for ministry design. For the purposes of these studies and with respect for the expressed needs of the parish where Hope Cottage Companions will first be offered, the program components will specifically address the Pastor's request for a grief support ministry within this particular parish.

Hope Cottage Companions will be a ministry of relationship. Relationships will develop within the grief support group and the larger faith community through attention to three pillars. The first pillar will be hospitality. Attention to this pillar will be evident through practices that encourage Holy Listening, the recognition of sacred space, personal and communal prayer and blessing. Greater understanding of authentic church teaching and participation in faith practices will be encouraged in order to protect the deposit of the faith, an important concept for Roman Catholics. The second pillar will focus on teachings about Jesus' life. This pillar will support the value of learning about God's love for His people, especially through the gift of His son Jesus. Understanding of this pillar will come about through attention to scripture related to the life and death of Jesus. Scriptural references will serve to support participants' development of a more intimate relationship with Jesus which in turn will support development of the larger community's relationship with Christ. Scripture will be chosen in keeping with the specific needs of those present in the group. The third pillar will be the Communion of

Saints. Understanding the teaching and practices of the Roman Catholic faith related to this pillar will encourage participants to better understand the Church's mission regarding the salvation of souls and will develop awareness of humankind's eternal connection with God.

All practices and materials will be in accordance with authentic teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Adults in the larger community including those who are not Catholic will be welcome. This inclusiveness will allow family members and friends who are not parishioners of St. Gerald due to place of residence or other faith community participation to attend and support each other.

Roman Catholics will benefit from an intentional effort within their faith community to address faith-specific grief concerns during the first year of renegotiating the world after the death of a loved one. Those who grieve will be provided a safe place companioned by a facilitator whose hope is grounded in compassionate truth. The provision of a sacred space, where two or more gather and find quiet welcome, assurance and support for their grief will be seen as historically aligned with Christ's command to love one another, our neighbors as ourselves, as God loves us. Hope Cottage Companions will be a ministry committed to providing an opportunity for people to be positively transformed by their experience of death. Grief will be experienced as liminal when the hospitality of Christ is extended to those who mourn. This support will enhance each participant's experience of God's love and mercy on both an individual and community level.

Through the collaborative efforts of the Blessings Based Spiritual Nurture cohort group at United Theological Seminary, BBSN practices will be incorporated into a

variety of pastoral care settings and faith communities in the future. These practices will have wide application due to their grounding in basic biblical, theological and historical teachings surrounding God's unceasing love and mercy. People of all ages will benefit from ministries that recognize and incorporate the practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture.

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!”¹

¹ Bishops' Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, *Saint Joseph Edition of The New American Bible* (Huntington, IN: Catholic Book Publishing Co, 1976), Matthew 28:19-20.

CHAPTER I
MINISTRY FOCUS

“She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”(Luke 2:19)

“This is a phrase that Luke uses more than once to describe Mary’s response. It has a tone of depth and excitement about it, and that’s always the experience of the Holy: we’re both fascinated with it and afraid of it. Luke shows us Mary caught up in this experience of the Holy. She is in that liminal space between fascination and attraction on the one side, and fear and awe on the other. When you confront the Holy, you stand between those two polarities, being pulled by both. All you can do is go deep and inside at the same time.”²

Her story began nearly fifty years ago. Born on June 20, 1958 to a married, professional couple whose work and sense of God’s call had brought them to a Presbyterian college campus in Hanover, Indiana, she was their only biological child. The woman was a registered nurse who was following her dream of missionary work and the man had come with the encouragement of his father to seek a life beyond that orchestrated by a railroad career. The two met, the man was smitten, the woman said yes, and a daughter was born. The couple was somewhat older than the norm for first time parenting when their daughter arrived. The father was 40 years old and the mother was nearly 35.

¹ Richard Rohr, *The Good News According to Luke* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 85.

Partly because of their ages and established lifestyle, the child had many opportunities to explore the world far beyond this small, rural college town. The family traveled extensively, frequently by Airstream travel trailer, but also by commercial and private plane. Both parents were licensed private pilots and the family shared ownership in a four passenger Cessna aircraft which allowed for frequent weekend trips. The college's academic calendar followed a two semester schedule which also made extended summer trips possible. Nearly annual trips took them as far north, south, east and west as one could go in Canada and the United States. Regardless of mode of transportation the family's travels nearly always included time spent with aunts, uncles and cousins. Paternal grandparents were living at the time of the child's birth. A favorite family story was that at the time of this child's birth the grandfather was losing his eyesight. One of the last things he was able to see was this new granddaughter. As the story is told, he held her close and cried upon being presented with this new member of the family. The child knew she was welcome in the world and that family and relationships were at the very heart of life.

The family's chosen faith was Presbyterian although the mother had Lutheran roots from her Pennsylvania upbringing and the father's family was Methodist with roots in Ohio. Both parents were actively involved in the ministries of the Hanover Presbyterian church which was founded in the 1800's. It was an easy choice to be Presbyterian in this small town, especially given their ties to the college. The church occupied a stately brick building complete with balcony and bell tower where the youth were occasionally allowed to go without adult supervision. Sunday school, confirmation

classes, Christmas pageants, serving in the nursery and church choir all contributed to the fond memories of belonging to a caring church family in those formative years.

The churches in Hanover often opened their doors to one another for choral concerts, bible study, thrift store and preschool activities. Families in this small town had a deep sense of community, of belonging, of safety and the peacefulness of life.

The family's frequent travels offered many opportunities to worship with those of other faiths in communities around the country. With the Airstream serving as the most frequently chosen mode of travel, worship services were often attended in nature settings, including nearly all of the national parks across the country. The child developed deep regard for the wonder and majesty of God's creation and was often awed not only by the quiet stillness offered by nature but also by the intensity experienced in storms of wind and rain.

In this child's array of faith experiences there was a gap. There was almost no Roman Catholic influence for the first twelve years of her life, perhaps owing to the fact that no Catholic church existed in Hanover, or perhaps due to the fact that the Catholic Church had any number of requirements to be met before full participation in the Eucharistic celebration central to that faith would be allowed. Therefore it likely was not sought out on the family's travels. Her only remembered contact with Roman Catholics was with two girls who rode her school bus for a time during elementary school. They were transported to the local elementary school for pickup and car pool to a nearby town with a Catholic school. They kept to themselves, and were quiet and reserved in their school uniforms. She considered them focused and intelligent. In them she experienced a sense of something 'other' than what she knew of life and faith.

The family's peaceful and ordered existence ended during the child's fourth grade year when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. She died two years later. It was a lengthy, intense illness that filled the child's nights with wondering which adult church member would spend the night in their home while her father stayed at her mother's hospital bedside. Relatives came from out of town as frequently as possible and the child spent many after school, evening and weekend hours in the homes of church friends. It seemed that few people knew what to say or do. She felt invisible and voiceless. The Lord's Prayer and confident belief in God's presence accompanied the child through the dark times.

The father remarried in his daughter's eighth grade year, surprisingly enough to a Roman Catholic woman who lived directly across from the Presbyterian Church and had known both of the child's parents. This woman had two young adult children, a twenty year old son and a seventeen year old daughter. They too had been deeply affected by a parent's death, that of their father who had a massive and fatal heart attack.

The wedding of widow and widower was officiated by the Presbyterian minister and a Roman Catholic Priest. The stepmother's children chose to live on their own after their mother's remarriage. They did not attend the wedding.

Weekly worship now included Saturday night mass and the Sunday morning Presbyterian service attended by father, stepmother and frequently the now teen-aged girl. Presbyterian youth group continued to be attended and one year the group traveled to Columbus, Ohio for a weekend retreat. It was led by a man who recounted the story of Samuel. It left an indelible mark on the teenage girl who never forgot his telling the story

of God calling him by name. She too had heard God's voice. She knew how to listen. She understood that man's story.

The following years were a time to incorporate a whole new understanding of faith and worship into daily living as the daughter was swept into the open arms of the stepmother's large Catholic family. Even though they lived two hours away in Indianapolis, her newly extended family included aunts, uncles and cousins who provided countless opportunities for conversation and experiences that intertwined life and faith in different but somehow familiar ways. There was a shared language being voiced and it resonated within the depths of the young woman's soul.

Eventually it was time to choose a college and the choice settled upon was a women's college in Cincinnati. It happened to be Catholic which offered the young woman additional opportunities to observe and experience the Catholic faith. During these years she was welcomed by some and questioned by others when opportunities arose to participate in limited ways within the faith community on this college campus. These experiences helped form the young woman's beliefs around the importance of hospitality, particularly as it related to faith.

A trip to Europe was received as a college graduation gift. The trip was filled with opportunities to experience the sights and sounds of Europe which afforded unintentional but increased awareness of the Catholic faith. She, along with her father and stepmother, visited multitudes of Cathedrals and places viewed as holy not only by practicing Catholics but by others who respected the history of the faith.

The family had flown to Europe to begin their trip but the return home came by way of travel on the Queen Elizabeth II. Most of the ship's passengers were older in age,

making it a long drawn out trip for the young woman. She spent the time observing people of many nationalities. On the morning of the ship's arrival in the New York harbor she found herself on the bow of the ship in the early morning fog. Having overheard some people talking the evening before about gathering here to experience their arrival stateside, the young woman had gotten out of bed well before daybreak and long before her parents or most other passengers were awake. Once in their midst she realized a Catholic Priest was present and preparing for the celebration of the Eucharist. She had a deep awareness of Christ's presence accompanying these people into this strange but hopeful land. Many of those gathered were new to America and their joy at arriving was shared in a rich variety of languages. It was an experience never forgotten. Mass ended with the Priest offering a prayer of special thanks as the ship passed beneath the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. The sun was beginning to rise.

A few years after graduation the young adult professional, now an elementary school teacher, was invited by a Presbyterian friend and professional colleague to attend a Catholic parish in Cincinnati. She was introduced to the people of St. George Roman Catholic church, and Newman Center on the campus of the University of Cincinnati. There the young woman experienced an expanded sense of community for the faith that had been quietly developing throughout the years. It was here that the teachings and practices of the larger Catholic faith began to be more clearly understood. This understanding grounded the joys and the sorrows of her heart and mind. It was here that a deeper sense of call to ministry was recognized and named which led to additional ministry opportunities and eventually graduate study.

This time of life was significant as it paved the way for a future of abundant service to, with, and for families in a variety of settings. It was in this community that the young woman made a choice for her own faith commitment. She entered into full participation in the Roman Catholic faith on Holy Saturday, April 18, 1981. She believed it was the single most important commitment she had ever made. This belief was reinforced in the years ahead.

Regardless of geographic setting or professional responsibilities, grief and transition were areas of special interest throughout her career. People seemed to seek her out whenever there were situations of death and dying. She was often told that she knew what to say or do to comfort those who had suffered loss. This surprised her as she rarely considered that she had done much more than actively listen. As life's journey took her from Indiana to Ohio, California and Nebraska, her professional experience enveloped time spent with people of all ages in preschools, elementary, junior high and high schools, college campuses, church and parish settings, pregnancy centers, adoption and mental health agencies, a pediatric hospital, and eventually an Archdiocesan Family Life Office. This last setting offered a broad spectrum of marriage and family ministries including those offered for grieving Catholic and non-Catholic children and adults. It was in this setting that she found herself preparing to enter the research phase of her doctoral studies at United Theological Seminary (UTS). It was not the place she had expected to be when her studies began a few years earlier.

“Crossing over into the unknown ... crossing over from a secure land to one who roads I have never walked ... For all of us in transition who have bridges to cross, bless

us, God of the journey, gift us with the desire to go ahead ... Help us to trust that the bridge will be strong and the risk will be worth it.”³

It was late summer, early fall 2002. In the Family Resource Library (FRL) at Children’s Hospital, Omaha, NE, a man was sitting near a woman who was using one of the computers provided for families. The woman barely acknowledged the staff person’s presence but the man made eye contact and invited her into conversation about their infant son. As the woman who was the child’s mother typed information into an e-mail regarding their son’s condition, the Dad explained that they had gone home a week earlier with a healthy boy and late last night they realized something just wasn’t right. They called the hospital and were told to come immediately. Now on the afternoon of this next day their son was struggling for his life and no one knew exactly what had happened or what was wrong. Dad had a small stuffed giraffe with a religious medal pinned to it. He explained their efforts to pray. It was clear this little animal was a help to them, something to hold until they could hold their son again.

The FRL staff person sat and listened, gently supporting. Questions were few and of little importance whether they were answered or not. Dad just needed to talk. Grandparents had come but were elsewhere in the hospital. She learned some of the hospital’s executive team had visited this family’s bedside. They were being well cared for by important people but in this life and death situation titles and importance were unrelated. Dad spoke of the changes in lifestyle he would make if his son lived. They

³ Joyce Rupp, *Out of the Ordinary* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2000), 218.

would travel. He would show his son the world and make sure this child knew he was valued and loved. Mom continued to type while Dad continued to talk.

Dad was assured that they were in wonderful hands with highly skilled medical staff who would do everything they could for their child. The family was encouraged to continue to utilize the services of the FRL where day or night families could come to use the computers, research their child's condition when they had more information or just sit and find comfort on the couch or window seats. The family was reminded that there were many people involved in their son's care and many were available by pager day or night. The family should not hesitate to call.

It was then that Dad stated, "I know it will be okay." She waited. He said, "We called the Chaplain to baptize our son this morning. After that I went to look out the window and I saw the hand of God on Children's. It's going to be okay, no matter what happens." Eyes wet with tears, hands were clasped in recognition that this family was not alone.

It was in this pediatric setting that the researcher planned to collaborate with others who ministered to people who were grieving. She envisioned retiring from this setting many years in the future. But within a year of her acceptance at United Theological Seminary a call came for her to consider working within the Archdiocese of Omaha and specifically the Family Life Office.

“Companion and Guide, you are my transition coach ... You say to me: Cross over the bridge. Go ahead, come on over. It’s sturdy enough ... Don’t look down, though, or you might get terrified and never walk across.”⁴

After weeks of prayerful consideration and careful discernment she said yes. It was an immensely difficult but strangely peaceful time. The purpose of her studies and her attention to developing a Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture model of grief ministry soon received greater scrutiny and wider potential for influence in the field of bereavement. It was through saying yes to joining the Archdiocesan staff that the still small voice which had guided her life-long call to ministry was more clearly heard and supported. While this call had continued to take shape through her studies and with the direction of the professors, mentors and cohorts at United Theological Seminary, she now had the commitment and ongoing support of leaders within her chosen faith community, the Roman Catholic Church. Some said this was providential. Regardless, she had to find her way through this time of significant transition.

“Don’t look back too long or you will lose courage and want to stay right where you are ... Hang on. Keep going. That’s what bridges are for, to get you to the other side ... Trust me to protect you.”⁵

On the researcher’s last day at the hospital the chaplain who had connected her to the doctoral program at UTS and who had become one of her Professional Associates accompanied her to the skywalk for a blessing ritual. From the skywalk they could see the entrance to the hospital, the helipad, and the many roads leading here from all

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

directions in the city. With tear-filled eyes the researcher looked longingly at her husband's office located in a building directly to the west of the hospital. During her time at Children's the skywalk was a chosen sacred place where the researcher came when there was a difficult decision to make or a family or coworker in distress. It was here that she often prayed and offered to God the situations beyond words. Oftentimes her prayers were for families who had come here because of a child's serious and unexpected illness or injury. On occasion her prayers were for families whose children would not accompany them home due to death.

On this day however, it was her desire to merge gratefulness with desolation that brought them here. The two stood with hands joined, arms embraced, joys and disappointments named and remembered from the times spent ministering together in this holy and liminal place. The words for prayer came from the poem, "Crossing Over" by Joyce Rupp. The chaplain blessed her and presented her with the gift of a small, clear, hollow heart. The chaplain said the hole in the center of the heart represented the hole that would be left at Children's upon the researcher's departure. The researcher offered the explanation that the hollow space represented the mystery that was leading their journey.

The two left the skywalk filled with a strong sense of the presence of God. They knew this apparent end was but another step on the journey which had brought them together. That knowledge did not negate their sorrow. For the next few weeks the small heart was frequently found in the researcher's hand or in her pocket. She placed it by her bed at night. Eventually it found a home on the desk in her new office.

“For all of us in transition who have bridges to cross, bless us, God of the journey, gift us with the desire to go ahead.”⁶

The Archdiocese of Omaha and specifically St. Gerald Roman Catholic Church now served as the primary context for her Doctoral Act of Ministry. For a number of years in the early 1990’s she had served as the St. Gerald Site Coordinator for Rainbows for All God’s Children. Rainbows was an international peer support group for children, adolescents and adults who had experienced death, divorce, separation or other loss within the family. She developed an adult component which followed the format and topics covered in the children’s groups during the 12-week series. Every adult who registered a child in the program was encouraged to consider accompanying their child by participating in the parallel adult track. This came out of her belief that the children would be better supported through their grief when a significant adult in their lives was available to reinforce the learning done during the sessions. She also hoped that the adults would realize that grief was not something simply to be learned, or started and finished, but was instead something to be experienced, grown through and shared together as a family. The program was well received and families of all faith traditions attended from throughout the greater Omaha community. Even though more than ten years had passed since discontinuation of the program within the St. Gerald community, Rainbows was still a program available through the Archdiocese of Omaha.

In addition to her awareness of Rainbows and the various other family life ministries provided through the office, the months ahead were filled with expanded awareness of Roman Catholic grief support efforts at the national level. She learned of

⁶ *Ibid.*

the resources available through the National Catholic Ministry to the Bereaved in St. Louis and supported staff attendance at their trainings. It was affirmed that there were gaps in what was locally available and she recognized that she was now in a key position to actively support interest within local parishes to collaborate with others around the topic of ministry for the grieving. Her doctoral studies were met with curiosity and affirmation. The researcher's acceptance of the offer to join the Family Life Office was supported by an ongoing and deeply spiritual sense of coming home.

“Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. If you're lost, you really start to look around and listen.”⁷

Concurrent with her acceptance to UTS, she and her husband had accepted an invitation to discern a call to the permanent diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church. There had been prayerful awareness of this possibility for years. They had always realized that marriage was a sacrament, grounded in teaching that they were called through covenant to bring Christ's presence more fully into the world. To become a deacon her husband was required to have her written consent and ongoing support.

She questioned God. Was it really going to be possible to give the necessary attention to Doctoral studies, a challenging new ministry position, a formation program which could lead her husband to ordination within the Roman Catholic Church and obedience to the Archbishop; all while maintaining integrity around her response to

⁷ Deena Metzger, *Circles of Stories* (Parabola, 1986), 104; quoted in *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, ed. Witherell, Carol, Nel Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

God's call in her life which included a deeply held respect for her primary vocation to marriage and motherhood? Was she really being called to this life that seemed to be presenting itself to her? There was a great sense of vulnerability during this period of transition. She dug deep into her life experience for a sense of God's presence moving her life into an unknown future.

First and foremost she recalled God's presence in her family of origin. She had grown up in a home with parents who were active in their church and open with their prayer lives. They had encouraged her to know God as always present and active. She knew prayer as a continual source of guidance through mealtime and bedtime ritual but also in those unexpected moments during the day when awareness of God was invited or received through ordinary life experiences. Her father, mother and stepmother, relatives and friends had established a model for a call to service that had been immediately recognized in the man who was now her husband. She knew from his continual acknowledgement of Christ as friend that her own relationship with Christ would be nurtured and strengthened within the sacrament of marriage. During friendship, courtship and now nearly twenty-three years of marriage he had recognized the same in her. She turned to this man, their teen and young adult children, close friends and trusted spiritual companions to move with her through this time and place.

As the days unfolded into months she began to accept that each of these strands brought a unique strength and support to her life. Her desire to seek out, listen for, and respond to God's call was nurtured in new ways. She recognized that her companions for the journey now included a full spectrum of people from a variety of faith backgrounds at United Theological Seminary. Their individual voices were collectively woven with hers.

Coworkers in the Archdiocese shared their deep commitment to family ministry and provided support through their own efforts to be attentive to God's call. Her former coworkers at Children's continued to stay close through phone, e-mail and occasional lunch meetings.

Participation in Diaconate formation provided opportunities for intellectual learning and spiritual development along with additional shared experiences of communal prayer and blessing. Members of the deacon community modeled their own understanding of what it meant to be good stewards of the blessings given them and were lived example of generous service in Christ's name. Each of these communities of people shared their stories of the gift and the challenge inherent to being continually called by God for increased service to His kingdom here on earth. She grew in understanding that the path had widened in significant ways. It was a sometimes painful but essentially grace-filled time.

In revisiting her paperwork for application to UTS she encountered words written and set aside months before. "It is my belief that the Spirit which gives us life has brought us together for the Doctor of Ministry. This same Spirit will join me with others for this Act of Ministry and continue to guide the development of Hope Cottage Companions. Continued growth through the Doctor of Ministry Program, joint participation in the diaconate formation program with my husband, and attention to this call in my life to serve those who grieve as a result of death or other significant transition will lead me further into my call to ministry. The development of Hope Cottage Companions may take me through yet another doorway on a path unknown today. Those imaginings and wonderings are a shadow of both concern and comfort. Ultimately I must

have faith and rest assured that God will be my ever present companion as the future continues to unfold.”

“Are you willing to be changed?” was asked in Step 1 of the Doctor of Ministry process. She was reminded of Christ’s call, “Come follow me.” There were many times in prayer when her response to God was, “Yes, but not this much. Please, not that.” Life experience had taught her that obedience to God’s call for her own personal growth was the most important way to encourage growth and change in the larger world.

“Are you prepared to effect change in others?” This was the second question in Step 1 of the Doctor of Ministry process. Leadership grounded in her own humility and respect for others only logically grew out of attention to the first question. If change in others was to be both encouraged and supported she must first embrace her own conversion and continuing formation. She must give herself for others as Christ gave Himself for her. It was that simple and that hard.

In prayer she was reminded once again that she was a child of God, invited to listen to His voice in order to be formed into the person whom God called her to become. She believed this was the essence of what it meant to be a Christian called through baptism to enter into a journey of faith within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic church. For all that was new and challenging about these times, there was much that was well grounded in her experience of God. A lifetime of experience and attention to faith converged to guide her days. Like Mary, “She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”(Luke 2:19)

CHAPTER II

STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT

Development of Hope Cottage Companions was rooted in regard for the value of relationship. It was born out of a need-based vision for grief ministry within a specific faith community setting. It was built on the belief that the ability to provide an environment of hospitality that extended the love of Christ to each participant was tantamount to enhancing awareness of God's love and mercy for His children, especially in a time of sorrow. The researcher sought to create a place where people could find encouragement to better understand the sacred gift of relationship with the person whose death brought them to the ministry. Out of their increased understanding it was hoped that participants would be encouraged to discover further connection with God and each other. By offering this ministry through a specific faith community, in this case the Roman Catholic community of St. Gerald parish, it was believed that the larger community would grow in understanding of God's love and mercy along with the individual ministry participants. It was to be a ministry rooted in recognition of the trinity.

Development of this act of ministry led the researcher to believe one of the most significant, mysterious and difficult subjects to grasp throughout the history of the world was relationship. Regardless of one's orientation to life as faith-based or secular, humankind's ability and choice to enter into relationship has impacted the whole of the world in countless ways. This ministry formed out of the belief that faith was ultimately about relationship, first and foremost with God, His son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, yet also with those who formed the community of believers. The researcher believed that

death frequently called people deeper into the mystery of God. Death therefore, presented an opportunity for faith communities to minister to those who grieve not only to provide comfort, but to support their desire to understand the mysteries of life and death. The researcher believed exploration of one's life story including the role of faith was a critical element in most people's healing.

The honoring of the telling of stories was viewed as an important element of this act of ministry. "The creative use of story and dialogue lends power to educational and therapeutic experiences because of their capacity to expand our horizons of understanding and provide rich contextual information about human actors, intentions, and experiences ... The individual achieves personhood through caring relation with the other, yet the story of a life is always, in every moment, distinctive from the stories of other lives."¹

Richard Hauser, a Jesuit priest and professor of theology at Creighton University, stated the following in his book on grief: "The teaching, example, and presence of Jesus are significant for every aspect of our lives, but it is not an exaggeration to assert that they are most necessary during times of suffering."²

Was there a connection to be found between a better understanding of the relationship between two people, one now deceased, and the development of faith-specific grief support ministry? Concurrently, was there a connection between Roman Catholic faith development and specific practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture? If

¹ Witherell, Carol, *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, ed. Carol Witherell, Nel Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 79.

² Richard J. Hauser, *Finding God in Troubled Times* (Chicago: The Loyola Press, 2002), 152-53.

so, did that connection support enhancement of people's ability to grieve the death of a loved one as well as enhancement of their understanding of God's love for each of His children? Could Hope Cottage Companions help people explore their relationship with God? Could this ministry help people of faith grow in relationship to each other?

The researcher began with the belief that the world always existed in relationship to God. She considered words by James Weldon Johnson in his poem, *The Creation*.

“And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said,
 *“I’m lonely –
 I’ll make me a world ...”*

Then God sat down
On the side of a hill where He could think;
By a deep, wide river He sat down;
With His head in His hands,
God thought and thought,
Till He thought, *“I’ll make me a man! ...*

*Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.”*³

She explored additional writings that recognized a connection between faith-based grief support and the importance of relationship. A definition of theology included the following, “An organized, often formalized body of opinions concerning God and man's relationship to God.”⁴

³ James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1922), 7, http://www.poetry-archive.com/j/the_creation.html. (accessed June 17, 2006).

⁴ William Morris, ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc, 1969), 1334.

As she studied she recalled the Great Commission to share the Good News with others. Her response to that call was carried out through ministry which provided a place for grieving people to come and share their stories while at the same time recalling the stories of their biblical ancestors and the traditions of the faith. “Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart all the days of your life. Rather, tell them to your children and to you children’s children.”⁵

The researcher reviewed a broad expanse of work by theologians, biblical scholars, psychologists, and educators as well as the work of her doctoral studies cohorts on Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture. Her goal was to discover consistent threads which could be incorporated into faith-based grief ministry. Her research included the following materials and authors, many of which were incorporated into the foundation portion of her written doctoral work.

Based on the researcher’s many years of professional experience related to the field of grief, consideration for her act of ministry included a study of theoretical foundations. Long recognized as an expert in the field of grief, the works of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross provided valuable information related to the stages of grief. Thomas Attig’s book, How We Grieve, contained insights into the value of storytelling which reinforced the possible importance of juxtaposing ministry participant’s stories alongside those of historical biblical characters. The work of Joe Baroody considered the story of creation in Genesis along with St. Augustine and original sin. His main focus was on the need for solid pastoral care for those who grieve.

⁵ Joyce Rupp, *The Star in My Heart* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1990), xiv.

The broadest research efforts were captured in a 2003 Report on Bereavement and Grief Research conducted by the Center for the Advancement of Health (CFAH). This extensive report was the result of the last national effort related to the field of grief. It followed a prior study conducted in 1984 by the Institute of Medicine entitled, Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences, and Care.

The CFAH report included 1) an overview of research related to grief, 2) explanation of the research literature review and the criteria involved, and 3) a summary including suggestions for future grief-related research. The broad focus of this report was of particular interest as the researcher considered how to approach the qualitative research phase for her doctoral studies. There was discussion of the various disciplines that study bereavement and grief responses along with details on the differences and merits of both quantitative and qualitative methods and research. The study notes: “Qualitative research also is characterized by the systematic and rigorous collection of data, but the data collected are typically in narrative form rather than numeric form. Qualitative research has been characterized as oriented to discovery and the generation of hypotheses, rather than to the testing of hypotheses. A goal of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals experiencing it, to understand the lived experience of participants.”⁶

The report contained noteworthy discussion regarding the ethics of conducting research with people who were grieving and cautioned against adding to their grief through the research process. It was stated that bereavement was being increasingly

⁶ Janice L. Genevro, Tracy Marshal, Tess Miller, *Report on Bereavement and Grief Research* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Advancement of Health), 4, <http://www.cfah.org/> (accessed April 4, 2006).

studied but the studies were not always conducted well. There was also valuable discussion relative to the merits of merging the world of practice and the world of research so as to actually benefit those who received support in ways that could be substantially measured. This report also included discussion on the value of religious or spiritual beliefs and their correlation to making sense of the loss. Results of studies were included that showed a relationship between strength of spiritual beliefs and characteristics related to grief resolution.

Beyond this extensive report, there are other researchers whose work was considered in the foundational studies for Hope Cottage Companions. Historically, some researchers argued that to successfully grieve the survivor needed to effectively recognize a complete end to the relationship with the deceased person. In effect the survivor needed to “get over” their grief. However, the work of George A. Bonanno and Stacey Kaltman argued differently by naming components of grieving and ways people were to be supported through the grief process. Their approach integrated understanding of the now deceased person’s presence with the survivor’s life albeit in non-physical ways. Their work correlated to some degree with the Roman Catholic belief in the Communion of Saints.

Jurgen Moltmann, German theologian, also spoke to this belief which comes about for some through the experience of living in community.

“In talking together, both sides, the accompanying and the accompanied, experience something new. Those who accompany help the grieving, so as to support and encourage them, and those accompanied teach the others by telling their own experience. So the first question is not, ‘How can I help?’, or ‘What shall I say?’ but ‘What does he or she want to tell me?’ Listening to each other and talking to each other then generates a dialogue in the face of death and with the pain of grief, until the loss can be accepted and, through a transformation, a new community with the dead comes into being. Grief for the one lost can be

transformed into gratitude for what has been experienced. The fellowship with the beloved person doesn't have to be broken off; it can be transformed in such a way that we live with them, just as formerly they were a part of our own lives, and the community shared with them does not have to be forgotten."⁷

The current work of researcher C.R. Snyder revolved around practices which encouraged the development of hope in those who grieve. His work included three scales for measuring the degree of hope in a person's life. Out of this possibility for measurement came suggestions for practices which enhanced the amount of hope one experienced in daily life. His focus was on action and not emotion related to supporting people through the process of successful grieving. Harold G. Koenig, M.D. provided information related to historical works that connected faith and mental health.

The world of art connected with grief was considered in the previously mentioned poetry of James Weldon Johnson and Joyce Kilmer, but also included study of poetry by Emily Dickinson, the writing of Madeleine L'Engle, and nineteenth century painter, Edward Munch and specifically his painting, *The Death Chamber*.

The work of Christian educators Donald B. Rogers, Kay Berg, and Jacqueline Nowak reinforced the importance of relationship and the valuable insights to be gained from active listening and willingness to learn from and with one's students. Their claim that education is transformational was reinforced by the field experience related to the researcher's act of ministry and doctoral studies. Likewise, the book *In Praise of Learning*, included writings by Dr. Rogers and further supported these theories.

The fact that the Doctor of Ministry was a qualitatively grounded research degree encouraged pursuit of research design and direction that supported the researcher's belief

⁷ Moltmann, Jurgen, *In the End - The Beginning*, trans. Kohl, Margaret (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 124-25.

in the value of relationship. The work of Nel Noddings, moral educator and professor emeritus at Stanford University, reinforced the need for narrative and dialogue to take place in settings where participants' stories were respected and valued as sacred. The writing of Sharan B. Merriam, Irvin Seidman and John W. Creswell further rounded out the researcher's design of methodology for her act of ministry.

In collaboration with her cohorts in the Blessings Based Spiritual Nurture focus group the researcher grew in understanding of the broad-based historical support for recognizing God's original and ongoing blessing of creation. The researcher found the work of mentors Leanne Hadley, Jacqueline Nowak and Donald B. Rogers integral to any study of BBSN. From their original and ongoing work and study, the researcher developed her own act of ministry that studied BBSN within the Roman Catholic arena.

While many of the researcher's cohorts were involved in developing acts of ministry for children, the information studied collectively by the group was helpful to those in adult ministry as well. The researcher observed that death and the grief surrounding loss often left those who mourned feeling as if they were unable to function as they did prior to the loss. It was not unusual for the researcher to hear grieving adults state that they felt dependent in ways they had as children. She recognized truth in the following statement, "Sorrow makes us all children again."⁸

The researcher recognized grief and its apparent connection to vulnerability. That sense of vulnerability was spoken of particularly well in this quote by Richard Rohr.

"I remember my own unsettled and shapeless state after the death of both of my parents. I felt I was living in a different world for some months. Everything looked and felt very,

⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Quotes About Grief," *Quote Garden*, <http://www.quote garden.com/grief/html/> (accessed June 19, 2006).

very strange. I felt emotionally askew for a long time, and I was ready for almost anything to fall apart and disappoint me. It did not make me angry or isolated, as much as humble, open, ready for help, so appreciative of the kindness of strangers and friends. Very small things actually delighted me, although I was afraid to smile or really enjoy them. I lived in a “holy tentativeness,” which made the listening and learning curve very high during that time. ... My ego structures were very permeable, very open to both deep darkness and lovely light.”⁹

The researcher’s theological studies continued to support the important role relationship plays in ministry. “Human beings as created by God are essentially relational, social beings, and this essential sociality and co-humanity is unalterably concretized by our coexistence as men and woman. We are created for life in community with others, to exist in relationships of mutual fidelity and mutual freedom in fellowship.”¹⁰

This relational necessity was considered by Jurgen Moltmann to be historically important during times of grief. “...the old concept of the religious communities, which Luther took over, the *mutual consolation fratrum*, the mutual consolation of the brethren. As brothers and sisters, men and women enter mutually into the situations of the others, and combine the trust which loosens dumb tongues with respect for the intimate mystery of the other person. Here no one talks down to anyone else. People speak or are silent, weep and laugh with others in the same situation.”¹¹

While the researcher considered and incorporated the work of many well know Christians including Marcus Borg, Walter Brueggeman and Claus Westermann in her

⁹ Richard Rohr, "Complaining to God," *Radical Grace* 19, no. 1 (January-February-March 2006): 3. ***CHECK THIS ENTRY***

¹⁰ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1991), 26.

¹¹ Moltmann, Jurgen, *In the End - The Beginning*, 123.

studies, it was important to recognize that her act of ministry was developed to address a gap in many Roman Catholic faith communities for grief support. Her act of ministry sought to address the needs of a particular faith community which was concerned with the teachings and practices of the Catholic faith. She intentionally studied the works and writings of Catholic lay people, scholars and leaders of this faith. Her study included some of the writings of Pope John Paul II who suffered many losses due to death throughout his life, and Pope Benedict XVI.

The New Dictionary of Theology, The Book of Blessings, The Catechism of the Catholic Church, and various documents including *Lumen Gentium*, *Deus Caritas Est* and *Salvifici Doloris* were read. The work of John Chrysostom and his study of the saints, books by Greg Dues, Matthew Fox, Oscar Lukefahr, Tony Hendra, Luke Timothy Johnson and Richard P. McBrien were considered for their relevance to development of Catholic grief ministry. Richard Rohr, Wendy Wright, William J. O'Malley, Henry Nouwen and the words of Mother Teresa were studied and included when deemed important to the researcher's efforts.

In her own lifelong faith development the researcher recognized that the Catholic faith, like others perhaps, was considered by some to be a culture. "Culture is a shared system of meaning, which includes values, beliefs and assumptions expressed through a definite pattern of language, behavior, customs, attitudes and practices, in daily interactions of individuals within a group. The members of a group may or may not be able to articulate the cultural elements that shape their world view and motivate their

actions, as much as the cultural knowledge is tacit and gained through participation in activities unique to that group.”¹²

The researcher considered religion and spirituality to be two main components intertwined within this culture. “Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals of a community. Religion is designed to increase a sense of closeness to the sacred or transcendent (whether that be God, a higher power, or ultimate truth/reality), and to promote an understanding of one’s relationship to and responsibility for others living together in a community. Religion, then, is community focused (organized into formal practices that are observable and measurable), may be authoritarian in terms of behaviors and responsibilities, and is often concerned with beliefs and doctrines that, among other goals, seek to separate good from evil.”¹³ This definition of religion was considered for its impact on grief ministry development within a specific faith community.

Familiarity with a definition of spirituality was also viewed as important by the researcher. “Spirituality, on the other hands, is much broader than religion and less distinctive. Spirituality involves a more generic personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life and its meaning, and while concerned with a relationship to the sacred or transcendent, may or may not lead to religious beliefs, rituals, or the formation of a community. Spirituality is more individualistic, more focused on emotion,

¹² M. Christensen, R.N. Emde, C. Fleming, *Handbook of infant, toddler, and preschool mental health assessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7 - 23; quoted in Tammy Mann, Marva Steward, Linda Eggbeer, Dolores Norton, *Zero to Three*, vol. 27 no. 5, ed. Powers, Stefanie (Washington, D.C: National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, 2007), 8.

¹³ Harold George Koenig, *Faith & Mental Health* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005), 44.

more inwardly directed and subjective, and has less definable boundaries which also makes it more difficult to measure. Finally, spirituality tends to be less authoritarian and less doctrine oriented, and may even be entirely divorced from religion, without involving belief in God but rather focusing more on connections with nature, art, or other humanistic values and concerns (as in earlier pagan cultures).”¹⁴

As she sought information on current practice and available grief ministry within the culture of the Roman Catholic faith, it was reinforced that Hope Cottage Companions addressed a gap in what was available to those who suffered the loss of a loved one through death. What was available within the Catholic community was inconsistent and often times people of the Catholic faith sought support outside the faith community to which they belonged. The most extensive support for grieving Catholics was found in the St. Louis Diocese and the National Catholic Ministry to the Bereaved.

One final area of specific focus was included in the researcher’s overall study. This was study of the reemergence of the permanent diaconate within the Catholic Church. This area further enhanced her understanding of the historical grounding of lay ministry, Holy Orders and service in the Roman Catholic faith and world history. Authors for this area of focus included John Baumen who wrote for Boston College Magazine, Bishop High who discussed current development of the permanent diaconate in a diocese in Indiana, William T. Ditewig, Margaret Morche and Kristen West McGuire. The Bishops’ Committee on the Diaconate produced noteworthy works which increased the researcher’s foundational knowledge in this area significantly.

¹⁴ Ibid., 44.

The researcher's state of the art overview of materials and research related to her act of ministry concluded with the understanding that relationship was indeed central to the development of faith based grief ministry. This conclusion was borne out in the extensive foundational work underlying her act of ministry. When those who grieved were welcomed with the hospitality of Christ and simultaneously encouraged to pursue answers for faith-specific questions, the researcher believed their faith and their sense of connection with the larger faith community would deepen in significant ways.

Faith communities historically had a particular advantage in providing grief support by virtue of centuries of experience which carried over into biblically-based writings and spiritual wisdom that clearly recognized the messiness inherent in life. This shared experience helped people integrate personal understanding of God's presence in the midst of life's very real challenges. The researcher believed there was a shared bond among the grieving that served to enhance the building of community. "What makes community real is people finding themselves in a common situation – a situation which they approach in different ways yet which calls each of them out. The very existence in genuine community is already a common concern, a caring for one another. The caring begins with understanding from within the actual people present. Only then does it extend to gather other people in and then to a dialogue with other communities."¹⁵

Grief support programs which encouraged development and awareness of this knowledge and wisdom were believed integral by the researcher to the ongoing vitality of faith communities, particularly those where the demographics indicated a population that

¹⁵ Shabatay, Virginia, *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, ed. Carol Witherell, Nel Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 138.

was aging in years. These communities entered into the depths of people's grief and grew in their own capacities for hope and belief in God. Understanding that the physical relationship with others and the relationship with God was not necessarily ended by physical death served as a foundation for grief to be experienced as a doorway into another realm of transformation. Ultimately the researcher sought to discover whether faith communities provided a unique place for adults to know themselves and their loved ones as children continually blessed by an all merciful God even beyond life here on earth.

CHAPTER III

FOUNDATIONS

The Foundations of this doctoral work include Biblical, Theological, and Theoretical information deemed important to development of the act of ministry entitled Hope Cottage Companions. Along with the required foundational work, the researcher includes a section on Qualitative Methodology located just before the Theoretical section. This is followed by information on the Practical Considerations for offering this act of ministry within a particular faith community, in this case the Roman Catholic Church. The Foundations are ordered and compiled with an eye toward enhancing both the reader's understanding of Hope Cottage Companions and the potential for the development of similar grief support ministry within other faith communities. The researcher concludes her Foundations with statements regarding the possibility that integration of selected practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture within this act of ministry is essentially directed at spiritual formation. Each portion of the Foundations is historically addressed by virtue of the fact that each section includes events from specific points in time. The researcher recognizes that much more information is available than was included for the purposes of this doctoral work.

Hope Cottage Companions developed as a ministry of relationship that joins together those who have experienced significant loss and transition due to death with those who have found hope beyond death's despair. This will occur within a particular faith community setting. A faith community is especially well suited to supporting

people's questions around issues of life and death. The researcher believes people who live lives based on belief in the significance of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ are uniquely situated to accompany the grieving in ways different from those who do not acknowledge the significance of the life of Christ. The ability to extend Christian hospitality and impart hope based on solid biblical, theological, and theoretical foundations applied to a particular faith community defines what this researcher believes to be the most unique and critically important components of this ministry.

Hope Cottage Companions developed as an act of ministry which intertwined specific practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture with authentic teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. This act of ministry is rooted in three pillars. They are 1) Hospitality as defined by God's Blessing, Holy Listening, Sacred Space, and Prayer, 2) Scripture as understood through example from the lives of people in the Old and New Testament, especially the Book of Luke and the life of Jesus and 3) the Communion of Saints.

BIBLICAL

Inspired by God, the Bible was recorded story by story, handed down faith community to faith community. People throughout the ages knew and understood God's great love while recalling the price that was paid for humankind's sin and selfishness in part through Biblical study and reading. The Bible taught people about "the marvels God has done."¹

Scripture taught that humankind has a particular place within creation and a particular call to make God's love and Christ's presence known in the world. It is the

¹ Rupp, *The Star in My Heart*, 52.

Holy Spirit which makes God's presence known to humankind. The Bible speaks of God's blessing. "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2). The wind referenced here is the Holy Spirit. From the beginning of time as recounted in the Old Testament, to Jesus' days on earth recorded in the writings of the New Testament, people have grown in understanding that it is the Holy Spirit which invites them into deeper relationship with God. This calling forth into relationship awakens them to living as blessed but broken people.

"Blessing manifests itself in widely differing ways. It is primarily the power of fertility, an understanding of blessing that remained constant through the centuries."²

"Blessing is the center of life; it is life itself and it includes all phases of life. It is the positive vital power, which for the people of Israel is manifest above all in fertility."³

"Because life and the powers of life were universally regarded as the most mysterious, awe-inspiring, and important of all reality, they were included in the sphere of holiness, of religion. Life, the power of life, and blessing came to be regarded as holy because their have their origin in the Holy, in the Deity. God is the creator and preserver of life. This thought has spread throughout the whole earth, even among the most primitive religions."⁴ Blessing as cited in Westermann's view was broad. Relationships did not exist without it. Blessing strengthened and gave life to the community.

² Westermann, Claus, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

God blesses. Humankind receives. “A world without blessings is a sterile world, an egocentric world, an ungrateful world. A blessing is a “yes” to goodness, to grace, to an ultimately friendly universe. Blessings connect us to the wellspring of our very being. To be blessed is to taste and savor being favored.”⁵ This understanding is integral to developing an act of ministry that draws upon the practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture.

The development of Hope Cottage Companions arises from the researcher’s belief that there is value in providing a group setting for those who grieve the loss of a loved one. The group setting provides a place for stories to be told and heard. “... the teller or receiver of stories can discover connections between self and other, penetrate barriers to understanding, and come to know more deeply the meanings of his or her own historical and cultural narratives.”⁶ Additionally, “Stories provide a way for one person to ““leap into the other” imagining the experience and feelings of the other.”⁷ Ministry participants hear stories shared by others who are grieving, develop deeper appreciation for biblical

⁴ Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien V* (Kristiania: , 1953), 55-56; quoted in Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 21.

⁵ William John Fitzgerald, *Blessings for the Fast Paced & Cyberspaced* (Leavenworth: Forest of Peace Publishing, Inc, 2000), 12.

⁶ Witherell, Carol, *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, ed. Carol Witherell, Nel Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), 94.**CHECK

⁷ Cynthia Ozick, *The moral necessity of metaphor* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 94; quoted in Carol Witherell, *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, ed. Witherell, Carol, Nel Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

stories and at the same time are part authors in the unfolding story encompassed by the researcher's act of ministry.

Biblical stories provide historical evidence of God's relationship with humankind. In the story of Moses God speaks through a burning bush. "There an angel of the Lord appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, 'I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned'" (Exodus 3:2 – 3). Later Moses hears God telling him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. God commanded Moses' attention; Moses heard, trusted and responded to God's voice.

The story of Joshua follows Moses' death. God charges Joshua with leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. When they cross the Jordan river, God intervenes to protect and save the people. "For the Lord, your God, dried up the waters of the Jordan in front of you until you crossed over, just as the Lord, your God, had done at the Red Sea, which he dried up in front of us until we crossed over" (Joshua 4:23). With Joshua's death the people remember all God has done for them. The faithful respond, "We will serve the Lord, our God, and obey his voice" (Joshua 24:24). Once again, people learn that when they listen and respond to God, the course of history is forever changed. This happens in relationship.

In the book of Judges Gideon speaks to God. He asks for proof of God's presence if he is to save the Israelites. "I am putting this woolen fleece on the threshing floor. If dew comes on the fleece alone, while all the ground is dry, I shall know that you will save Israel through me, as you promised" (Judges 6:37). After one more request by

Gideon for God to make clear to him a sign, God responds. Gideon obeys God's will, and grows in relationship to God.

Further on in the Old Testament God calls Samuel. At first Samuel does not understand what has happened. "At that time Samuel was not familiar with the Lord, because the Lord had not revealed anything to him as yet. The Lord called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me." Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'" (Samuel 3:7 – 9). The Old Testament holds story after story when God speaks and faithful people respond through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament also speaks of humankind's choice to disobey God, a recurrent theme throughout biblical history. That choice allows sin to enter God's perfect world. Yet even with humankind's choice to sin, God has continually sought out His beloved children in order that they would one day be with Him for all eternity. Awareness of the scriptural tradition of God speaking to humankind develops further through study of the New Testament, when humankind's relationship with God is impacted by Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. Each of the four Gospels is built around telling the story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection with the exception of John who does not include the story of Christ's birth.

The stories of the New Testament tell of God sending His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as the bridge between humanity's sinfulness and God's great love and mercy. It is through the sending of His Son that redemption enters the world and sins are forgiven forever. "The teaching, example, and presence of Jesus are significant for every

aspect of our lives, but it is not an exaggeration to assert that they are most necessary during times of suffering.”⁸

The researcher believes attention to Biblical stories is important to her act of ministry. Christ’s relationship with the faithful provides a guide for ministry participants to develop relationships with each other. Living Jesus, Learning the Heart of the Gospel, by Luke Timothy Johnson provides insight for ministry development. The tone and significance of the content of this book is captured in this quote. “If we are dealing not with a dead person of the past but with a person whose life continues, however mysteriously, in the present, then it is better to speak of “learning Jesus” than of “knowing Jesus.” We are concerned with a *process* rather than a *product*.”⁹ This speaks to the transformational nature of the researcher’s act of ministry.

Hope Cottage Companions draws heavily from the Gospel of Luke. Another researcher or facilitator might as easily choose another Gospel with equally good results. There are a number of reasons for this. For purposes related to the timing of the research phase of this act of ministry, and specifically the season of Advent, the researcher chose to refer most consistently to Luke. The researcher considers the book of Luke and particularly the story of the incarnation a valuable starting point for the integration of story telling into this act of ministry.

The stories in Luke are believed to be generally well known and the researcher believes there is comfort for most people when a story is recognized as familiar. A

⁸ Hauser *** CHECK***

⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus, Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 57.

second point important for grief ministry is the fact that more women than men typically seek out grief support. This is due in part to the fact that women have longer life expectancies. The story of Mary and Elizabeth is a classic biblical story of female companionship during a time of unexpected encounter with the Holy. In addition to these reasons is the fact that from beginning to end, Luke spoke frequently about the Holy Spirit. A side note of importance is also that Luke's Gospel is one of two books in the Bible attributed to him. The second is Acts which attends heavily to the work of the Holy Spirit. "All of this is the work of the spirit: the same Spirit that anoints Jesus at the beginning of his mission goes on to anoint the Christian community at Pentecost at the beginning of its mission. For Luke, the Spirit active in Jesus continues in the mission of the community. By implication, then, the community is to continue Jesus' activity in the world."¹⁰

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of an angel who appears to Mary and announces Jesus' coming birth. She responds in fear and trepidation but ultimately turns to God in faith and says, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say" (Luke 1:38). Mary's story in the New Testament built on stories of the Old Testament. In the Magnificat Mary said, "He has upheld Israel his servant, ever mindful of his mercy; Even as he promised our fathers, promised Abraham and his descendants forever" (Luke 1:54-44).

The Gospel of Luke speaks to the fact that Jesus' life, with both his human and divine nature, holds many examples of learning and growing in relationship to God the

¹⁰ Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 202.

father. During his years of growing toward manhood, Jesus journeys out without Mary and Joseph who later find him in the temple at Jerusalem. “His mother meanwhile kept all these things in memory. Jesus, for his part, progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men” (Luke 2:51-52). While Mary and Joseph do not understand his response which is to tell them that they need not have worried, he was where he belonged in his Father’s house, readers gain a sense of foreshadowing that Mary is also called to grow in wisdom concerning the son of God.

The Gospel of Luke brings the reader face to face with God’s promise of eternal life through the story of Jesus’ crucifixion. At Golgotha, one of two other men crucified with Jesus says, “Jesus, remember me when you enter upon your reign.” And Jesus replies, “I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 24:42-43) As the researcher developed her act of ministry she recognized that while science has greatly enhanced humankind’s understanding of pregnancy and birth throughout history, death continues to challenge people with unanswerable questions and pervasive mystery. Loved ones shared a pervasive loneliness born of physical separation along with an unrelenting desire to know what happens to the dead beyond life here on earth. “A mystery is always “beyond words,” not because it can’t be discerned but because one can begin to understand its inner truths only by going through a process – not just a routine rite but a vulnerable submission to a soul-experience.”¹¹ The Bible helps people come to grips with this experience. At times of particular vulnerability they find reassurance when they recall Christ’s words, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.” (Matthews 18:20) Study of the Bible helps people make sense of this promise.

¹¹ O'Malley, *Choosing to be Catholic for the First Time or Once Again*, 69. ***

The Emmaus story contained in Luke tells of two disciples who walk together from Jerusalem after Jesus' death. During the course of their walk, Jesus joins them but he is not recognized by them. It is only later when Jesus joins them at table, breaks bread, blesses and shares it that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him; whereupon he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31). Earlier in this same book of Luke, Jesus chastises them for not recognizing and believing what had been prophesied throughout the ages. "Then he said to them, "What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced!" (Luke 24:25). These people of faith struggled to believe.

The researcher turned again to the book Living Jesus as she considered the importance of biblical connection for this ministry. Having stated the case for the importance of really coming to know Jesus and the profound impact that can have on people's lives, the author goes on to list a number of ways people can learn to know Jesus as real and living among them today. "The learning of another person requires certain moral as well as intellectual capacities. The first of these, in order both of occurrence and of importance, may well be trust."¹² The author goes on to name the following additional requirements for growing in relationship with another person. They are respect, attentiveness, reflection, time, patience, willingness to suffer for and with the other and creative fidelity. The author concludes his discussion of relationship building by saying, "It is a living process, because it is a process that goes on between two living, conscious, and free subjects."¹³ The researcher believes these same requirements can be applied to

¹² Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus*, 58.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

the relationships built within this act of ministry. This act of ministry encourages relationship building in three areas. The researcher recognizes the relationships that will develop within the ministry, the relationships that will develop between the participants and the larger faith community, and also among participants and the living God.

The biblical portion of the researcher's Foundations serve to remind the reader that history as recorded in the bible stands as written record of ordinary people, places and events handed down in various ways throughout the course of time. Biblical history, unlike secular history, has an added extraordinary dimension which calls humankind to see the hand of God ever present in the midst of the unfolding story. Biblical stories provide unique hope and comfort, especially important for those who grieve. "To see the Church as an institution which has a history filled with noble figures but also, it must be admitted, with human frailty, without seeing the fact, attested in the New Testament, that Christ is its head and that it is the dwelling of the Holy Spirit is to miss what is most significant about it."¹⁴ With this understanding Hope Cottage Companions seeks to help people develop awareness of their relational connections across time and space. Attention to biblical foundations supports this desire.

Belief in the significance of what faith communities offer the grieving is supported by the work of Harold G. Koenig, M.D. His work suggests "ten ways that religion could improve mental health."¹⁵ These ten possibilities include viewing life more positively, providing understanding of difficulties in life, encouraging positive choices

¹⁴ William Henn, *Church: The People of God* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), 38 - 39.

¹⁵ Koenig, Harold George, *Research on Religion & Mental Health* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005), 134. ***CHECK***

during stressful times, supporting social networking, looking outward toward others and not retreating into self, developing trust in something greater than one's own control, living from a point of accepting and granting forgiveness, having a grateful attitude and being hopeful. Each of these possibilities is integral to this act of ministry and guides the researcher's attention to creation of an environment which extends the hospitality of Christ to ministry participants. Christ's life provides example for each of Koenig's possibilities as ministry participants grow through attention to scripture.

Biblical study afforded the researcher the opportunity to review and consider the stories recorded throughout the Old and New Testament. The Bible reassures readers that their lives are inextricably connected to all those who have gone before them and those who will come after them. "We are not some casual and meaningless production of evolution...Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."¹⁶

People encountered through Biblical stories encourage others who desire to grow in wisdom, age and grace. The researcher believes Biblical stories help people to see with the eyes of God, listen with the ears of God, reach out in service with the hands of God and ultimately love with the sacred heart of Jesus, His only Son. The act of ministry, Hope Cottage Companions, prompts this kind of growth among those who grieve

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *St. Gerald Parish Bulletin* (Omaha: Liturgical Publications) July 2, 2006.

THEOLOGICAL

“The Jesuit retreat master Anthony de Mello once described theology as *the art of listening to and telling stories about God.*”¹⁷ Stories are important throughout history. Stories allow people to make sense of the world and create an understanding of history shared across generations. “The medieval idea about learning, that theology was the ultimate science and all the others are “ancillary” – in humble service – is, to me, absolutely correct. Every issue, no matter how secular it appears to be, has a sacred dimension. If you press anything far enough, you will come up against either the holy or the demonic.”¹⁸

Theology is the intellectual attempt to make sense of God’s presence in the world. Theological understanding of God’s capacity for love and mercy bring hope to the world. As people grow in their understanding of the relationship God offers to them, their capacity for hope develops out of the knowledge that they are God’s beloved for all eternity. Hope is recognized by the Roman Catholic faith as one of three theological virtues that guide a Christian’s life.

“As one of the three “theological virtues,” the “three things that last (1Cor 13:13), hope has traditionally been understood together with faith and love as *the* modalities which describe christian existence. As such, these virtues, grounded in the grace of the Spirit, express what never changes in christian anthropology. Where the Spirit is, there is freedom.” (2 Cor. 3:17). This freedom *is* Christian discipleship as actualized in faith, hope and love.

While christian hope is a *spes docta* (“learned hope”), hope itself is a fundamental human affect. Hope is the presupposition behind the human “will to live.” In this

¹⁷ Richard Rohr, *The Good News According to Luke* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 50.

¹⁸ Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 290.

basic sense hope is the wager that there is some correspondence between this human will to live and the world which supports and sustains life. Without this hope the human will would be paralyzed, because the will to live presupposes that life is somehow worthwhile despite all evidence to the contrary. Against every invitation to despair, “for any among the living there is hope” (Eccl 9:4). Hope is the name of the human spirit as conative openness to reality, as outreach in search of the meaning the value of life. And where there is hope, there is religion (Ernst Bloch). Hope is at once the source and the product of religion. Ad “pre-thematic” or “transcendental” hope is the *a priori* ground of religion, and religion is the language of hope.”¹⁹

The hospitality of Christ extends hope to God’s people throughout history. “Hope becomes human hospitality for the divine guest. Hope is the human spirit as receptive to the divine indwelling ...”²⁰ This learned hopefulness comes in part from knowledge of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection and the realization that all people have God’s invitation to share in eternal life with Him. In this light hope is understood as closely related to the virtue of love. “The Christian practice of hospitality was not viewed simply as a means of overcoming a practical problem. Theological statements by different authors in the New Testament show that it was frequently viewed as the concrete expression of Christian love.”²¹

For Christians it is their souls that seek union with God. Out of the depths of God’s immense love humankind receives life upon the earth. Ultimately it is the goal of people’s souls to live out God’s kingdom while on earth and then, upon bodily death, to be joined completely as one with God. Hope bridges the span between this world and the

¹⁹ Welch, John, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 493.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 493.

²¹ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: State University Press, 1977), 67.

next, forming the thin veil sometimes spoken of by those who have had an intimate experience with death. Hope is recognized as the still small voice of God deep within the human soul. Emily Dickinson described hope through the metaphor of a bird.

"Hope" is the thing with feathers – That perches in the soul – And sings the tune without the words – And never stops – at all –²²

The researcher believes the practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture and their grounding in the importance of hospitality invite people into closer relationship with God. Understanding the role and importance of hope that has connected countless theologians who sought to make sense of both blessing and sin in the world is important to the researcher's foundational work. The fact that so many for so long have sought understanding of that which is God speaks to the ultimate mystery of the divine. St. Augustine said, "If you understand Him, it is not God." God is the mystery beyond understanding. But still people tried.

Rudolph Otto, a Lutheran theologian, lived during the first half of the twentieth century and focused attention on the mystery underlying all religion. He coined the term, *numinous*, which was understood through the Latin phrase, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Otto's work pointed to the mystery which was the holy. The Holy has a sense of that which is completely other and outside of what is known in daily life. This other provokes in people a sense of that which is grand and majestic. Humankind's desire to know God is infused with an urgent energy which simultaneously pulls them in and

²² Emily Dickinson, "Hope Is The Thing With Feathers," <http://www.favoritepoem.org/poems/dickinson/index.html>, / (accessed June 25, 2006).

prompts them to stay outside the experience. Encounter with the mystery of God is transformational.

Present day Franciscan priest and popular speaker Richard Rohr, speaks of this encounter with divine mystery as liminal. "... this "unique space where all transformation happens" is liminal space."²³ Historically theologians have called this liminal space the mystical or contemplative state.

"The mystical tradition has been identified as a rich, largely untapped resource for theology and the church. Karl Rahner spoke of the necessity to do theology rooted in the experience of the Mystery which we find addressing us. And he believed that the mystical experience is found in the lives of all faithful Christians. Everyone has the experience of being addressed by God, no matter how implicitly.

This experience is not necessarily identical for everyone and across all religions. Experience is a product arising from the interaction of a person with reality. Consequently, the person's history, community context, conceptual framework, and images will all condition the experience. Mystical experiences will have similarities and differences."²⁴

Study of the mystical concerns itself with humankind's direct and ongoing encounter with God. Mysticism is viewed as inherently relational. Historically mystical experiences invited people, including Jesus, to new understanding of God and relationship. "Jesus knew the Father with a loving knowledge that is the epitome of mysticism."²⁵

Regardless of the immensity of the task, theology developed as a means to make sense of the mystery of God. In the second century, Christians tried to make sense of their experience, and theology as a course of study was more defined through their efforts.

²³ Rohr, "Editor's Note," *Radical Grace* 19, no. 2, (April-May-June 2006): 2.

²⁴ Welch, John, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 697.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 695.

Early Christians lived within the Roman society and had the task of convincing others that what they now believed about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was true. The first Christians were Jews who needed to distinguish themselves from those having different beliefs.

The Didache developed as a tool to present a simple and orderly understanding of what was needed to have a relationship with God from life until death. During the second century Justin Martyr, an apologist, developed the concept of Logos which eventually permeated the history of Christian and Catholic theology. Martyr's work with Logos provided a means for people to understand the writing of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word; the word was in God's presence, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love" (John 1:14). Study of the Logos was Martyr's most important teaching as it connected Christianity to Greek philosophy. It also prompted great controversy around the study of truth and how it was made available to people.

Theologians such as Tertullian and Origen looked at Scripture to support their beliefs. Tertullian studied Scripture and attempted to present clearer understanding of the Trinity to early Christians. It was not until nearly the end of the fourth century when the Holy Spirit became part of the Creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Tertullian introduced the concept of allegory, whereby scripture was considered as a whole for its layers of meaning and not just for what appeared on the surface of a particular verse or phrase. He saw the soul as humankind's connection to God. Origen viewed life as a process which held many opportunities for continued growth and understanding about

God. Origen was eventually labeled a heretic but his work significantly impacted the church.

In the third century, Irenaeus studied the tradition of the church and how it was connected to the Apostles' lives. He was the first theologian to address original sin and presented parallels between Adam and Christ's lives and relationships to God. While Adam made the choice for self, Christ made the choice to be obedient and trust in God's ever present love, even unto death on the cross. Irenaeus tried to fit all the pieces of people's lives together into a comprehensive whole. That whole included an understanding that in spite of human sinfulness, God provided a means for salvation through Christ who died for all sins and was now seated at God's right hand, awaiting humankind's acceptance into heaven.

A theologian particularly important to the study of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture was Augustine of Hippo. Considered the "architect of theology in the Western world, both Roman Catholic and Protestant,"²⁶ he lived from 356-430 and made his life-long work that of understanding the reason for so much pain and unhappiness in the world. "Theologically, Augustine's social teachings were based on his doctrine of original sin, a dark undertow that vitiates human existence."²⁷ "Original sin, a theory of St. Augustine based upon his interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3, concludes that human death, unlike animal death, is an unnatural event resulting from Adam's single act of disobedience. Humans were never intended to die, and the only reason they do results

²⁶ William P. Anderson, ed., *A Journey Through Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 48.

²⁷ Margaret R. Miles, *The Word Made Flesh* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 97.

from God's judgment in response to Adam's disobedience.²⁸ Augustine's theological views held important consideration for their implications related to the researcher's development of this act of ministry.

Augustine's beliefs conflicted with those of Pelagius who was a layperson and an anthropologist from the British Isles. The conflict between these two encouraged Augustine to further define his teachings. "St. Augustine, in the latter years of his life, battled contemporaries Pelagius and Julian over whether death was a natural event or an unnatural enemy. Pelagius, and later Julian, took the position that death was in the nature of things, that no one person could bring death upon all humanity. In reply, Augustine proclaimed his theory of original sin. Based upon his interpretation of Genesis 1-3, his theory stated that death was strictly a moral issue. Death arose only after Adam's single act of disobedience, infecting every generation of the human race thereafter. The church of the fifth century declared Pelagius and Julian heretics and accepted Augustine's theory as official doctrine."²⁹

Ultimately their dialogue developed into questions about the role of grace and salvation. What was important here was knowing, "In different contexts in the history of Christianity, people continued to struggle to articulate two seemingly contradictory truths: Grace and salvation are unmerited gift, *and* Christians must work to accept the gift."³⁰

²⁸ Joe Barody, "Life and Death Matters: Toward a Sanctity of Death," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 53, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 297.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 298.

³⁰ Ibid., 102. ***CHECK***

The thousand years from the days of Augustine until the beginning of Protestant reform were considered the Middle Ages of the church. Anselm of Canterbury, who defined theology as faith seeking understanding, lived during this time. Anselm believed that prayer established a relationship with God. Through prayer God came to be known and understood. Anselm believed it was faith that led humanity to seek greater understanding about who and what God was and what that meant for them. Anselm further developed people's understanding of the role of salvation and why it was necessary for Jesus to be born and die in atonement for our sins.

It was during the Middle Ages that Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Saint Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhardt and Thomas A Kempis lived and contributed to the history of the church. "In the fourteenth century the Dominican mystics of the Rhineland made notable contributions. Meister Eckhart stressed the radical otherness of God, who was approached through a letting-be of this passing world. This letting-go of sinful compulsions as well as noble activity in a serene, mature, and ordinary way frees the spirit. Eckhart's influence continued in the Dominicans Henry Suso and John Tauler.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries produced a school of Flemish mystics, exemplified in Jan Val Ruysbroeck, a canon regular of St. Augustine. And English mystics became prominent, especially the Augustinian Walter Hilton, the anchoress Julian of Norwich, and the anonymous Englishman who wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing* and translated Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystica Theologia* into English."³¹ Julian shared her experience of God as Mother and thought in terms of threes for naming God's

³¹ Welch, John, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 695-696.

relationship with her life. The women of this time experienced God through direct and emotional connections.

Spirituality and mysticism were recognized as important. The researcher noted that, “Prior to the late Middle Ages, the Latin Church, exemplified in writers such as Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard, more commonly used the word “contemplation” instead of “mysticism.”³² Monasteries were provided as places to focus on the development of theology. Thomas A Kempis stressed the importance of love and humility and encouraged people to live as imitators of Christ. Universities awarded the first academic degrees, known as “licentia docendi.”³³ TODAY’S NAME???

Culture reflected Christian beliefs to a greater degree in that the architecture of the great cathedrals and universities was established and dedicated to the study of all things church. The development of cathedrals and universities represented the structure, power and hierarchy of the church while it continued to try and make sense of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whereas faith was once shared through word of mouth by people who had experienced God in the events of their lives, including by those who actually knew Jesus, faith now contended with dimensions of wealth, intellectual capacity, organizing systems of knowledge, and the development of hierarchical order. This was experienced by people who had never actually met Jesus, the Son of God.

As the work of theologians continued, so did the recording of tradition. Many of today’s Roman Catholic liturgical traditions were traced to the earliest gatherings of Christian communities. Justin Martyr provided a glimpse into early worship

³² Ibid., 695.

³³ Ibid., 151. ****CHECK****

in his First Apology, written from Rome in 150. His writing indicated that people gathered together on Sunday, traveling into the city from outlying towns to hear the writings of the prophets or the apostles. There was reference to standing and praying and then sharing bread and wine after which those gathered said the Amen. A collection was taken up by those who could afford to share their earthly goods. Communion was distributed by deacons to those not physically present with the community. Creeds grew out of baptismal ceremonies which were recorded as early as the fourth century. Understandably, there was great variation in the way this new Christian faith was lived and celebrated. The permanent diaconate, recognized by the Roman Catholic faith, was rooted in this historic time.

A growing need for those available to help the Apostles was implicitly mentioned throughout the New Testament. In Acts, seven men were selected to serve Greek-speaking Jewish Christian widows in Jerusalem. "In those days, as the number of disciples grew, the ones who spoke Greek complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, as compared with the widows of those who spoke Hebrew. The Twelve assembled the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Look around among your own number, brothers, for seven men acknowledged to be deeply spiritual and prudent, and we shall appoint them to this task. This will permit us to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word." The proposal was unanimously accepted by the community. Following this they selected Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit; Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, who had been a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who first prayed

over them and then imposed hands on them.” (Acts 6:1 – 6) Deacons stood with bishops and priests as those called and accountable in a unique way by Christ’s commandment to make love visible in the world.

The Christian faith was more firmly established within the Roman Empire in the fourth century. This challenged Christians to defend their beliefs. Constantine played an important role in history in this regard. During Constantine’s reign Bishop Alexander of Alexandria called together a synod which was attended by 318 bishops. The Creed of Nicea resulted from this gathering which laid the groundwork for the Council of Constantinople in 381 and the development of the Nicene Creed. Regarding that connection between developing theology and practice, it was important to note that the Nicene Creed continued to be the profession of faith common to the Catholic Church and even the Eastern Churches which eventually separated from Rome along with most Protestant denominations.

As important as knowing when and how the Nicene Creed developed was awareness that gatherings of church leaders in Councils began in these early times. These early Councils impacted the ongoing development of church teaching and practice sixteen centuries later. At the end of the fifteenth century invention of the printing press allowed the ideas of people throughout society to more efficiently and consistently spread. Some of the issues that once consumed the lives of people, including health concerns like the plague, were less prevalent by this time. The church moved out of the Middle Ages into the age of Reformation and inventions like the printing press and ability of people to focus on their future by way of extended life span were important developments.

“... the Reformation was, and remains, primarily a religious movement. The Christian tradition was subjected to fresh, critical scrutiny. The church and her authority were not simply taken for granted. Scripture was newly translated and interpreted. Learning in Greek and Hebrew led a revival in the field of exegesis and began to replace learning in Latin. Education expanded in the interests of an emerging, intelligent laity, and the winds of freedom began to blow. As the name itself suggests, Protestantism involved a “principle of protest.” Frequently this was a negative reaction to abuses in the church or a challenge to church doctrine. Underlying this tumult was the Reformers’ conviction that the truth of God as revealed in Scripture is the authority on which everything else must be judged.”³⁴

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) was a key historical figure from this time. Luther was a monk and an ordained Catholic priest, who was later excommunicated for his role in the schism which divided Roman Catholicism and Protestant evangelicalism. He questioned the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly indulgences. “Luther’s theology was as simple and straightforward as it was unsystematic and uncomplicated; it derived in part from personal anxiety about his own redemption, the impossibility of complete confession of sin, and a questioning of the validity of the medieval sacramental system.”³⁵ Ultimately Luther’s concerns centered on the issue of grace received through faith alone as opposed to grace earned through works and governed by those who held positions of power within the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church.

³⁴ William P. Anderson, ed., *A Journey Through Christian Theology*, 103.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

Those who previously believed in one holy, Catholic and apostolic Church as stated in the Nicene Creed now reevaluated the impact of their personal life choices in relationship to their faith and understanding of God. The printing press was instrumental to the far reaching impact of Martin Luther's life. What was previously only spoken was written and distributed freely throughout society. Art, including music, was similarly able to be reproduced, distributed and experienced in ways previously not possible. Developments from this time produced the ability for all the faithful to receive education and understanding of God. Luther recognized the value of providing standardized education for children in this regard.

Interestingly enough, the researcher's studies turned up information related to the origin of the word hospitality from this time in church history. It was in 1550 that a man who was known for his selfless giving to others died in Granada, Spain. John Cuidad was born in 1495, suffered the death of his mother during early adulthood, and later was diagnosed with acute psychological distress. His concern for others throughout his life earned him the name "John of God"³⁶ and canonization in 1690 by Pope Alexander VIII. He was credited with perhaps defining the spirit of the word hospitality for centuries to come.

Other important church reformers included John Calvin and John Wesley. A term associated with Calvin was quickening. Quickening referred to that which "happens when a person responds to this beauty and terror [of knowing God] with faith."³⁷ He contributed to the body of knowledge which addressed predestination. As with other

³⁶ Harold George Koenig, *Faith & Mental Health*, 4.

³⁷ Miles, *The Word Made Flesh*, 271.

reformers of this time, the sacraments received less emphasis from him than preaching of the Gospel. Wesley helped develop and spread the Methodist faith. Calvin's work aided in establishment of the Presbyterian Church in America and Scotland and influenced Puritans both in the United States and abroad.

The Roman Catholic Church of the sixteenth century was forced to contend with the Reformation that now ensued within itself. The Council of Trent convened in the mid-1500's and addressed issues of scripture and the doctrine of original sin. The most significant controversy existed in the theological differences that surrounded the Eucharist. The Council of Trent reaffirmed the doctrine of transubstantiation which was defined in 1215 by the Fourth Lateran Council. The Council condemned Luther's writings and established the "Roman Office of the Inquisition [which] consisted of six cardinals, headed by the pope."³⁸ This office was abolished in 1966.

Coercion occurred as a response to the outer Reformation and some important developments occurred within the Roman Catholic Church. These had positive influence and impacted the lives of Christians into the twenty-first century. Among these influences were the Spiritual Exercises developed by Ignatius of Loyola. These Exercises became the basis for the Order Ignatius which was eventually known as the Society of Jesus or Jesuit Order. Establishment of the Ursuline order came from this time. Established faith communities including the Carmelites, Benedictines and Cistercians reassessed their way of life.

Along with the Council of Trent, there were two additional Councils which significantly impacted not only the history of the Roman Catholic Church but the larger

³⁸ Ibid., 304. ***DICT. OF THEOLOGY***???

church as well. These included Vatican I in 1869 and Vatican II which first gathered in 1962. Vatican I concerned itself primarily with the church's teaching on the infallibility of the Pope. Vatican II made a much broader commitment to examining issues of concern to all the faithful than had any other gathering of religious in the history of the church. Indeed, Vatican II had a "greater impact on the life of the Catholic Church than any event since the Protestant Reformation."³⁹

Vatican II produced a work known as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*. This document recognized Church as Mystery and emphasized that the Church was made up of a community of men and women who participated together in the life of the Trinity. Lay people received support for increased involvement in liturgy and the workings of the church. The permanent diaconate was restored within the hierarchy of Holy Orders reserved for ordained clergy. Vatican II declared it possible for those called to the permanent diaconate to be ordained as married men, unlike Bishops and Priests. This Council's work gave attention to the ecumenical relationships held by the church in the world and addressed the schism of the Protestant Reformation. Many changes occurred relative to the liturgy such as use of vernacular language instead of Latin, changes in the actual physical environment such as removal of communion rails and repositioning of altars, and new attention to music and prayer styles.

Awareness of theological developments within the history of religion reinforced the researcher's initial thinking which viewed theology as study of the relationship that connected humankind with God. Her theological Foundations work prompted her to consider the church's role in supporting that relationship. This study supported her belief

³⁹ Welch, John, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 1072. ***CHECK # ***

that the Holy Spirit prompted the Church through individuals as well as through the Church to better understand the mystery of God. “The assistance given to the pastors in council should not be viewed in isolation from the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church as a whole. The church is by its very nature a communion established in the Spirit.”⁴⁰

From the beginning of creation there was always more to be considered, more to be understood, more to be taken up in prayer as humankind connected that which was known in head and intellect with that which was known on the level of feeling, intuition, and mystical experience. People continually sought deeper levels of knowing God. Humankind grappled with the existence of Adam and Eve, who were brought to life from God’s abundant blessing and whose act of free will separated God and God’s people.

“The end for which the world was created and redeemed is for the deep and lasting communion between God and creation, a commonwealth of justice, reconciliation, and freedom based on the grace of God. While flawed and always in need of reform and renewal, the church is nonetheless the real beginning of God’s new and inclusive community of liberated creatures reconciled to God and to each other and called to God’s service in the world.”⁴¹ Christians and non-Christians alike, including those who were Protestant or Roman Catholic, sought theological understanding. Theologians contributed to St. Anselm’s work from the eleventh century through his suggestion that theological study was faith seeking understanding.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 239.

⁴¹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1991), 186.

THEORETICAL

In an early work entitled Teachable Moments, Christian educator, Kay Kupper Berg shared this story from her adolescent years. Berg's pastor was leading the confirmation class and presented an image of a floor as a way to help the youth understand eternal life. "Eternal life, he said, was like the floor that runs under the door. We can't see into the next room when the door is shut, but we know that the floor is there, just as it is in the room in which we are standing. At death, we open the door and enter another room. The second room may be different from the first, but when we cross the threshold, the floor will continue."⁴² Faith is like that floor.

It was Alexander Graham Bell who said, "When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us." Death is often viewed as a closed door by those who mourn.

Theories regarding death and grief enablesurvivors to formulate their version of the "floor" between this world and the next. Death throughout history has been viewed as mystery. Death demands that those who mourn encounter that which is not to be fully understood by the living. The theoretical portion of this Foundations section concerns itself with study of theories related to grief support programs that hold potential impact for the pillars of this act of ministry. Death is understood as an unchangeable fact of life. The relationship survivors have with the deceased demands an adjustment to life without the physical presence of the person who died.

⁴² Kay Kupper Berg, Donald B. Rogers, *Teachable Moments* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1985), 11.

“Mysteries make the limits of our ideas transparent. We must see that even the most appropriate ideas and the most acutely perceptive understanding of the realities of death and suffering cannot change them. They remain unperturbed. Only we can change in response to them. Although our thinking cannot change them, we can define, individually and collectively, appropriate coping responses. Despite a fundamental limitation of our ideas, there remains an enduring point to doing the best we can in finding our way through even our most difficult experiences, in struggling to relearn. Some paths are better than others in coping with loss and relearning the world. But not all persons are suited to the same paths, and not all find the way. Ultimately, the mysteries remain beyond our grasp or control.”⁴³

As Emily Dickinson spoke of hope through her poetry, Edward Munch was moved by the death of his sister to paint “The Death Chamber”. Munch’s painting depicted a room full of people, each separated by his or her own grief. None faced another. No one spoke. There was no physical connection between the living in the room. It was depicted as that place of mourning which was not of the past when the deceased was still living but it was also not of the future when the mourners had readjusted to life without the physical presence of the deceased.

Munch’s painting prompts those who view it to consider their experience of a loved one’s death. Do they remember the room they were in when they first heard the news? Do they remember what it was like to leave the now deceased person’s physical presence for the last time? Do they recall who was with them as companion through their grief? How did they move from despair toward healing to hope? Theoretical study positively impacted the researcher’s development of this act of ministry although ultimately death is about a mystery that offers very few real answers.

“Death brought people throughout the ages face to face with pain and sorrow and loss, all realities which the world tried to ignore, postpone or cover up as daily life continued. Death allowed no turning back. ...”what is perhaps most unsettling yet

⁴³ Attig, *How We Grieve*, 16.

most fascinating about grieving – that mystery pervades our human condition. ... the bereaved are dealing not with ordinary, day-to-day problems but rather with mystery as they struggle to come to terms with loss through death. Mourners are put off by others who fail to see how the shape and proportion of what lies before them is anything but ordinary and who offer simple advice about what they need to do to address their losses. They rightly set aside books that give no hint of understanding how daunting their situation is, and they reject those who try to comfort them by parroting superficial words of understanding. Grieving reminds them, and us, of the profundity, of the mystery of living an individual life, in which struggles with finiteness, change, uncertainty, and vulnerability recur and persist.

Mysteries, and not simply problems, hold center stage in our lives when we grieve.”⁴⁴

Freud

The researcher found that while life and death had their origins in the beginning of creation; it is only in recent times that research has been conducted in the field of grief support. Much of the current theory regarding death is impacted by work originally published by Freud in 1917.

“Freud produced a landmark work entitled “Mourning and Melancholia” in which he described the “work of mourning” as that of severing “attachment to the nonexistent object: (p.166). In normal mourning, according to Freud, this work takes the form of repeated “reality testing,” which gradually allows the ego to free its investment in the “lost object” (p. 163). Complicated or “pathological” mourning was seen as arising out of intense ambivalence that impeded this detachment process. Although Freud proposed these ideas with caution and was concerned primarily with the etiology of depression rather than grief, his views have dominated the bereavement literature over much of the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 15. ***NEED FULL ENTRY ON #45***

past century.”⁴⁵ Death and the grief it caused were viewed as something to be gotten over, and not as something to be entered into with the ultimate hope of incorporating the experience into the griever’s life in an integrated positive way.

In their study, “Toward an Integrative Perspective on Bereavement,” Bonanno and Kaltman , offer little solid empirical evidence to support Freud’s early views. In fact, they offer growing evidence to the contrary. Namely, grief is not something to be worked through so much as an experience that transforms and continually impacts the lives of the bereaved well after the death. Their work led to better understanding and openness to recognizing the ongoing impact of death on the now changed relationship with the deceased. This was in obvious opposition to Freud’s earlier work.

Bonanno and Kaltman outline four perspectives related to bereavement. They include 1) cognitive stress, 2) attachment, 3) social-functional approach to emotion, and 4) trauma theory. Bonanno and Kaltman stress that care be given to allowing participants to make their own value judgments about the experience of death and that death could be viewed positively. Also important is the finding that for some people their avoidance of the apparent acceptance of the death could be an adaptive coping strategy that serves in a positive way. Their work makes particular note of the finding that many people grieve while continuing to have a meaningful relationship with the deceased. This finding holds significant importance for faith communities that recognize the dead as active members of a mourner’s present lived experience. Their study also gives support to accepting a full range of emotion in grief support programs. They consider expressions of anger and

⁴⁵ Bonanno, Kaltman, "Toward an Integrative Perspective on Bereavement," 760.***NEED FULL ENTRY***

sadness as well as laughter and smiling to be possible healthy expressions shared by those who mourn. They give traumatic death special mention as emotions surrounding violent and unexpected death are considered hard to accommodate in a support group setting.

Their work did not exclusively direct the researcher's efforts to support those who grieve, but the information gleaned from this study on bereavement did reinforce the importance of providing supportive environments for the grieving. Their work supports the need for the grieving to have settings with clear boundaries on sharing information and the importance of withholding judgment on what was shared during sessions. Their work supports the practices of BBSN and particularly the provision of sacred space and Holy Listening.

Snyder on Hope

Some of the most exciting work related to bereavement and grief is credited to C.R. Snyder at The University of Kansas. In the mid-1980's he began his study into the foundations of hope related not only to people's emotions but to their thought processes. In his work Snyder identified three main components that defined hope.

“Hope is defined as the process of thinking about one's goals, along with the motivation to move toward (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) those goals.”⁴⁶

“Based on my research and that of others in the emerging area of health psychology, hope is increasingly being perceived as understandable, measurable, and essential as a coping strategy; moreover, ways of increasing hope also are being advanced.”⁴⁷ His work is

⁴⁶ C.R. Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 73 (January/February 1995): 355.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 355.

important to the development of Hope Cottage Companions. Snyder's work reinforces that it is common for people who grieve to share a certain feeling of hopelessness about being able to make sense of life after the death of their loved one. This is sometimes a result of the suddenness of the death or the circumstances surrounding the death. This sense of hopelessness is a concern as it seems to impact people's ability to continue living with a sense of purpose. In developing a ministry for those who grieve, the researcher was reminded that:

“An adult who loses a loved one is also at risk for losing hope. The reason for this is that people often define their goals as a couple; and with the demise of one partner, the remaining partner is left bewildered and depressed. (Horowitz, 1990). This effect should be more marked if the death of the loved one is not expected and it is seen as being unfair ... Our society places a great emphasis on relationships, and many of the goals in life are pursued with one's partner. Therefore, a single person is at risk for an enduring diminishment of goal-directed thought and personal worth. Just as it can be very hurtful to lose a partner, it also is very immobilizing to be unable to make connections with other people. Recall that hope is inherently a way of thinking that occurs in social commerce. To not connect with others, in many ways, is not to hope.”⁴⁸

Belief in the importance of a response by the communities to provide a place for those who grieve is supported by Snyder's work. He identifies hope as a thinking process followed by emotions as opposed to emotions followed by thinking. This reinforces the researcher's observation that selected practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture intertwined with authentic teaching of the Catholic faith provide a means to enhance people's cognitive processes which in turn could lead to improved possibilities for lives lived with hope and increased faith.

⁴⁸ C.R Snyder, "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind," *Psychological Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2002): 263-264.

Snyder's definition of hope reinforces the importance of sharing stories that reflect upon the lives of both the deceased and the survivor. The researcher believes intentional inclusion of Biblical stories in the act of ministry provide example of practices which encourage deeper relationship with God and lead mourners to be people of greater hope. Snyder identifies fourteen actions that lead people to greater agency and pathways thinking and presumably more hopeful lives.

- “Learning self-talk about succeeding
- Thinking of difficulties encountered as reflecting wrong strategy, not lack of talent
- Thinking of goals and setbacks as challenges, not failures
- Recalling past successes
- Hearing stories of how other people have succeeded (e.g., movies, tapes, books)
- Cultivating friends with whom you can talk about goals
- Finding role models that you can emulate (everyday heroes are closer than you think)
- Exercising physically (relearning that the body and mind are connected)
- Eating properly (remembering that you need fuel)
- Resting adequately (recharging for the next active goal-directed output)
- Laughing at oneself (especially when stuck)
- Regoaling (persistence in the face of absolute goal blockage deflates agency and pathways)
- Rewarding oneself for small subgoal attainments on the way to larger, long-term goals

- Educating oneself for specific skills, as well as learning how to learn”⁴⁹

In the final consideration of Snyder’s work the researcher found support for the value of living and grieving as part of a larger community. Snyder’s work closely parallels the work of Harold Koenig, mentioned earlier in the researcher’s Biblical Foundations, when Koenig identified ten possible ways that religion positively impacts quality of life.

However, the researcher was also reminded through her research efforts of the possible unequal distribution of power inherent in situations where people are in need due to the stress caused by death and grief.

“Hope is ultimately counterproductive in the extent to which individuals pursue their goals to maximize their outcomes to the comparative detriment of other people. Hope, in this context, may fuel the pursuit of egocentric goals. What is needed are environments in which people living and working together can interact in a supportive atmosphere so that both individual and collective goals can be met. This would mean that people, in whatever settings they reside, could increasingly perceive that they have the agency and pathways to succeed.”

“As helpers, we often see the repercussions of ageism, sexism, and racism when these forces limit the number of people who have access to the “hope game.” That is to say, whenever some group of people are delimited in terms of developing a sense of agency and pathways for their goals, then hope has been stifled. We, like all members, of society, would be well advised to remember that hope should be for the many rather than for the few.”⁵⁰

Snyder’s words educated the researcher about the potential for politicizing hope. The implications of Snyder’s words for those interested in providing support for people who grieve deserve further thought. Does the researcher’s act of ministry make grief support approached from a Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture framework available to all

⁴⁹ Ibid., 358-359.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 359.

and is God's promise of love and mercy equally available? Or is it limited only to those who make the right choices in their lives? Who defines and measures right? While there are no immediate answers to these questions, the researcher believes attention to them merits further study far beyond her current doctoral effort.

Report by The Center for the Advancement of Health

Much broader in scope than the previously mentioned theoretical foundations is a report entitled "*Report on Bereavement and Grief Research*." The Center for the Advancement of Health (CFAH) was commissioned under the auspices of the Project of Death in America in 2000. "The purpose was to provide a base from which to make recommendations to strengthen grief research and to facilitate the use of evidence to guide the provision of high quality, appropriate bereavement and grief-related care."⁵¹

The CFAH report includes 1) an overview of research related to grief, 2) explanation of the research literature review and the criteria involved, and 3) a summary that included suggestions for future grief-related research. The broad focus of this report particularly interested the researcher as she approached the qualitative research phase of her doctoral studies. The study includes discussion of the various disciplines that study bereavement and grief responses along with details on the differences and merits of both quantitative and qualitative methods and research. The study makes note of the need for attention to ethics while conducting research with people who are grieving. This report cautions against adding to a person's grief through participation in the research process. The CFAH report states that bereavement is being increasingly studied but these studies

⁵¹ Janice L. Geneviro, Tracy Marshall, Tess Miller, *Report on Bereavement and Grief Research* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Advancement of Health), Center for the Advancement of Health, 4, <http://www.cfah.org>. (accessed April 4, 2006).

are not always conducted well. There is a valuable discussion relative to the merits of merging the world of practice and the world of research so that those who receive support benefit in substantially measurable ways. Mention is made of the value of religious or spiritual beliefs and their correlation to making sense of loss. Results of studies are included that show a relationship between strength of spiritual beliefs and characteristics related to grief resolution.

Prior to the publishing of this work in 2003, the most extensive report on bereavement was written in 1984 by the National Institutes of Health. An interesting side note to these dates is that the internationally recognized premiere Hospice House was established in London in 1967 followed by advancement of the hospice movement to the United States in the early 1970's. This reinforces awareness that support for the dying and the study of subsequent effects on their survivors is legitimately considered relatively new territory.

The CFAH report is the most recent large scale research effort related to the relief of pain and suffering for those who are grieving due to death. Approximately three quarters of the deaths that occur in the United States take place in health care related facilities. This supports the researcher's awareness that most participants in grief support ministry have experienced the death of a loved one who was in one of these settings.

This report dedicated substantial space to discussion of the role of health care professionals in bereavement care and prior training to aid their own grieving when a patient dies. Subsequent to that discussion note was made that most people who experience the death of a loved one find support for their grief outside the health care system. Friends, family and faith communities were named as the most typical resources

for support. This report opened the door to further consideration of ways health care professionals and other professionals in the community could work together to provide grief support.

Finally, this study cited the difficulties inherent in carrying out research related to grief. “As observed by Lindstrom (2002): The field of bereavement research is ... complicated by the fact that the losses are varied: spouse/parent/child/relative/ friend; sudden/expected; accident/natural/ inflicted/self-inflicted; and that cultural norms and religious/philosophical conviction also are part of the intricate field of bereavement. Any investigation would have to take these factors into consideration. (p.19).”⁵²

These observations were reinforced by the researcher’s act of ministry field experience. As stories were shared by participants in Hope Cottage Companions it was understood how varied the circumstances were that brought each of these people to seek out support. Related to these difficulties, the CFAH report contained cautions as to factors that influenced the potential outcome for participants of grief support ministry.

“Three types of factors have been identified as being potentially affecting risk for poor outcomes of bereavement (see, e.g., Stroebe & Schut, 2001). These are:

- situational factors related to the death, such as whether the death was sudden or anticipated
- personal factors such as gender and characteristics prior to the death such as emotional stability, religious beliefs and practices and self-esteem
- interpersonal factors such as the availability of social and emotional support from family and friends.

These factors may act to increase risk (e.g., sudden death, or lack of social and emotional support) or may play a protective role (e.g., availability and use of social

⁵² Ibid., 42.

and emotional support from family, friends and community)Hansson & Stroebe, 2003).”⁵³

An awareness and understanding of these factors is believed by the researcher to be important in the development of any type of grief ministry. The researcher considers those who grieve to be potentially fragile and there is an implied responsibility for those who offer grief support to be attentive to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of participants.

The Report on Bereavement and Grief Research did not find substantive evidence that support for people who experience uncomplicated grief actually reduces the symptoms typically categorized as problem causing. This finding prompted the researcher’s continued interest. Could it be that people who seek grief support from a faith community come not solely for help with understanding the recognized effects of death’s impact on their lives but also for support related to their own spiritual growth and development? Could death and the ensuing grief serve as impetus for spiritual transformation and could the large faith community benefit from companioning people who were grieving? These are exciting questions to consider.

“As Lindstrom (2002) has observed, the slowness with which change occurs in theories and systems of thought (in “paradigms”) is not unique to the field of bereavement and grief. But it does appear that the field is at a critical juncture in terms of actively working to align research and practice – to explicitly make provisions for

⁵³ Ibid., 34.

practice and research to influence each other – as the bereavement and grief research enterprise matures and moves forward.”⁵⁴

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THESE BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THIS ACT OF MINISTRY
WITHIN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC FAITH**

“The relationship of human beings to God out of which they come alive is also called ‘dialogue immortality.’ ‘The one with whom God speaks be it in wrath or be it in grace, that one is assuredly immortal’, said Luther. Many Protestant and Catholic theologians maintain that men and women remain God’s ‘contact’, even if they don’t listen to him. Even death cannot alter that. But if they do listen, then their whole life becomes a responding existence: they respond, and become responsible. If this is correct, then death is of course the limit of our lives, but it is not the limit of God’s relationship to us. In the relationship of our lives, death is rather a gateway, a transformation on our side. The speaking, calling and finally redeeming relationship of God to us endures”.⁵⁵

The act of ministry, Hope Cottage Companions, extended the hospitality of Christ to grieving adults. This occurred when the researcher joined specific practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture with the authentic teachings of the Roman Catholic faith. Given that the primary context for developing this grief support program was a Roman Catholic faith community, it was important that the components of this small group ministry had the support of the hierarchical leadership of the Church. This did not however limit the scope of influence for this act of ministry by excluding its application to other faith communities or faith traditions. The model for development of this ministry with its attention to study of biblical, theological and theoretical foundations was believed to be applicable to other faith based grief support settings. Given the historical roots of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture in God’s first act of creation it was the researcher’s

⁵⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, Jurgen, *In the End - The Beginning*, 107-108.

assumption and hope that practical application of this project lent itself to establishment of grief support ministry within most any faith community which desired to offer grief support.

All Christian faith traditions, Catholic or otherwise, have historically offered their followers the means to grow in relationship with God. “To choose to be Catholic is analogous to choosing to be Christian. Even Catholics have to make that choice. They have to hear God calling them to follow Christ, to surrender to God just as Christ did, to be filled with the Spirit just as Christ was. They first have to be willing to enter into a dialogue with God and then to respond to what they hear God saying to them. Once they say yes to that dialogue, they have to listen to where the Lord is leading them. They enter into a personal relationship with God.”⁵⁶

Sister Kateri, explained in *Mother Teresa, A Simple Path*, “Our understanding of ‘faith’ as Catholics is that it is a supernatural virtue infused in the soul. It’s as if this virtue is a power, an ability ... Without faith, we are not able to believe in things that are mysteries and that are beyond our capacity to comprehend. You can’t understand the mysteries of faith – but they should make sense. As we grow into adulthood, we need to penetrate them, to understand them more, so that it becomes more and more credible.”⁵⁷

This understanding of faith recognized the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and grounded the researcher’s studies and development of this act of ministry.

Hospitality

⁵⁶ Richard Rohr, Joseph Martos, *Why Be Catholic? Understanding Our Experience & Tradition* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1989), 70.

⁵⁷ Lucinda Vardey, ed., *Mother Teresa A Simple Path* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 63-64.

God's blessing is integral to the invitation of hospitality extended by the Roman Catholic tradition. "The celebration of a blessing, then, prepares us to receive the chief effect of the sacraments and makes holy the various situations of human life."⁵⁸ The Celebration of the Eucharist begins with the blessing, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen." This blessing recognizes the essentially relational nature of God and our connection to Him.

Faith and Service

In his first words to the world as Pope, John Paul II said, "Open wide the doors to Christ, and be not afraid of him!"⁵⁹ Life for Roman Catholics is historically grounded in faith and service. Filled with God's grace, instructed by the prophets, companioned by the saints who were joined together in one holy catholic community that was founded by the apostles centuries ago, Catholics live as one within a community which shares a single yet universal story. Roman Catholics, "believe that Christian life is more than a matter of me and Jesus. We do not relate to Christ as isolated individuals, but as members of the communion of saints. This expression, found in the Apostles' Creed, refers not only to the saints in heaven but to all people who are united with Christ, those in heaven, those of earth, and those in purgatory."⁶⁰ Through, with, and in Christ they are promised life eternal surrounded by all those whom God has joined together. "We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are

⁵⁸ Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, *Book of Blessings* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co, 1989), 24.

⁵⁹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Legacy of John Paul II Images and Memories* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 123. ***CATECHISM ?***

being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always attentive to our prayers.”⁶¹

Sacraments

Roman Catholics live a sacramental faith. The sacraments are the means by which Christ becomes truly present to people during life on earth. “The classic definition of sacraments explains them as outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace.”⁶² “We may also define sacraments as signs from Christ by which he comes to us and gives us his life and love. Both definitions show our Catholic belief that sacraments find their origin in Jesus Christ and therefore have been part of the Church’s life from the beginning.”⁶³

As do other Christians, Roman Catholics accept that through one baptism sins are forgiven and the baptized are joined with others in the Christian community. Through baptism people are called into relationship with God. It is baptism that gives meaning to all the other sacraments in the Roman Catholic faith. In addition to baptism, the sacraments include the celebration of the Eucharist, confirmation, reconciliation, matrimony, holy orders and the anointing of the sick.

The Roman Catholic faith developed around a context of recognized sacraments common to the entire community. Through the offering and receiving of sacraments, some once, others many times throughout life, they open themselves to living life in a big

⁶¹ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 250.

⁶² Oscar Lukefahr, *The Privilege of Being Catholic* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1993), 65.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 65.

way, a way that invited God to help them become all that was imagined for them in the original act of blessing and giving of life. Sacraments are meant to be lived outwardly upon acceptance of God's presence in a person's innermost being. The sacraments support both an individual's and the faith community's ongoing spiritual development. When the sacraments are celebrated in church they involve "water and oil, bread and wine and human touch as signs of God's graciousness."⁶⁴ Through them God confers blessing upon His beloved people.

In addition to the sacraments, "sacramentals have long been a part of Catholic life. They are instituted by the Church and symbolize spiritual effects which come about primarily through the prayer of the Church. In a special way, sacramentals dispose us to receive the grace of the sacraments and sanctify various occasions in human life."⁶⁵

Roman Catholics recognizes two types of sacramentals: "prayers of blessing and blessed objects."⁶⁶ The Sign of the Cross is a prayer of blessing while holy water and sacred chrism (perfumed oil) are blessed objects. "The purpose of all blessings is to sanctify people, to help them grow in holiness and in their desire and ability to serve and worship God."⁶⁷

Blessings are first among sacramentals and when bestowed they always include a prayer with a recognized action. This action includes the laying on of hands or making the sign of the cross and often also involves the use of holy water, chrism oil or incense.

⁶⁴ Richard Rohr, Joseph Martos, *Why Be Catholic*, 7. *** PAGE # ? ***

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

“Sacramentals derive from the baptismal priesthood: every baptized person is called to be a “blessing” and to bless. cf. Gen 12:2; Lk 6:28; Rom 12:14; 1 Pet 3:9. Hence lay people may preside at certain blessings; the more a blessing concerns ecclesial and sacramental life, the more is its administration reserved to the ordained ministry (bishops, priests, or deacons). cf. SC 79; CIC, can. 1168; De Ben 16, 18.

Sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church’s prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it. For well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the Paschal mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be thus directed toward the sanctification of men and their praise of God.” SC 61.⁶⁸

It is in discussion of sacramentals that the researcher recognized strong connection to the use of manipulatives in the practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture.

Prayer

“Traditionally, Catholic prayer involves both body and spirit. It binds the lives of those who pray to the historical life of Christ, and it foreshadows our eternal destiny, union with Christ in heaven.”⁶⁹ The Catholic faith acknowledged God’s immeasurable love and encouraged the faithful to be grateful for God’s unceasing invitation to grow in holiness throughout life. This was done through individual and collective prayer.

“In prayer we wake up to the world as it is spread out before God in all its heights and depths. We perceive the sighing of creation, and hear the cries of the created victims that have fallen dumb. We also hear the song of praise of the blossoming spring, and feel

⁶⁸ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 416.

⁶⁹ Lukefahr, *The Privilege of Being Catholic*, 97.

the divine love for everything that lives. So prayer to God awakens all our senses and alerts our minds and spirits. The person who prays, lives more attentively.”⁷⁰

Regardless of the form of prayer chosen, liturgical or otherwise, “this is really the purpose of all Catholic prayer: to fix our attention on God, to see God in everything good, to allow Christ to enter our hearts so that we can become Christ and say with Saint Paul, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.”⁷¹ Ultimately prayer fills life with words and silence and encourages listening and looking at the ordinary life events with an openness to hearing or seeing and hopefully becoming a glimpse of God’s presence for others here on earth. Prayer is an important part of what was developed and eventually offered to the grieving through this act of ministry.

Liturgy

“The most important Catholic prayer is liturgy, the official prayer of the Church. This includes the Mass, the celebration of the sacraments, benediction, the Liturgy of the Hours and liturgical blessings.”⁷²

“The New Testament speaks of the apostles praying at various times (Acts 1:1-15, 3:1, 10:9, 16:25) and gradually the Church came to celebrate prayer throughout the day.”⁷³ “Desire to grow in relationship with God encouraged the setting aside of time each day to meet God in the Liturgy of the Hours or the Divine Office. This was not required of lay people as it was of those ordained, but it was encouraged of all the Roman

⁷⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁷¹ Ibid., 107.

⁷² Ibid., 97.

⁷³ Ibid., 102.

Catholic faithful. As now prayed by priests, deacons, religious, and many laypeople, the Liturgy of the Hours consists of five *hours* or times for prayer. These are the office of readings, morning prayer, midday prayer, evening prayer, and night prayer. Each includes psalms, Scripture readings, and intercessions.”⁷⁴

Throughout history, God’s people have attempted to listen. The people of God recognize that faith is a dialogue and requires the practice of both reaching out in word and deed to the Creator but also to setting aside time and space to listen for God’s response. The practice of Holy Listening within Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture reinforces an important component of ministry within the Roman Catholic faith. The liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church supports ongoing dialogue with God. The liturgy encourages the faithful to hear God speaking to their hearts and minds in ways that lead them back into the world better able to model their lives upon Christ.

Celebration of the Eucharist

For Roman Catholics, the Celebration of the Eucharist is the single most important celebration shared by the community. It is here that they are joined in a most significant way to be reminded that their lives do indeed matter to God. All members of the community recognize that it is by full participation in the Mass that they share most completely in the Body of Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church provides this description of the Eucharist. It was written by St. Justin Martyr around the year 155. This writing was used to explain the activities of Christians of that time to the pagan emperor Antoninus Pius.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 102.

“On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.

Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves ... and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation. When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.

Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: *eucharistian*) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts.

When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: ‘Amen.’ When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the “eucharisted” bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent.”⁷⁵

This tradition for worship was handed down to Catholics throughout the centuries and into the present day.

The Celebration of the Eucharist contains two parts. The first is the Liturgy of the Word which focuses on the word of God in sacred Scripture while the second is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that the word *companion* is most fully understood. Two Latin words, *com* meaning “with,” and *panis* meaning “bread” remind the faithful of the many stories in the Bible when Jesus companioned people and in doing so fed their hearts, minds, souls and bodies. Jesus lived in community and broke bread with people. Catholics believe that they become what they eat and Christ lives in them. This is an important teaching of the church.

⁷⁵ United States Catholic Conference, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 339.

Many familiar stories from Jesus' life involve the sharing of food. The words of the Last Supper are spoken during every Mass. "This is my body which is given up for you. Take this, all of you and drink from it. Do this in remembrance of me." It is in the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist that the community of believers hear the voice of God and are fed by the body and blood of Christ. Believers become what they eat.

Communion of Saints

The Communion of Saints is a powerful image that is brought to light during the Celebration of the Mass. This belief within the Roman Catholic faith is viewed as especially comforting to those who grieve a loved one's death.

"In the *intercessions*, the Church indicates that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church in heaven and on earth, the living and the dead, and in communion with the pastors of the Church, the Pope, the diocesan bishop, his presbyterium and his deacons, and all the bishops of the whole world together with their Churches."⁷⁶ Roman Catholics believe that those who have died before them, are still present with them during the Celebration of the Eucharist.

It was the researcher's belief that people who grieve frequently continue to maintain strong awareness of the deceased person's presence and find ongoing positive support through the Church's teachings on the Communion of Saints. Just as the community of the faithful in the Roman Catholic tradition believe that Christ is truly present in body and blood during the Celebration of the Eucharist, mourners can be comforted with knowing that their deceased loved ones continue to live in community

⁷⁶ Ibid., 342.

with them. This teaching encompasses living and dying as part of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Participation in the Mass connects the Holy with humanity in a special way. The celebration of the Eucharist includes prayers of adoration, thankfulness and penitence. It is the source and summit for the continued seeking out and receiving of God's presence in people's lives. Through music, the reading of Scripture, prayer and intentional silence the Celebration of the Eucharist provides a place apart that encourages people to listen with open hearts and become Holy Listeners.

Mystery of Faith

“I am slowly beginning to learn something about immortality. Our children are hungry for words like Father Anthony's. They have a passionate need for the dimension of transcendence, mysticism, way-outness. We're not offering it to them legitimately. The tendency of the churches to be relevant and more-secular-than-thou does not answer our need for the transcendent. As George Tyrrell wrote nearly a hundred years ago, “If [man's] craving for the mysterious, the wonderful, the supernatural, be not fed on true religion, it will feed itself on the garbage of any superstition that is offered to it.”⁷⁷

The Eucharist makes tangible God's love and the mystery of Christ's birth, death and resurrection. “What about the love? What about the love? That's what! It's the *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*. It's the energy of Christ informing mortal matter. It's the believing that permeates our being. If we are infused, enthused with this joy and

⁷⁷ L'Engle, *Glimpses of Grace*, 148. ***WHOLE ENTRY NEEDED***

this wonder, then it will be infectious, far more infectious than answers to unanswerable questions. God loves us!”⁷⁸

“The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers they should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively. They should be instructed by God’s word and be refreshed at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves too. Through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever closer union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.”⁷⁹

Death opens the door to acknowledging the mystery that surrounds humankind’s life on earth. Death brings Christians face to face with the Paschal Mystery. Here, in the Celebration of the Eucharist, the ultimate mystery is celebrated and the faithful are invited to find blessing in the agony of the cross.

“Catholicism has never hesitated to affirm the “mysterious” dimension of all reality: the cosmos, nature, history, events, persons, objects, rituals, words. Everything is, in principle, capable of embodying and communicating the divine.”⁸⁰ “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.” (Romans 8:14) How were people

⁷⁸ Madeleine L'Engle, Carole F. Chase, *Glimpses of Grace* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 334. ***THIS WILL BE IBID***

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-85. ***CHECK***

⁸⁰ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994); quoted in Richard Rohr, Joseph Martos, *Why Be Catholic? Understanding Our Experience & Tradition* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1989), 113.

throughout the ages moved to this mysterious and liminal experience of relationship with God? Fr. Hauser, professor of Theology at Creighton University states “there are four possible responses to this question about God’s activity in our daily lives. First, God works in the world in human hearts through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Second, in addition to working in human hearts, God also works within the laws of nature though in a hidden way. Third, in addition to working within human hearts and within the laws of nature in a hidden way, God also intervenes in creation and works contrary to the laws of nature. Finally, God works in all of the above ways.”⁸¹

“The Fathers of the Church distinguish between theology (*theologia*) and economy (*oikonomia*). “Theology” refers to the mystery of God’s inmost life within the Blessed Trinity and “economy” to all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life. Through the *oikonomia* the *theologia* is revealed to us; but conversely, the *theologia* illuminates the whole *oikonomia*. God’s works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions.”⁸² Participation in the Roman Catholic faith and particularly the Eucharist, encourages believers to know Christ and understand his actions. It also invites Christ to live in them.

Conclusion

“It also seems that the time may be ripe for efforts to marry the information being derived from empirical research with the information about bereavement and grief that is available simply because it is a universal experience of potentially great

⁸¹ Hauser, *Finding God in Troubled Times*, 36-37.

⁸² United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 62.

power and import. Experiences of grief have given life to music, art and literature of tremendous emotional intensity and beauty. The nature and meaning of death are issues of central import in most (if not all) religions. Mourning rituals and practices – public expressions of grief – are influenced by multiple cultural, social and familial factors. Weaving these understandings of grief and bereavement together with the understanding that can be derived from the scientific study of grief may be an important aspect of more effectively situating bereavement and grief research within a coherent conceptual framework.”⁸³

This Foundations section concludes with the researcher’s increased confidence that grief ministry offered within a faith community will be positively impacted by attention to the Biblical, Theological, Theoretical and Practical Application of BBSN practices. Inherent to these Foundations are historical considerations important to developing this act of ministry. Through these studies the researcher recognized that the religious and spiritual development of people throughout the ages impacted their awareness of God’s presence in everyday life. As connections of blessing and gratitude were realized even in the midst of stories of suffering, hearts and minds were transformed. That continues in the present day lives of the faithful.

These Foundations impacted the researcher’s ability to develop this act of ministry through increased understanding of the potential for spiritual formation of the participants. “Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit’s touch, disciplines such as Sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice,

⁸³ Genevro, Marshall, Miller, *Report on Bereavement and Grief Research*, 73.

discernment, worship, Scripture study, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence.”⁸⁴

The researcher learned that death was viewed historically as having the potential to transform people’s lives in many realms including the spiritual. This transformation had the effect of drawing those who were grieving farther into the life of the faith community. Likewise the faith community was drawn into caring about those who grieved. This mutual expression of care led to increased compassion and faith development.

One of the greatest gifts realized through attention to the Foundations for this act of ministry was the researcher’s continued hope for revitalization of the larger faith community. During a time of significant personal loss, ministry participants received many opportunities to experience God’s blessing and presence within a small group setting. As the continuously told story of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection has brought together and inspired countless generations, it was with hopeful expectation that the researcher prepared to offer participants of Hope Cottage Companions the opportunity to enhance their relationship with Christ in profound and life changing ways.

As Christ’s own birth, life and death transformed the world, it was hoped that reflection on the birth, life and death of participant’s loved ones would be the impetus that moved them to more fully understand, appreciate and share the story of God’s blessing and promise to be with humankind until the end of time. This opportunity for reflection was viewed by the researcher as the core means by which the ministry

⁸⁴ Steve Shussett, "Editor's Reflections," *Hungryhearts* XV, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 2, E-mail.

encouraged spiritual formation. Knowledge of Christ's life and lived experience of being care for by the faith community could potentially move people's faith from head to heart.

“This is how I would describe spiritual formation: moving beyond belief in a system of affirmation or confessions or doctrines, and *participating* in the life of the Risen Christ. Not an emotional response but a corporeal realization that Christ lives in us and we the *ekklesia* (the church or the “called out”) are his body in the world. It isn't rational in the Enlightenment sense of that word, but it is mindful. It doesn't make sense but it infuses the senses.”⁸⁵

In recent history Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, reminded the world that it was Jesus who “united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the command of love for neighbour found in the Book of Leviticus. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lv 19:18)”⁸⁶ A recurrent theme in history, Pope Paul VI had similarly referred to Christ's teaching in *Lumen Gentium*. “It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ.”⁸⁷ Scripture taught throughout the ages that humankind had a particular place within creation and a particular call to make God's love and Christ's presence known in the world.

These Foundations provide support for development of ministry to the grieving whereby Christ's words might be more clearly understood. “I tell you this that in me you

⁸⁵ Doug Gebhard, "Spiritual Formation in the Small Church," *Hungryhearts* XV, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 4, <http://www.hungryhearts/> (accessed June 25, 2006).

⁸⁶ Benedict XVI, "Deus Caritas Est," *Encyclical Letter*, 1. *** FULL ENTRY***

⁸⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 26. ***NEED FULL ENTRY***

may find peace. You will suffer in the world. But take courage! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Theologian John Courtney Murray, S.J., said that even research is prayer, because it is a search for the truth, and there is only one Truth.”¹ Prayer can indeed be enhanced by research and study which supports growth in relationship to God.

Hope Cottage Companions was developed in response to a perceived need for adults, particularly Roman Catholic adults, to have short term grief support provided within their faith community. This need was met through the development of a six-week series that integrated some of the practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture with authentic teachings of the Roman Catholic faith relevant to grief support ministry.

The hypothesis underlying development of this ministry was that the joining of relevant and authentic teachings of the Roman Catholic faith with intentionally selected practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture would result in the spiritual transformation of participants which could lead them to develop a deeper and more active personal faith that in turn could transform the larger faith community.

The basic hypothesis was explored by way of qualitative research. “Qualitative research also is characterized by the systematic and rigorous collection of data, but the data collected are typically in narrative form rather than numeric form. Qualitative research has been characterized as oriented to discovery and the generation of hypotheses, rather than to the testing of hypotheses. A goal of qualitative research is to

¹ O'Malley, William J., *Choosing to Be Catholic for the First Time or Once Again*, 234.

understand a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals experiencing it, to understand the lived experience of participants.”²

The intent of all research was to determine the value and effect of integrating selected practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture with relevant teachings of the Roman Catholic faith in order to develop a ministry of grief support called Hope Cottage Companions. Research was evaluated with an eye toward determining the perceived healing value of 1) hospitality involving holy listening, sacred space, prayer and blessing; 2) Scripture involving understanding and support for the human condition and quest to know God in times of spiritual darkness; and 3) Church teachings regarding the Communion of Saints.

Depth and breadth of research for this project were determined in part by the time frame required for completion of coursework for the Doctor of Ministry program. The research methods chosen were applied to a grief support series for adults who had experienced the death of a loved one in the past calendar year. The group size was limited to ten adults who met weekly for ninety minutes during each evening session.

The teachings of the Roman Catholic faith incorporated into this ministry came from the researcher’s long history of involvement in grief ministry along with an unfolding awareness of the needs of those who were participants in this offering of Hope Cottage Companions. The explicit support of the pastor of St. Gerald parish came in many forms throughout the offering of this ministry. Most helpful was his immediate response during weekly contact with the researcher who shared the concerns and questions of those in the group. In this way he helped guide the direction of the group

² Ibid., 18. ***QUAL RESEARCH BOOK***

through recommendation of resources that were in keeping with the teachings of the church. The group experienced the pastor's involvement in a personal but nonthreatening way. Each week the researcher shared the pastor's responses and suggestions for materials that were in addition to or in place of some of those shared by the group's participants. The close working relationship between pastor and researcher prevented situations of unintentional and unchecked heresy related to the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

The research for this act of ministry, Hope Cottage Companions, was approached from a qualitative view. Qualitative methodology was particularly well suited to both the researcher's interests and the development of this act of ministry in light of the fact that the fundamental activity of ministry participants was the telling of stories. "... stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And, of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition. Telling and listening to stories can be a powerful sign of regard – of caring – for one another."³

It was expected that through the sharing of personal stories regarding the death of each participant's loved one, parallels would be discovered between their lives and those of historic biblical people. It was believed that the universal themes of birth, life, death

³ Noddings, Nel, Carol Witherell, *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, ed. Nel Noddings, Carol Witherell (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 280.

and resurrection would become a source of support and encouragement for the adult ministry participants. This understanding was assumed to be a way to strengthen ties to the faith community and encourage engagement with sacramental practices, especially the sacraments of Reconciliation and Celebration of the Eucharist. The Communion of Saints was to be more deeply understood as was God's great love for humankind as evidenced by the gift of His son Jesus Christ who was sent to save the world from all its sins.

Participation in Hope Cottage Companions was viewed as a means to deepen knowledge of God's unceasing love and mercy through greater connection with the faith community and the living out of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. It was expected that Hope Cottage Companions would be known as a ministry of healing which sought to comfort those who grieved the death of a loved one through the intentional creation of a sacred space that acknowledged the reality of both sin and blessing in the world. Here the hospitality of Christ was known through the joining of particular practices of BBSN and relevant teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

Outcomes for the ministry were measured by way of qualitative research.

Research methods included:

1. Pre and post ministry interviews with the pastor of St. Gerald Church.
2. Observations of participants in Hope Cottage Companions and narrative recorded by the researcher who facilitated the ministry sessions

CHAPTER V
FIELD EXPERIENCE

The researcher organized the Field Experience of this doctoral work in the following manner. First the researcher documented the Pre Ministry Interview held with the pastor prior to the start of this act of ministry. (See Appendix A, page 144). The pastor's responses guided development of the ministry. That interview led the researcher to develop a written overview of the ministry that included dates, place and time, method of advertisement to the parish and general orientation as to how the six sessions were organized. This was followed by detailed documentation of each session through use of a Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page. Documentation details included the following: stating of each session's theme and key questions, researcher's preparation for the session, listing of the facilitation steps taken by the researcher, and finally the narrative recorded by the researcher during the session. The narrative was considered confidential information and was shared only with the pastor on a need to know basis. The researcher documented the Post Ministry Interview with the pastor at the conclusion of the Field Experience.

PRE MINISTRY INTERVIEW WITH THE PASTOR
September 12, 2006

1) What prompted you to want to offer grief support in our parish?

Pastor's response: "I felt that people needed support long after the funeral of a loved one and I was in no position to do ongoing, one on one support with people. Since then the number of our funerals have gone from 25 to 40 a year and this number is pushing towards 50. Grief is a slow process and I couldn't be there for them."

2) What gaps do you see in what is available in the community and/or Archdiocese that this ministry might address?

Pastor's response: "The archdiocese had a widows/separated/divorced group. It did not seem to fit the needs of our grieving parishioners. We needed something to focus on their needs in their own parish setting."

Overview of Sessions

The act of ministry, Hope Cottage Companions, was offered as a six-week series, meeting once each week between November 9 through December 21, 2006. An exception was November 23 which was Thanksgiving. The sessions were held at St. Gerald Roman Catholic Church, a 2,716 household parish located at 7859 Lakeview Street, Omaha, Nebraska. The ministry was promoted weekly through a bulletin announcement in the St. Gerald Church bulletin. This promotion began on October 21, one month prior to the first session. (See Appendix B, page 145). The pastor also personally called or sent a letter to parishioners whom he thought would most benefit from participation in this ministry. (See Appendix C, page 146). Participation was limited to ten adults. The series was not limited to St. Gerald parishioners or those of the Roman Catholic faith but was instead open to any adult within the larger community. All participants at the first session were asked to sign a Written Consent Form for Participation in the Doctor of Ministry program pursued by the researcher. (Appendix D, page 147).

All sessions started promptly at 7:00 p.m. with opening prayer and ended with closing prayer at 8:30 p.m. (See Appendix E, page 148). A consistent blessing was part of each week's prayer ritual. (See Appendix F, page 149). Prayerful connection among participants was encouraged between sessions through use of a Prayer Dove. (See Appendix G, page 150). The larger faith community was invited to support this ministry through donation of antique linens. A bulletin announcement was used for this purpose.

(See Appendix H, page 151). The facilitator planned and carried out the series using a Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page Template completed for each session. (See Appendix I, page 152). The sessions were held in the school library at St. Gerald School, Ralston, Nebraska. Chairs were arranged in a circular fashion with a small table placed between two of the chairs and slightly forward so the table was clearly visible to all participants. Ceiling lights were adjusted so that the group's gathering space was clearly lit and the rest of the room was visible but not a distraction.

Creation of a resource entitled Wisdom Walk occurred prior to the start of the ministry. (Appendix J, page 153). Placed within a standard two pocket folder with prongs, the researcher added or modified Wisdom Walk materials during the series of sessions according to stated and perceived needs of the participants and the professional judgment of the facilitator and/or the pastor. Wisdom Walk content included Prayer Prompts. These were divided into scriptural and non scriptural references and quotes and were chosen by the researcher for their connection to grief. Wisdom Walk resources were intended to encourage engagement of participants and provide a place for them to record questions, reflections, and notes on discussion that occurred both during and between sessions. Participant sharing of the information recorded in this resource was completely optional.

A maximum of eight adults actually attended any one session. There were at least four adults in attendance each week. Participants included two married couples, a grandmother, a husband, a mother and a daughter. Participants actively grieved the deaths of a wife, a mother, two sons, a daughter and a granddaughter although other losses through death were named by participants during the sessions.

What follows in this Chapter on the researcher's Field Experience is the actual documentation of each session as recorded on a Facilitator Page template. This documentation takes the reader step by step from preparation for each session to the actual narrative among group participants during that session.

Individual Session Facilitator Page Documentation

Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page

November 9, 2006

Week One and Two:

Focus on the Larger Story – establish context for each participant to be here

Key Questions:

Who are you and how do you come to be here?
Tell us about life in relationship to your loved one.

Provide take home sheet for reflection on what was heard during the previous week's session. The invitation to share these reflections was given at the beginning of each week after the first session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 preparation: (Session underlined)

- Contact all participants one week prior to session.
- Gather Session 1 materials for the reflection table. These include 1) small table that can be covered with a simple cloth, 2) tissues, 3) "Hugs" candies, 4) new pencils, 5) paper doves, 6) Holy water, 7) Vessel for passing Holy water, 8) a picture of Jesus welcoming someone into Heaven and 9) angel candle and matches.
- Prepare all Wisdom Walk: Session 1 materials for participants.
- Visit room the room where sessions will be held the day before the first session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 steps: (Session underlined)

- Welcome each participant at the door.
- Invite each participant to choose a seat of their choice.
- When all have arrived, explain format of sessions including rules for creating a safe environment. These included respecting that what is said during group stays with the group, being careful to not interrupt and not give answers or attempt to provide solutions. Participants are encouraged to use this time for their own healing and to trust that they know best what they need.
- Emphasize the courage it takes to enter this unknown setting for the first time.
- Lead Opening Prayer.

- Provide information on facilitator's background and interest in facilitating grief ministry.
- Explain the Doctor of Ministry degree and Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture. Pass out the Consent form which must be signed this first evening.
- Take a short break, inviting people to use the restroom or get a drink while the forms are completed and returned.
- Place Prayer Dove on each participant's seat.
- As the group reconvenes, pass out the participant folders. Ask them to place the dove inside the front pocket.
- Invite participants to share information about themselves. Suggest that they include how they came to be here. Explain time constraints and give approximate amount of time for each person to share in order for group to end at stated time.
- Explain that the facilitator may ask questions take brief notes during this time. These notes will include verifying full names, preferred names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Explain that this information is only for the facilitator's use in serving as a memory prompt for the many details shared as the Sessions continue and for discussion with the Pastor which will allow him to provide valuable input related to each Session.
- Watch the time to ensure each person has a similar amount of time. Be alert for those who might need encouragement to share and/or those who might have a tendency to dominate the group. Either might result in participants not returning the following week.
- Thank each person in the group for attending the session, listening and sharing.
- Reemphasize the courage it took to attend this first session.
- Ask them to remove the dove from their folder and write the names of each participant on their doves along with the name of each participant's loved one who has died.
- Have each person spell their name and the name of their loved one while all participants write this information on their dove.
- Explain that this dove can serve as a tangible prayer connection with those in the group and also with the loved ones who have died.
- Explain that this is the suggested reflective assignment for the coming week.
- Answer any questions.
- Emphasize the importance of bringing Wisdom Walk to Session 2.
- Lead blessing ritual.
- Lead closing prayer.
- Pass out "Hugs" candies before departure.
- Accompany all participants to the door.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 notes: (Session underlined)

This space was used for things forgotten, things that could have been done differently/better etc. and ideas for the next Session.

The facilitator forgot to have one person hand in their written consent form.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 narrative: (Session underlined)
 This was considered confidential information.

The researcher followed the steps on the Facilitator page and participants engaged in the following verbal exchange:

“My wife and I were married for 36 years. She died of an aneurysm and I found her dead in our house one morning. I was in shock, still am, but the grandkids have helped me through it. We’ve had grandkids die too so I’ve been through this before. My brother committed suicide.”

“I’m older than most of you.”

“I’m glad to be here or to have a place like this to come to. Thanks for doing this.”

“My grandchild died. My dad died fourteen years ago. He was seventy one years old. We were good friends. My grandson died. He was nine months old three months ago. We took care of him. Now what do we do?”

“My wife and I don’t know if we should be here. Our teenager died. They told us to be careful of coming to groups like this. People might not understand. We might get mad. Our son killed himself. That’s different from the rest of you I bet.”

“Thanksgiving will be hard. That’s the day he killed himself. His birthday was a few weeks ago. A hundred and fifty people came to the funeral. He was fifteen. You don’t understand. He was the best son you could want. Smart. Popular. I found him. I screamed.”

“I’m so mad I didn’t say “I love you” the night before. Every parent should do that. He died laying there like an angel. You couldn’t tell when you walked in the room. There wasn’t blood like they say there is.”

“Our other child stays close to us now.”

“My mom died. I might not be able to come next week. I’m not sure I really needed to be here. Thanks everyone for sharing your stories. That helps.”

“My baby died. His heart didn’t have the left side. I told God to take him. It’s weird how thankful we were. How we were so sad but so thankful. He hurt. When I’m driving down the street I wonder how the person in the car next to me can just be driving like everything’s the same. It’s not. There’s a lot of pain in the world. I haven’t been past the hospital or the street that goes past it since he died.”

“Our daughter gets his toys and plays with them. Is that okay? She doesn’t know. I’m pregnant now. I have a doctor’s appointment this week. I’m scared.”

“I haven’t been to work since he died. I don’t know if I want to go. You know how people are. They don’t know what to say.”

The researcher shared a box of tissue. It was passed around the group. She shared the following quote. “To listen – really listen – one must be able to concentrate, to accept the speaker, to be unfailingly honest and transparently real, and be willing to enter an experience from which the listener may not return unchanged.”¹

The researcher said, “It takes a lot of courage to come here. It’s hard to listen hurt. It’s hard to hear other people hurt. This is a place to be selfish. We don’t need to fix each other, just listen. And maybe pray, if we can. That’s why we have the Prayer Dove. When we leave tonight we’ll be different people. The dove helps us remember that the people are what is important. Our love for them brought us here tonight..”

Pause

The researcher continued, “People who are willing to walk into their grief, to say “I hurt” and want to do something about that are very brave. Do you know you don’t have to grieve. It’s a choice. I wonder if some of you know someone who’s carrying around grief a long time after someone died.”

“I do. It’s hard to be around her. I never know what to say or if I’ll make her cry. But I want to remember the person who died, but I’m afraid to bring it up. It’s like they never existed. That’s harder.”

“It’s like at holidays. We all pretend. We can’t laugh or tell stories about the funny things that happened. That doesn’t seem right. It’s harder.”

The researcher asked, “What’s harder?”

“It’s harder to be that way than to know I wanted to come here tonight. I was so glad when Fr. called and said we were doing this. Thank you for making this happen. It’s a good thing our parish does this.”

“I’m not afraid to cry. I’m afraid that once I start crying I won’t stop. Or that I’ll start crying when I’m out somewhere. Do you feel that way too?”

“I did start crying in the grocery. In the diaper aisle.”

Tears

¹ Rogers, Donald B, *In Praise of Learning*, ed. Ezra Earl Jones (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1980), 60. ***CHECK FOR FIRST TIME ENTRY***

The researcher prompted, “Would you like to tell a little about your loved one?” for the people who haven’t shared their stories yet.

“Our daughter loved Lucille Ball. She was an 8th grade reader at mass. Her words started to run together one day and that’s when we knew something was wrong. She got the Silver Girl Scout award. I just wanted her to be pain free. He (husband) put Winnie the Pooh on her bed when she was sick. Our son, who’s twenty six, pinned a religious medal on her. He doesn’t talk about it much. Do you think that’s normal?”

“There wasn’t a cure for our daughter. We buried her a month ago. He pinned a scapula to her bedsheet. She didn’t recognize him anymore. He just hugged and held her. She loved boy bands, especially Justin Timberlake.”

“We read a lot of heaven books. She would move her lips and look at the ceiling. She was talking to angels or to God. She was six days old when we got her. Our kids are adopted. There wasn’t a cure for what she had. You know my brother, from work.

“You worked at Children’s didn’t you? I can’t go back there. It’s a good place. They took good care of my son, but I can’t go back. Do people do that? I can’t even drive past. Maybe someday. Did you know me from there?”

“Our daughter’s brain deteriorated. But now she’s doing lots of stuff, eating running away, in heaven.

“My dad said she’s in a better place. I thought our home was the better place. We got the biggest blessing when she was in the casket. You should have seen her. Were you at the funeral? She looked beautiful, just like nothing was wrong. I have to look for my blessings everyday now. Her birthday is Sunday.”

“I ordered her a birthday cake. It’s hard. I go in her room. I’m okay in the morning and night. It’s hard all day. Our family like everything in her room the way it was. I’m painting it now. We made one big room out of two. We’re putting the wall back to one room.”

“My mom died three years ago. Fr. visited. He does great with death. The funeral. The homily was great. He cares. He came to the hospital a lot. Not everybody knows that about him. They don’t see the stuff he does with people. Just mass.”

“Thanks for doing this.”

The researcher began to wrap up the evening. “You’re welcome. It’s important that we have a place to share our stories. You’re all brave people to come here. I always think the first night is the worst one. It’s take a lot of courage to walk through a door into a room full of people you don’t know. Especially if you think you might cry. How do you feel knowing that you’ve come here the first time?”

“It’s going to be easier next week.”

“I don’t know if I’ll be back.”

“I feel really bad for you about your son. That’s hard. At least my wife and I had a lot of years together. A child. That’s hard. We had a son die. He was an adult though. On a motorcycle. I’ll pray for you.”

“Me too.”

“I’m glad we have these doves. I’m bad with names.”

The researcher said, “It’s a special thing that happens in this group. You might hear things said that aren’t said anywhere else. It’s a safe place. The stories we tell here need to stay here. But the dove is something that reminds us all week that there are others who are grieving. I’m going to put my dove on the window sill over the kitchen sink. You might want to put it out somewhere like that or maybe in a Bible or prayer book or by your bed. Every time you see it maybe you can remember the stories you heard here this evening.”

“I’ve always heard people say they would pray for me but I never really understood until now just what that meant. I guess I matter. And so does my wife, even though she’s dead. That’s nice. It’s kind of like that at mass. I feel close to her. My friend’s a widow too. He goes to mass to talk to his wife. He’s says that’s part of our being Catholic, that you can do that. Do you believe that?”

“I think our loved ones are everywhere we go now. And they don’t hurt.”

“They don’t want us to be sad. They are hoping we’ll quit crying.”

“I never thought much about heaven before. But now I’ve been reading a lot. And asking questions. I got a little book. It’s only a dollar. Want me to bring you one? I’ll do that next time.”

The researcher said, “I’m sorry that it was death and grief that brought us here tonight. But I’m glad we have a place to be together. Does anyone have any questions before we share a blessing that we’ll do every week? And then we’ll close with a prayer. There’s a pattern to our time together, like the pattern of the mass. We’ll prayer, share blessing, and receive something to take home each week to help us be close to our loved one. This week you’ll take Wisdom Walk home. Next week I’ll ask you what you heard this week when we told our stories. Sometimes something sticks in your head and you might want to write it down to talk about next week. And sometimes you read things that you want to ask about. Every week after we meet I’ll talk with Father. If you have questions that he can help with he will be glad to answer them. He cares a lot about us and our parish. He is the person who wanted to make sure we had a place to come with our grief. You have my home phone number and you have the parish number. You can always call if you think of something during the week. It helps to know that I think.

Let's close with our blessing, we'll pass this small crystal bowl with Holy Water around the circle. Remember the waters of baptism and the Holy Water font when you walk into mass this week."

The researcher closes with the blessing, passes the Holy Water around the group, invites everyone to join in prayer and dismisses the group. There are tears and hugs. One couple stays behind to say they might not come back next week. The researcher walks with them to the door and assures them that they are welcome to come or not, and that she trusts they will know what is right for them when next week's session comes. They hug her and walk to their car.

Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page

Week One and Two:

November 16, 2006

Focus on the Larger Story – continue to establish context of each companion's experience

Key Questions:

Who are you and how do you come to be here?

Tell us about life in relationship to your loved one.

Who taught you how to grieve?

Provide take home sheet for reflection on what was heard during the previous week's session. The invitation to share these reflections was given at the beginning of each week after the first session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 preparation: (Session underlined)

- Call each participant prior to the second session. Thank them for coming last week and invite them to return. Answer any questions or concerns they might have.
- Bring tabletop flip chart.
- Bring as many colored markers as there are participants in the group.
- Gather Session 2 materials for the reflection table. These include 1) small table that can be covered with a simple cloth, 2) tissues, 3) feather wreath, 4) feathers, 5) feather wreath 6) pencils, 7) Holy water, 8) Vessel for passing Holy water, 9) picture of Jesus welcoming a person into heaven, 10) angel candle and matches.
- Prepare all Wisdom Walk Session 2 materials for participants.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 steps: (Session underlined)

- Welcome each participant at the door.
- Invite each participant to choose a seat of their choice.
- When all have arrived, reemphasize the rules for creating a safe environment and the courage it takes to enter this unknown setting and share amidst strangers.
- Emphasize the role of the Pastor and the parish in providing this ministry.

- Lead Opening Prayer.
- Pass out this Session's materials. Point out the suggested reflective assignment for the coming week.
- Invite the participants to reflect with the group on the following questions:
 1. What did you hear others share last week?
 2. Was there anything in particular that was said that stayed with you during the week?
 3. Did you hear or experience anything that brought a sense of hope to you during the week?
- As people talk record key words or phrase on the flip chart using a marker in the color they choose.
- Thank each person in the group for attending the session and sharing.
- Reemphasize the courage it takes to attend the sessions.
- Give each person a feather from the reflection table. Recite the Emily Dickinson quote on hope that appears on the Wisdom Walk Session 2 reflective assignment.
- Emphasize the importance of bringing the folder to Session 3.
- Lead blessing ritual.
- Lead closing prayer.
- Accompany all participants to the door.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 notes: (Session underlined)

This space can be for things forgotten, things that could have been done differently/better etc. and ideas for the next Session.

Don't forget feathers and feather wreath.

Plan to send all participants, even those who didn't come every week, a card from the parish remembering them on this holiday.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 narrative: (Session underlined)

This was considered confidential information.

The researcher led the opening discussion with the following: "Thank you for returning this week. I'm wondering if you heard anything said last week that stuck with you, anything you'd like to share. I'll write some key words in different color markers on this flip chart. Who would like to begin?"

"I wrote some things on the page like you asked us. The three words for our loved one. I wrote live, love, laugh."

"I did that too. I wrote smile, eyes, brave."

"I wrote brave for my daughter. She was."

"I wrote fragile, survivor, mother."

“I didn’t write anything. I kept thinking about those people and their son who killed himself. That’s hard.”

The researcher said, “That is hard. It’s hard to know what to say. How do you feel that they didn’t come back this week?”

“I thought they might not.”

“It makes me feel like mine isn’t so bad.”

The researcher said, “I wondered if anyone might feel like that. It’s important to realize that’s everyone’s grief is a little different but it all still hurts. Death comes in many different ways. Some grief seems easier than others. It’s important that you each use this time for your grief and to learn what you need to do to heal. We will learn best from each other by listening.”

“I think it’s all hard. But with babies, or children ... well, you just don’t think that’s how it’s supposed to be. Like my wife and I. We was married a lot of years. We talked about our dying. She always said she’d be first. I said it would be me. I wish it had been. It’s hard to look out the window where she always looked. She loved birds. We had bird feeders all over. She’d watch those birds. And the grandkids now. They come over. One of them brought me a leaf. Said it was for grandma. So I had all the grandkids go out and find a leaf that reminded them of her. Brought them all in. Put them in a place on the counter. Lots of colors. She’d like that. They loved her. They miss her. It’s not the same with just me there. The holidays. She always cooked, had the whole family over. I wrote beautiful smile, fun loving laughter for my words for her.”

“I wrote loved.”

The researcher said, “I’m glad we are able to talk about our loved ones this week. This is a place to be selfish and focus on what you need to say. That’s why I asked about the family with the child who committed suicide. We can’t fix their grief. We can pray for them. They’re still part of our group even if they don’t return. It’s important that you know I called them this week to make sure they knew they were welcome but we would also consider them part of our group even if they didn’t come back.”

“Thanksgiving will be hard for them this year.”

“It will be hard for all of us. I’d like to stay home that day but I’ll probably go to my sister’s.”

“Our daughter loved the holidays. I wonder how we’re gonna survive them. I think about heaven and purgatory and just being here without her. I brought you all those books like I said.”

Participant passed out the little books.

“I’m not afraid to die. For awhile it bothered me that I had to be really good because she was watching. Now I want to be good so I can be with her. I think a lot about God and faith. I go to mass a lot. I talk to her there.”

“I went to the doctor. He said the baby’s fine so far. It scares me to think about going through that again. I can’t believe I went through that.”

“I was okay with crying this week. I knew if I started I’d stop. And I knew you guys were doing the same thing. It helped knowing we were coming here tonight. I looked forward to it if that makes sense.”

The researcher said, “Kind of like a club you didn’t want to join but now you’ve met some other people and it helps?”

“Yeah, like that. You understand.”

“Even if it’s different it’s the same. I went out to lunch this week. Where my daughter liked to go. She wasn’t there. I cried. How do you do that? Do you quit going those places?”

“I don’t go in parts of my house.”

“I get mad and angry and then I feel guilty.”

“I just remember chaos. Always trying to be everywhere. At the hospital, at home for my family, at work. I couldn’t do it. I’m afraid if I really start crying I won’t be able to stop.”

“Me too. But you will. You get tired. And you sleep better. Get a blanket or a shirt or something to hold. That helps. They say don’t make changes for a year. I’m not. I don’t have enough energy.”

“I keep this in my pocket.”

Participant pulls out a rock that looks like an angel and a pocket rosary.

“I keep these with me all the time. Put my hand in my pocket when I want to be close to her. It helps.”

“Are we gonna get one of those feathers on the table? I saw the quote on the homework page. You know I’m hopeful. I don’t know how but I am.”

The researcher said, “Let’s talk about hope. Who would like to read the quote for us?”

After the Emily Dickinson quote was read the researcher passed out a feather to each participant and held the feather wreath.

The researcher said, "Each week you will receive something to take home with you. It will be a small thing. You might want to begin keeping these things together, with your Prayer Dove or in your Wisdom Walk folder. Some people find that there are a lot of little things in our faith that help bring us closer to Jesus. Does anything in particular come to mind when I say that?"

"I have a rosary from my First Communion. And prayer cards from funerals. There was a priest who was good friends of our family. He would come to see us when my wife died. He blessed some things for the kids and grandkids. Those are special."

"Yeah, it helps to have something to touch."

"I'm glad to know other people keep things like clothes and toys and stuff. You gotta have something to hold onto. I have pictures all over. At first I put them away but then I missed seeing her. I got them out again. I have them all arranged."

"I just have that dove by my bed. Made me feel good to know you was all praying for me and her. I talked to a priest about that, not our pastor. Another one. We talked about mass. And communion. How Christ is really present. I think she is too."

"Some people think you're crazy when you talk like that. But I know they're still here. You can feel it sometimes. My granddaughter said she could see him one day. We couldn't but she could. I believed her. Kids have different eyes. They know stuff."

"Sometimes when I wake up I think she's gonna be there. And then I open my eyes and remember. Those are bad times. But somehow it's better than it was. That's hope. Knowing you're gonna make it and each day's a little better. Faith tells you that."

"But you don't know it's gonna work till someone dies sometimes. It's like when everything's good it's okay and you go to church and feel like God's right there. And then all of a sudden that person is gone and you think different."

"Like how could God do this? Why is life like this? Is all that stuff about eternity really true? Are we gonna see our loved ones again? That's when it's a test."

"My grandma had so much faith. Had some kids who died and a husband who was killed. And she never quit praying. She was sad and got mad sometimes like when she had to learn to do something grandpa used to do without even trying. But then she'd just stop and start talking to him and ask him to teach her whatever it was she needed to know. And it worked. She had a lot of faith. Hope too."

The researcher asked, "So was your grandma kind of a mentor for how to grieve?"

“Yeah. I learned it was okay to be sad. And she had a good friend. They would get together and bake for bake sales or people who might have a hard time going on. They acted like there was always someone worse off that they could help and they watched out to help someone all the time.”

“I never knew anyone who had a baby be so sick. The nurses helped me know how it was going to go. That I could stay at the hospital or go home, they’d take care of my son so I could take care of the rest of my family too. But I felt guilty leaving him.”

“Babies are hard. There’s always more you didn’t get to do. You’d just started and didn’t get to have the fun. You always wonder what he would be doing now and what you’d be doing. My friends say that’s the hard part. You always wonder and imagine.”

The researcher asked, “Who will help you through the holidays?”

“My family says to just come and if I have to leave that’s okay. They’ll understand.”

“My sister is going to have a special pray at the meal. I’m glad. I want to remember him. It’s harder to pretend.”

“I’m going to my grandkids. They’ll keep me busy. They love to talk about their grandma and that’s good. It makes me smile.”

The researcher said, “Thank you for all you’ve shared this evening. We’re going to close with our blessing and prayer. We’ll pass the Holy Water around. Make sure to take your feather home and think about what brings you hope this week. And don’t forget we won’t be meeting next week due to Thanksgiving on Thursday. I’ll look forward to seeing you the following week, November 30.”

The group stands to say the prayer together, all share hugs and walk together to the door.

Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page

Week Three and Four:
November 30, 2006

Focus on each Participant’s Faith Story – establish context for each companion’s faith

Key Questions:

Who taught you how to grieve?

Does your faith impact your grief? In what ways? Does your grief impact your faith?

Provide take home sheet for reflection on what was heard during the previous week’s session. The invitation to share these reflections will be given at the beginning of each week after the first session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 preparation: (Session underlined)

- Gather Session 3 materials for the reflection table. These include 1) small table that can be covered with a simple cloth, 2) tissues, 3) God Bless You rock 4) small rocks, 5) Sharpies, 6) pencils, 7) Holy water, 8) Vessel for passing Holy water, 9) picture of Jesus welcoming a person into heaven 10) angel candle and matches and 11) copies of The Magnificat Advent Companion for each participant.
- Prepare all Wisdom Walk Session 3 materials for participants.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 steps: (Session underlined)

- Welcome each participant at the door.
- Invite each participant to choose a seat of their choice.
- When all have arrived, reemphasize the rules for creating a safe environment and the courage it takes to enter this unknown setting and share amidst strangers.
- Emphasize the role of the Pastor and the parish in providing this ministry.
- Lead Opening Prayer.
- Pass out this Session's materials. Point out the suggested reflective assignment for the coming week.
- Provide a copy of The Magnificat Advent Companion for each person. Indicate how it may be used during Advent and that it is highly recommended and used by the pastor. Encourage them to bring their copy next week.
- Invite the participants to reflect with the group on the following questions:
 1. What did you hear others share last week about their grieving?
 2. Was there anything in particular that was said that stayed with you during the week?
 3. How does your faith impact your grief and how did it impact the life of your loved one?
- As participants reflect on these questions, invite them to pass a small rock around the group that says "God Bless You."
- Each participant will take a small rock home with them this evening. These will be called Holy Listening Stones. Each participant will write one word or symbol on the rock that brings to mind hope for them.
- Remind them of the suggested reflective assignment and answer any questions.
- Emphasize the importance of bringing the participant folder to Session 4.
- Lead blessing ritual.
- Lead closing prayer.
- Accompany all participants to the door.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 notes: (Session underlined)

This space can be for things forgotten, things that could have been done differently/better etc. or ideas for the next Session.

Don't forget to have the candles, and linens blessed by Father for an upcoming session.

Remember that two weeks have passed due to Thanksgiving falling on November. 23.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 narrative: (Session underlined)

This is considered confidential information.

The researcher asked, “Was there anything of significance for you in what was shared last week?”

“It was helpful to hear that others were not looking forward to the holiday.”

“How did everyone’s go?”

“It was better than I thought. Since we talked about it in group, I had some different ideas on how I could handle things and had talked to some of the family about that.”

“I thought about the couple with the teenager who killed himself. It must have been an awful day for them.”

“Thank you for sending us the card. That meant a lot.”

The researcher said, “Those cards were created for you by Fr. Gary. I think you all recognize that as our risen Christ which hangs above the altar. He added “A Time for Healing” beneath the picture.”

“He takes time for the extra things doesn’t he?”

“It always surprises me that he remembers about my son when he sees me at church.”

“He cares about families when someone dies.”

The researcher said, “I shared the book on Heaven with Father that you gave us. He had some questions about our using it and wondered if we’d like him to put together some information that speaks more clearly to our faith.”

“That would be great.”

“I thought there were some things in there that didn’t quite fit.”

“But I liked that it got me thinking about all of this and what happens next.”

“I was mad about my son dying this week. I was reading about that child abuse case at Children’s and thought why didn’t this happen to that family? Well, I don’t want any child to die, but I loved my child, and wonder how anyone could do that to a child.”

“I think about all the times I got upset over nothing. I wish I hadn’t.”

“Are you more patient now? Like you know how short a life can be?”

“Yeah, I appreciate time with my family more. I just want to tell the world to slow down.”

“I hear things that Father says at mass better. And the readings. They make more sense.”

“Like, why didn’t I pay attention before?”

The researcher asked, “Did everyone bring their Magnificat back?”

The participants open their folders and pull them out.

The researcher said, “Let all turn to page 70. I noticed there was a prayer for Hope that I wondered if anyone had noticed.”

“I did. This is nice. So, you said Father likes this?”

The researcher said, “Yes, a number of years ago he mentioned it fairly often as a good way to be more attentive to prayer in the day. It has the readings and he likes that it fits in a pocket or a purse. Have any of you used it before? I see a lot of people using it before mass.”

The group indicated they haven’t.

The researcher asked, “Would anyone like to read the first paragraph?”

One in the group responds and then another person reads and second verse and then the third. Then the Psalms are read and finally the prayer on page 72.

“It helps to have something like this. And with Advent coming, it will be good. I never quite know what to do on my own.”

“I like that it was so about what we’re all going through.”

“I’m kind of afraid of the bible. I don’t know where to turn or find what would be about my life.”

The researcher asked, “When you think about your growing up or your loved one’s life, what are the influences that helped you in your faith?”

“I had an aunt who I could always talk to.”

“My parents always went to church and were very active.”

“The priest in our parish seemed like part of the family.”

“We weren’t as busy then. It seemed like we spent more time doing things around church and talking about our faith. I like coming to this group because it kind of reminds me of those times. There aren’t a lot of people I talk to about this stuff.”

“I was thinking that maybe I’d join this parish. I’ve come here off and on for awhile but never really joined. I like that Fr. wanted to have this for us. Maybe there’s other things I’d know about if I belonged.”

The researcher asked, “Would you like me to ask the church secretary about what you would need to do, whether you need to call or come in to fill something out?”

“Yeah, that would be okay. I could do either.”

“This is a friendly parish even though it’s big.”

The researcher asked, “So are there things from growing up and your faith that are helping you now?”

“We went to mass. And I’ve been doing that again since this happened. For awhile I didn’t cause I was mad but then that seemed dumb. Like I was cutting myself off from what would help me most.”

“But sometimes it’s hard to come and be part of a group, like at mass, and maybe no one knows what happened to you with the death and all, and you end up feeling more alone.”

“Yeah, but then I realize there’s a lot of people there and they’re probably going through things I don’t know about, maybe worse things, and maybe I need to get involved in something and we could help each other.”

“It really made me think this month, when the banner with all the names of the people who died in the parish was hanging there. We are part of a family. We just don’t always know it. But seeing all those names up there, and now I’ve met all of you and they aren’t just names anymore. Well, they are, but I know the stories. And I see the same names at home on the dove by my bed.”

“Yeah, that’s a nice thing. That little piece of paper with names. That makes me feel really good during the week. That each of you know my name and my wife’s name and something about her. Like you’re keeping her alive by remembering her.”

“Do you think we could get the banner and cut the names off for the people in this group and we could have those to keep?”

“And the candles too with the names. What do they do with those?”

The researcher answered, “I really don’t know. Mary Clare creates the banner but I don’t know what they do with them when November is over. I’ll check this week.”

“I just think this time of year is hard. There’s just one holiday after another.”

“And shopping is too many people and reminders everywhere of things I would have bought for him. I hate all the fakeness. And the people talking about buying stuff when they don’t want to. I’d give anything to have her around to buy for.”

“I go down aisles and think how she’d like this and I’d for sure go back later and buy it.”

“You know when we were talking about the banner. That’s about the Communion of Saints isn’t it, and All Saints and All Souls Day?”

“It is. That’s a great part of what I remember growing up. My parents talked about our grandparents being with us still and our praying for them and them praying for us.”

“Something happened this week that made me think of her. There were geese flying really low at the cemetery when she was buried. And I was back there on Thanksgiving. And there were geese. I just knew they were a sign that she was telling me she was okay. It was really neat.”

“And I keep thinking about your grandchild saying he could see your other grandson and he was fine and not to worry. I never thought much about all of that before. Like I was afraid it would make people think I was crazy.”

“Sometimes I hear her talking to me. Telling me what to do, in the kitchen when I’m making breakfast and it’s not how she would do it.”

“I hear him giggling. And I can smell him. I used to cry but now it kind of makes me feel good that I can remember. Or I can let myself remember. For awhile it hurt too bad. I didn’t feel anything.”

“I’m like that now too. It’s like thawing out.”

“Like we were frozen with grief and now we’re warming up to life again.”

“Wow, I like that.”

“Yeah, and I haven’t been afraid to cry when I felt like it. And I’ve stopped, not like when I was afraid I wouldn’t.”

“I’ve been going to church almost every day to talk with her. It’s like I can’t wait to get there. And I talk to her lots of other places too, but in church it’s like she’s there waiting with God for me to come. I sat there for forty five minutes after mass last week. It was the greatest thing.”

“I went to the cemetery too on Thanksgiving. There was a couple people there for someone else. One of them started to sing Amazing Grace and then a couple of others around them started singing. I even was humming the tune. I can’t sing so good. And you know then I realized it was her favorite song and that was her being with me that day. In the cemetery. Would you believe that? I don’t know if that will happen again but it was special that day. I won’t forget it.”

The researcher said, “It almost time for us to share the blessing and closing prayer. Is there anything else someone would like to say before we do that?”

“Yeah, when you ask about our faith and who helped us have that? Well, I don’t know if we answered that very well, but I feel like we’re becoming those people or learning to do that by being here. Like, when someone else has a death, we’re going to be the people they can come to and we’ll know that it’s okay to just listen and not have to fix anything and that they will figure it out if they just have some support.”

“I agree. This is a great thing our parish does. Thank you for doing this. It’s really helping me. And my family too, by me being better when I go back to them after Thursday evenings.”

The researcher realized there would not be time to do the activity with the Holy Listening Stones. She stated that the group would begin with those next week. The researcher drew the evening to a close with the blessing ritual, the closing prayer and walking with the group to the door. A number of participants shared hugs and lingered at the door before walking out to the parking lot.

Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page

Week Three and Four:

December 7, 2006

Focus on the Smaller Story - actual details of each companion’s story

Key Questions:

Who taught you how to grieve?

Who are your companions?

Provide take home sheet for reflection on what was heard during the previous week’s session. The invitation to share these reflections will be given at the beginning of each week after the first session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 preparation: (Session underlined)

- Gather Session 4 materials for the reflection table. These include 1) small table that can be covered with a simple cloth, 2) tissues, 3) pencils, 4) Holy water, 5) Vessel for passing Holy water, 6) picture of Jesus welcoming a person into heaven 7) small rocks and 8) black fine point permanent markers.
- Prepare all Session 4 materials for participants.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 steps: (Session underlined)

- Welcome each participant at the door.
- Invite each participant to choose a seat of their choice.
- Lead Opening Prayer.
- Pass out this Session's materials. Point out the suggested reflective assignment for the coming week.
- Emphasize the session's topic of Holy Listening.
- Each participant will take a small rock home with them this evening. These will be called Holy Listening Stones. Each participant will write one word or symbol on the rock that brings to mind hope for them.
- As participants reflect on these questions, invite them to pass a small rock around the group that says "God Bless You."

As we have shared stories during our time together, was there a particular word that came to mind when you thought of our group?

Is there a small symbol you might draw that makes you think of hope?

- Thank each person in the group for attending the session and sharing.
- Remind them of the suggested reflective assignment and answer any questions.
- Emphasize the importance of bringing the participant folder to Session 5.
- Lead blessing ritual.
- Lead closing prayer.
- Accompany all participants to the door.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 notes: (Session underlined)

This space can be for things forgotten, things that could have been done differently/better etc. or ideas for the next Session.

Don't forget to check on banner and candles from November's remembrance of those who have died during the past year.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 narrative: (Session underlined)

This was considered confidential information.

The researcher said, "The first things I wanted to share is that I have the banners from church and the candles with your loved ones names. We will leave time tonight to decide what to do with those. I was glad this group wanted to know about that and I'm glad they had them in the sacristy."

The group responds that they are glad the researcher brought them. One participant asked if he could have his friend's wife's name and candle.

The researcher continued, "Last week we didn't have time to think about a word or symbol for hope and make our Holy Listening Stones. I'd like to begin with that this week. As we share with the group what we heard last week that stuck with us, let's pass the little rock around that says God Bless You, and share a story of someone who has been a companion to us in our grief."

"Well, I know everyone in this group has. I couldn't wait to come tonight because I knew you'd understand about something that happened this week. I wanted to start to clean out her closet and when I opened the closet door where her clothes were, I just started to cry and couldn't stop. Well, it was more like I didn't want to stop. And then all of a sudden it was like she was in the room with me saying it was okay to cry. I got all calm and just sat there like she was there with me."

"I do understand."

"I have been thinking about cleaning his closet out, folding little blankets and t-shirts to keep. It's too hard to make all those decisions yet. So I closed the door."

"I was thinking how there are just so many memories. All the picture frames are filled with them. That's the hard thing for me."

The researcher asked, "Would everyone like to bring a picture of their loved one next week?"

"Yes, that's a great idea. Would everyone remember to do that?"

The group agreed to do this.

The researcher prompted, "So who are your companions outside of this group?"

"My family has been pretty good, certain people in it. They stop by and stay just long enough to check on me, maybe have a cup of coffee."

"I have a good friend. She just comes and helps out with something, like cooking or cleaning or helping with some little project. Just long enough and then she leaves."

"I have been thinking a lot about some of you going to mass and talking to your person. I haven't been doing that but I think I'm going to try and go this week. It's been too hard before. I sit there and just see a casket or remember where we sat. Or I hear a song and have to leave cause I don't want to cry with all those people around me. But I know God's trying to be with me. I just won't let him."

“You know I’ve been reading and making some notes in the Magnificat. There was a couple of days it just seemed like it was talking to me. Can I tell you what those were? One was the day about the spaghetti. The first Sunday we used this book. And I thought how this is all like a big mess and I need God to help me unravel it. Then another day was when it talked about Mary being afraid but somehow being calm. I know I’m afraid but somehow there is that little bit of hope like that poem. It’s in me and wants to get bigger and it will. But not yet.”

“Those are great things you’ve been thinking. So what would you put on a rock for hope?”

The researcher asked, “Should we all move to the table and think about the Holy Listening Stones? Let’s think about what we could put on them that would remind us about hope this week.”

The group moved to the table and each person picked a small stone and a marker. They worked quietly as a group. Some looked through their Wisdom Walk folders when they were done. The researcher invited them to return to the circle as they finished.

“I put a squiggle on mine. That’s what I feel like. One minute is fine and then there’s a high or low that I didn’t know was coming. So the squiggle is hope that it’s all connected and I just have to trust.”

“I put a smile. Because that’s what she’s doing in heaven. She’s happy. I’m the one who’s sad. But I’m also happy because she doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“I drew a leaf. For the grandkids. They are just glad to have memories and are going on with their lives. It’s like she’s still here with them. I need to be that way. Cause she is still here in my heart.”

“That’s funny. I put a heart on mine. It’s the Sacred Heart of Jesus. That was something I grew up with in my family and being in this group reminded me of that. I went to the Catholic bookstore this week and bought a little picture of the Sacred Heart. It made me feel like a kid again.”

“I put a spiral. Somedays are like going up the spiral, like a mountain, others it’s going down and everything’s easy. But there’s hope in knowing that I’m moving again. For a long time I just didn’t feel anything. And now I’m starting to feel like I can make choices.”

“I drew lips. Cause he was always giving me big baby kisses. Slobbery ones. And I’m so hopeful about this new baby and being able to not be so sad. I’ll still love my son who died and he’ll always be with us but if I can quit being so scared that something’s gonna be wrong with this one. Well, then we’ll have fun and look forward to all the things you’re supposed to do with your children.”

“I drew a question mark. I don’t know if that’s hope or not but it seems to me that there’s a lot we’re never going to know about and God is there even when we don’t have answers.”

The researcher thanked the group for their sharing, invited them to keep their Holy Listening Stones in a special place this week, reminded them to bring a picture next week. She then led the blessing ritual, closed with the prayer and watched as the group proceeded to the door together, talking comfortably with each other.

Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page

Week Five and Six:

December 14, 2006

Focus on extending and recognizing the hospitality of Christ within the group

Key Questions:

Have you felt that the hospitality of Christ was extended to you through this group?

Did you feel the support of the larger parish community?

Provide take home sheet for reflection on what was heard during the previous week’s session. The invitation to share these reflections will be given at the beginning of each week after the first session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 preparation: (Session underlined)

- Gather Session 5 materials for the reflection table. These include 1) small table that can be covered with a simple cloth, 2) tissues, 3) prayer cards, 4) pencils, 5) Holy water, 6) Vessel for passing Holy water, 7) picture of Jesus welcoming a person into heaven, 8) angel candle and matches, and 9) candles for each participant and antique table linen that have been blessed by the Pastor.
- Prepare all Wisdom Walk Session 5 materials for participants. Include KVSS program guide.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 steps: (Session underlined)

- Welcome each participant at the door.
- Invite each participant to choose a seat of their choice.
- Lead Opening Prayer.
- Pass out this Session’s materials. Point out the suggested reflective assignment for the coming week.
- Remind the group that next week will be our last week.
- Introduce the session’s topic of the hospitality of Christ.
- Thank each person in the group for attending the session and sharing.
- Remind them of the suggested reflective assignment and answer any questions.
- Emphasize the importance of bringing the participant folder to Session 6.
- Point out that next week will be the last session.

- Lead blessing ritual.
- Lead closing prayer.
- Accompany all participants to the door.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 notes: (Session underlined)

This space can be for things forgotten, things that could have been done differently/better etc. and ideas for the next Session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 narrative: (Session underlined)

This was considered confidential information.

The researcher asked, “Did everyone remember their picture this evening? I was thinking that having the pictures here would help to make our loved ones more real to everyone in the group. Would you like to begin with sharing those?”

The group agreed they would.

“I’m going to miss the group when this is over next week.”

“I was thinking about some serious stuff this week. Like, is purgatory in the bible? I was wondering if I could call the pastor and talk with him about things like that.”

“I’ve talked to him a lot. It’s really helpful. If you just take a couple of questions, he’s real good about sharing books or ideas with you about how to learn what you need to.”

“I cried a lot this week. I think it’s the holidays. I heard her favorite Christmas carol in the store and had to leave.”

“I was thinking about the school program and how hard it is to know he won’t be in it ever. That makes me sad. They wear those little halos. I guess he has one that’s real.”

“I still see my wife standing at the window in our house watching the birds.”

“I’m painting her room. We’re almost done. Now I wonder if I should have waited. It seems like it’s not her room anymore.”

“I went back to work. It was very hard. Some people knew to just give me a hug. Some tried to say things and cried. I wanted to just go and dive into work. I wanted to think about other things than his death.”

“That’s a really pretty picture of your daughter.”

This comment prompted the group to begin sharing about the pictures they had brought. Essentially they shared the details of each loved one’s dying as they had during the first couple of weeks. They held their pictures while they told their stories and then

they passed each picture around. No one started to tell the next story until the last picture had been passed all around the circle and then placed on the reflection table amidst the unlit candles.

When the last picture was on the table the researcher said, “The item for you to take home tonight is a candle that was blessed by Father. There is also a small linen that was blessed. These were donated by the parishioners. I thought it might be nice for you to have a sort of sacred space in your home where you could put the linen and all the small items on top of it. Tonight’s theme was extending the hospitality of Christ. Has this group helped you feel closer to Christ and if so how has that happened?”

“I have just been so glad that this was in our parish. It was so easy to come here instead of somewhere I hadn’t been. When I go to mass I see some of you and even if we don’t talk it makes me feel like there’s someone I know and who cares.”

“It helped me to hear people talk about going to mass or just sitting in church and feeling close to their loved one. It seemed to me that when I looked at our crucifix and thought about Christ being with us, my daughter was there too.”

“I never really thought about how all the things that we can touch in our faith are important. It seems like things are more sacred now. My granddaughter is going to have her First Communion this spring and now when I think about what to get her it’s more important that she know about the things of our faith.”

“I really like that little rock we made. It made me think one day of the resurrection and the rock at the tomb. That’s weird but I never really thought about things like that being real before. I’m thinking about going to the bible study I heard about. I think one of the deacons does it during the week.”

“I still like the dove the best. I look at those names and they aren’t just names. And now with the pictures tonight I feel like I’ve met people that I haven’t really met.”

“I was listening to the Advent readings last week and realized the Magnificat really helps me get ready for Sunday mass. It’s like I can know a little more about what’s coming and then when I go home I have something to look at when I have a question. It’s simple to read. Some things are too complicated. Faith shouldn’t be hard. It’s just stories about history and then the same things are happening to us today.”

“It’s like here in group. Even though the deaths are all a little different they are the same. They hurt and we miss our loved ones. And so we wonder where they are and if they’re okay and our faith helps us figure out the answers.”

“Even though it is still a big question. I mean it is a mystery. What does happen?”

“It’s about trusting. That those times when God seems really close, like you can touch him. Well someone He is touching us. With his spirit. We haven’t really talked

about it here but God is three. Thinking about Jesus being Mary's son. I've been doing that and thinking she knows just how bad I hurt. Cause her son died. And so did mine. I'll never get over it but someone I know she knows and is watching out for my son too."

"Wow. Think back to the first time we came here. I was scared to say anything and what if I cried. But now I don't even think about that. I just know when I come there are going to other people here who understand that even though my daughter isn't physically here anymore, she's still here. And you don't think I'm crazy."

At this point the researcher asked, "Would you each please open your Wisdom Walk? The page I want to give you tonight is for the local Catholic radio station. There are some programs on KVSS that can help with some of the questions we've had and sometimes it's nice to know you can turn the station on day or night, like when you can't sleep. Are any of you having trouble sleeping? Or maybe you're not eating the way you were before. Would anyone like to talk about that?"

"For awhile I hated mealtime. It was so quiet. But now I read a book or play music. I try not to turn the TV on. The news is usually about death or someone getting killed."

"Some days I eat a lot and others hardly anything. After the funeral there was so much food in the house. It's kind of nice to just buy what I want and make whatever I want. I'm getting used to that."

"I really don't have a routine anymore."

"Going back to work made me have a routine again. But it was hard. Somedays I just want to sit and do nothing. But that's not good either I know."

"This is good to think about. Since next week is our last week. We'll have to talk about this more next week. Do we have time to light the candles when you say the blessing and pass the Holy Water? Then we could say the closing prayer by candlelight with the pictures on our laps."

"That's a great idea."

The researcher turned out all but one light in the room. She passed the Holy Water around the circle and said the blessing. She lit the candles and passed the pictures to each person before they said the closing prayer together. No one rushed to leave. It was a peaceful, sacred moment. There were tears. She passed the box of tissue. Some shared hugs as they began to put their coats on. They all walked to the door together. Some talked about bringing treats to the group next week as a sort of celebration.

Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator PageWeek Five and Six:

December 21, 2006

Discovering Meaning in the Story – connection with the larger faith communityKey Questions:

How are death, life and resurrection lived out within our shared community of the Roman Catholic Church and St. Gerald?

How have I been companioned? How am I called to companion? How has Christ been our light during these six weeks?

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 preparation: (Session underlined)

- Gather Session 6 materials for the reflection table. These include 1) small table that can be covered with a simple cloth, 2) tissues, 3) blessed small linens, 4) pencils, 5) Holy water, 6) Vessel for passing Holy water, 7) picture of Jesus welcoming a person into heaven 8) angel candle and matches and a “Pass It On” card for each person. The card chosen had a winter scene and said “Seasons Change but God never does.”

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 steps: (Session underlined)

- Welcome each participant at the door.
- Invite each participant to choose a seat of their choice.
- Lead Opening Prayer.
- Point out that this is out last session.
- Introduce the session’s topic of the ongoing care for self after this last Session.
- Thank each person in the group for attending the Sessions and sharing.
- Reemphasize the courage it takes to continue to grieve.
- Emphasize the sacredness of their participant folders and the importance of keeping them in a safe place.
- Lead blessing ritual.
- Lead closing prayer.
- Accompany all participants to the door.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 notes: (Session underlined)

This space can be for things forgotten or things that could have been done differently/better etc. and ideas for the next grief ministry series.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 narrative: (Session underlined)

This is considered confidential information.

The researcher said, “This is our last session of this series. I was looking forward to coming this evening but I also knew I was going to miss each of you after this evening has ended. How do you feel about this evening?”

“I saw Father last Sunday at mass and told him how thankful I was that we have this in our parish.”

“I felt the same way. Thankful but sad. But I know that my faith is stronger for listening to all your stories and knowing that I’m strong too.”

“I knew it would be hard to go home tonight so I have all the things we’ve gotten during these weeks and they are all sitting on that cloth we got last week. It’s the first thing you see when you come in my house. It’s like it all welcomes me and reminds me that people care.”

The researcher asked, “So have you felt more connected to the parish since coming to this group?”

“Oh yes. I saw that notice about the linens one week but then when you had them blessed for us by Father and I knew people gave them who were in our parish. That was like getting something from my grandma. I feel older now. Like I’m a person who can help others when someone dies. That’s how I always saw my aunt but now it’s me.”

“I think that was one of the best parts. We listened to the others but found our own answers. Like when you said we knew how to do this. I didn’t really understand that when you first said it. But now I do. We have this faith and our church and we know a lot but we don’t always know we do. I felt respected even when I was crying.”

“You know when we were talking about memories and showing pictures last week. You might think this is weird but I have something that’s a memory for me. It’s here. My granddaughter kisses it, like it’s her brother.”

The researcher waited to see what would be said next. She was curious.

“I have a tattoo.”

“I do too.”

“What’s yours?”

“It’s a heart here.”

As she pulls her t-shirt a little to the side by her neck the group can see a small heart.

“Mine’s a little bigger. It’s called a portrait tattoo. I wasn’t sure about it but then when I was at the mall I watched someone else get one and thought it was something that I wanted to do. It hurt for awhile.”

The researcher watched as the group watched the participant lift her shirt and to the side of the woman's abdomen and just above her waist was a tattoo about 4 inches by 5 inches in size.

"When I was in the navy I got a tattoo that size but it's on my arm. You're pretty brave."

"My granddaughter kisses it. Says she wants to see her brother."

The group talked about tattoos a little bit longer and then one participant said she had a small gift for the researcher to use this evening during blessing.

The researcher opened a small bag and in it was a clear votive type glass set in a pair of wings. It was the perfect size for the Holy Water. She said, "This is beautiful. Thank you. I will use it with our groups in the future."

"I saw it and just knew you'd like it. I've been thinking a lot about angels lately. Last Saturday was the worst day. I cried all day. Christmas is just four days away and we don't have a tree up or anything. She loved Christmas. But I just didn't want to bother with putting it up and then being sad when I had to take it down."

The researcher asked, "How are you all preparing for Christmas? Do we need to talk about that and think about some plans depending on how you feel that day?"

"It's going to be harder than Thanksgiving."

"There's always so much about children at Christmas. Thanksgiving is more about food and family and just getting together. Christmas is different."

"Christmas is about birth and here we're just trying to deal with death."

"It seems like pretending."

"I went to Reconciliation last week. I haven't been in a long time. It felt good to go and just talk to the priest about all the things I'd been feeling bad about since her death."

"I realized it's all normal."

"I like the angel for the Holy Water. I never thought much about blessing before. I'd just walk into church and bless myself. It seems more important now. Makes me think of the church I was baptized in. Out in the country. They closed it."

“I bought one of those little Holy Water things you can hang on the wall. It’s in the hall by our bedrooms. I try to do that with my daughter every day now, at least once.”

“I thought about that the other day. I was watching the birds in the bird bath and thinking how God sprinkles us and the church has ways for us to remember that.”

“Sometimes when we think God is mad we forget there’s still good going on. And death doesn’t happen because God’s mad anyway. Sometimes death just happens.”

“I’ve learned that what I know about grief now, I can help somebody else someday. Not yet. It’s too soon. But someday I’ll know that it’s okay to just hold their hand or give them a hug. And I don’t have to do anything. It was good to be listened to in this group.”

“Thanks again for doing this. Make sure you do it again. And that Father knows it made a difference.”

“It’s not like we did anything hard here. But it was hard to come that first time. Others need to come. My friend needs to be here. His wife died like mine. He’s lonely and there’s no one to just listen to him. His family is tired of him being sad.”

“Some weeks this was really hard. Not here but just life.”

“Grief makes us tired.”

“You didn’t hurry us. Even though you didn’t let us get stuck either.”

“It’s like you knew what was going to happen to us after we met that week and we practiced without knowing it. That really helped. It made me feel like I can make some choices.”

“That’s the hard thing. Making choices by myself. I always had someone else to bounce things off of. It was good to hear all of you having the same hard time with that.”

“That was the best thing. Knowing we were part of a bigger group of people that cared even if we didn’t know their names. Now I go to mass and I think, were you praying for us?”

“Those names on that dove really got me thinking about prayer. Like when Father’s on the altar at mass and says all those prayers. It’s the same thing. But you all were praying for me. That meant a lot. Thank you for that. I hope you know I was praying for you and your person too.”

“We don’t have to stop that. Let’s make a promise to do that at least till January first, for the rest of this year. I’d like to know that.”

The group agreed to do this for each other.

The researcher asked, “Would you be interested in a follow up group?”

The group agreed they would.

The researcher went on to ask for details in what they thought they might want. The consensus seemed to be that there could be an evening for anyone in the parish who had suffered from a death to come and ask questions about what grief felt like and what support was available. The group encouraged the researcher to put together a mini lesson of sorts on all the themes from the six week series, especially the theme of practicing for situations that the griever knows will be hard. They also thought it would be good for Father to present during that evening or at another time on some of the bigger questions people have about their faith, purgatory as example. They wondered about the teaching on suicide also. Another idea was cremation as accepted church practice has changed around that in recent years.

At this point the researcher prompted the group to consider the time and that they needed to leave time for the blessing and closing prayer. She put Holy Water in the new angel wings and passed it around while the group bowed their heads and made the sign of the cross with the Holy Water as it passed from person to person in the circle. They stood and said the closing prayer together, received their Pass It On card and prepared to leave together. Without anyone saying it would happen, all participants took part in packing up the materials, folding the table covering, picking up the small table and accompanying the researcher to her car as part of the group. They all departed the parking lot together after sharing final hugs and promising to remember each other in prayer.

As the researcher drove home she thought of the grandmother’s tattoo. She prayerfully considered its possible connection to veneration of the cross.

POST MINISTRY INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR

June 12, 2007

1) Review answers to the Pre Ministry Interview questions.

2) What do you think the results have been?

Pastor’s response: “I think our parish program has been very successful. I received a lot of positive feedback from those who participated.”

3) Do you think the participants have received the grief support you hoped for?

Pastor’s response: “I think most have received the support they needed. Some folks are not ready to heal and move on. I still think we could have some folks who keep contact with these people before and after their losses. If grief support sessions are only a couple of times a year, there will be gaps.”

4) What makes you think that?

Pastor's response: "From the feedback I have received from those folks who participated and my observations."

5) Do you think grief support in our parish has been good for the larger parish community?

Pastor's response: "That is a hard one to judge. Our parish is so large that death of members and grieving relatives are unknown to most parishioners. We also have a number of funerals a year in which the relatives aren't even in our parish so it is hard to continue contact with them."

6) Why do you think that?

Pastor's response: "From my contact with parishioners."

7) Do you think the participants have grown in their faith?

Pastor's response: "I don't know for sure because I don't have continued contact with them but my guess is that they would have to grow in their faith having experienced God's love through a support group."

8) Why do you think that?

Pastor's response: "During funeral preparation I can see faith in many of the people. I am sure their faith grew during the sessions. I also see people who don't practice their faith. I would think if they came to the sessions they would benefit greatly."

9) Are there any particular stories that come to mind regarding the value of having this ministry available?

Pastor's response: "Because I have had little contact with most of the relatives after a funeral I don't have many personal stories. If I was in a parish of a few hundred families it would be a different story. This is the reason there would be great value in a follow up group besides the grief support group sessions."

10) What changes/suggestions would you like to see incorporated the next time we offer this?

Pastor's response: "I would like to see an extension of the support staff that would be in contact with those who have lost a loved one between the time of the funeral and the support sessions. Then I would like to see follow up after the support sessions until the people are well on their way to recovery."

11) What would you like to see offered through the archdiocese if grief support becomes available that is different from our parish ministry?

Pastor's response: "The archdiocese can continue to offer their sessions but it might be good if they can train interested people in individual parishes to do their own support sessions. In parish sessions I think would always be better."

12) Other thoughts/observations?

Pastor's response: "This is a lot of questions."

CHAPTER VI

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

Reflection

Learning and Developing the Theory, Practices and Power of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture was the shared focus of a Doctor of Ministry cohort group at United Theological Seminary. As the group pursued study of the importance of blessing throughout history, consideration was given to seeking biblical, theological, historical, and for some acts of ministry, theoretical references which considered the impact of blessing as understood from creation's beginning. The cohort group sought in their individual and shared studies to be more attuned to the role of blessing in the lives of key historical figures, especially Jesus, but also the understanding of blessing as it related to living as children and adults blessed by God. Increasingly, a belief shared by all members of the group was that the recognition and embracing of God's blessing of their own lives did in fact impact their understanding of God's love and mercy. This more clearly developed understanding in turn impacted development of each cohort's particular ministry.

While initially it seemed that the focus group was charting new territory in recognizing the importance of blessing throughout history, they discovered that historically choices were made that impacted awareness of God's original blessing within particular religions and faith practices, Christian and otherwise. These historical choices awaited the cohort's studies as they converged at United Theological Seminary from

destinations throughout the United States. Each cohort came with shared desire but varying background and experience with intentionally incorporating awareness of God's blessing into their respective ministries.

While at times it seemed this emphasis on blessing was in contrast with teaching regarding original sin, the cohort who developed BBSN adult grief ministry within a Roman Catholic context realized that a both/and approach was what was most consistent with the teachings of that faith. With great respect and curiosity for each other's faith and individual calls to ministry the cohort group grew in understanding of the impact on people's lives related to emphasis on original sin and/or original blessing and particularly how this was experienced and lived out historically by various Judeo-Christian faith traditions. This special regard for blessing became another point of potential learning and appreciation as the cohort's studies within different faith settings continued to evolve and transform each person who had entered the doctoral study process.

Summary

Hope Cottage Companions was an act of ministry understood to be tied to the early church through St. Anselm's definition of theology. That definition was *faith seeking understanding*. The researcher believed Hope Cottage Companions provided an environment for the grieving to better understand their faith and that it was faith which brought them to this ministry.

Hope Cottage Companions was a ministry of relationship. Increased understanding of the relationship which involved humankind and God was integral to the researcher's development of the ministry. The ministry of Hope Cottage Companions was rooted in the importance of understanding this relationship. In addition the larger faith

community was recognized as critical to the success of the ministry. The researcher hoped the relationships that developed within the ministry would be experienced as an outpouring of Christ's hospitality. The researcher believed the invitation to enter into any ministry must be viewed as safe and welcoming, kind and compassionate, filled with the spirit of caring. God ministers through people. Life hurts and wounds. Those whom ministers serve are often tired, scared, or just unsure of what is being offered. Hospitality was vitally important.

After opening each week's grief support session with prayer and blessing, the first question asked was "What did you hear in our group last week?" Many times this led the group's discussion for the rest of the session. As people began to feel safe in each other's presence they began to ask questions which addressed their faith and relationship with God. "Where is God? Why do I hurt this much? What happens after death?" Sometimes death had come suddenly and resulted from events that were preventable. At such times there was anger, confusion, and doubt over whether God even exists. Many times there was questioning about life after death including the existence of hell and purgatory. Sometimes the most important skill for the facilitator was to encourage those gathered to be courageous in their asking of questions and reassure them that their questioning of God connected them historically with people in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Sharing stories that called people to awareness of God's presence throughout history enabled ministry participants to more closely associate Christ's life with their own. This was Holy Listening.

As blessing was recognized in the stories grounded in the grief experience, a different quality emerged for those joined as companions in this ministry. This was a

place of sacredness rooted in God's welcoming presence. There was a sense of holy hospitality. Alongside the painful realities of life, God's blessings were recognized and celebrated, wisdom was embraced, peacefulness emerged and a greater depth of confidence in God's presence came to those who walked into their grief. Grief ministry grounded in Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture connected participant's lives to Christ's life, both on the cross and in the rolled away stone of resurrection. New trust in God's ever present love was experienced and a desire to reach out to others seemed to emerge.

A sense of Sabbath time was integral to the support that was provided through this ministry. Grief was not hurried. New appreciation for life and death came from sacred stillness. In contrast to the reality that society often rushes people through the grief process, ministry participants were supported in discovering God in the stillness where tears and fear and sadness were freely shared. Lament was heard and felt. Silence was embraced. Ministry participants understood these sessions as time apart. This time was imbued with the knowing that came from realizing all of creation was cradled in the palm of God's loving hand. Participants were connected to the sacred circle of life. The researcher hoped the larger faith community also grew in ability to see the Holy in their midst. That was difficult to determine through qualitative research.

This time of grieving was an opportunity to encourage openness to experiences of the sacred in daily life. The grieving often spoke of their days being governed by a different sense of time and presence. There was a disconnect with the world that allowed them to give and receive care in ways outside the norm. Very often it was a time of gratefulness amidst the pain. The grieving spoke of being more aware of and appreciative

for small acts of kindness shown to them. Ultimately they spoke of realizing more than ever how important it was to be compassionate and care for others in daily life.

Holy Listening grounded the rituals and prayer experiences shared within the grief ministry setting which were then seen as connected to the sacramental life of the larger faith community. The researcher believed from years of experience that death disturbed most people's emotional, physical and spiritual foundations and presented an often overlooked or perhaps avoided opportunity for faith transformation and community building. New understanding of Christ's life, death and resurrection seemed to be possible after a personal encounter with death and the grief experience that followed. In a pain-avoidant world, Hope Cottage Companions provided a place for people to gather and confront the reality of death, theirs and Christ's, so that ultimately ministry participants emerged with deeper faith and understanding of God's blessing even beyond this life. This was Holy work.

Within the Roman Catholic faith tradition, the celebration of eternal connection was visibly reinforced and physically experienced during the Celebration of the Eucharist. The researcher sought to encourage awareness of the blessings recognized through the community's celebration of the Eucharist and their connection to the activities within the context of the smaller grief support ministry. Both the life and death experiences of Christ were considered as experiences to which participants in the ministry could relate. The researcher believed that specific BBSN practices incorporated into the ministry would lead to increased opportunity for spiritually-focused conversation and relationship building. This did indeed happen.

Each session of Hope Cottage Companions built awareness of the ties between what occurred in the small group to what happened during Celebration of the Eucharist. Opening and closing rituals included personal blessing, lighting of a candle and the use of Holy Water. These rituals and sacramentals were closely associated with the blessings offered to the faithful at the beginning and ending of every Mass. Other elements of the ministry of Hope Cottage Companions included Scripture reading, prayer, and recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the group's midst along with the continual reminder that God loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ in order that we and our loved ones could be united with God for all eternity. All of these elements were wrapped around time spent sharing from personal life experience and the loved one's death which brought each person to the group.

The Communion of Saints was specially recognized for its significance by the Roman Catholic Church. By virtue of the fact of the realized presence of God within the Eucharist, grief ministry participants found continual reassurance of their connection with their deceased loved ones through enhanced understanding of the Church's belief relative to this teaching.

Generally, discussion of prayer within the group brought mention of the Lord's Prayer, the Rosary, prayer cards, Liturgy of the Hours, Stations of the Cross, mealtime, bedtime and special occasion prayers. Most often people within the group first referenced their own family's prayer traditions. The group recognized the role that a variety of objects played in the Roman Catholic faith. Just as the cohort focus group received prayer shawls, created Holy Listening stones, discussed the use of prayer beads, offered balm for blessing, and held a small fleece lamb during sharing time, Hope Cottage Companions

were given opportunities to gain new appreciation for the use of sacramentals and participation in the sacraments of the Church.

The point of any of these practices was to further encourage faith development and recognize the sacred into the present moment. It was immensely comforting and reassuring to employ the use of specially-chosen items and materials that served not only as special remembrances of the group's time together but which encouraged ongoing meaningful connection to God.

Perhaps more than any other learning that occurred from time spent in the ministry of Hope Cottage Companions was the understanding that participants were not alone. While it was true that grief upset their lives in a variety of ways, most particularly by rendering them unable to change the course of events which led to their loved one's death, it was within the faith community that distress was shared and companions for this journey through grief emerged and were recognized. Sometimes death serves as an entry point for us to accept the kind of caring and concern generally reserved for children. Many who grieve talk of not knowing how many people cared about them until their loved one died. Meals are brought, hands are offered for holding, shoulders serve as pillows for tears that seem to come unexpectedly and endlessly as memories of our loved ones well up and spill over into our orderly lives. This sense of companionship was especially important as the emotional, physical and psychological demands of grief often separated participants from much needed support systems. The researcher continued to recognize and believe that faith communities had a unique responsibility in ministering to those who grieve as well as a unique opportunity to provide support that encouraged faith to grow beyond that which was practiced and experienced prior to the loved one's death.

Conclusion

Life experiences and faith led the researcher to seek understanding of the mystery which was, is, and always will be God. She had always experienced a realness to the many settings in life where she encountered death. She believed healing environments were encouraged not only by physical setting but by a spirit of hospitality and presence emanating from within the people who were present. She believed environments which supported healthy grieving encouraged people to face their fears and explore their faith during some of the most difficult times of their lives. She believed these environments could be liminal spaces that encouraged people to connect this world and the next. While her interest in the area of grief began with her personal experience, it greatly expanded through the years thanks to many people who allowed her to be present with them as they faced their own death or grieved the death of a loved one. These experiences were rich with the mystery of people questioning everything they had previously known as truth. This time of great transition often included courageous acknowledgment of their fears and hopes, wonderings and beliefs, about life and death and the Spirit connecting it all.

Death can prompt transformation of people's lives including their faith. Oftentimes intentional naming of the elements of the group's gatherings which are directly connected to faith traditions are helpful in setting the stage for participants to reconnect with the larger faith community. Beyond growing awareness of the significance of blessing in the church is the opportunity to discuss the sacraments which are integral to the Roman Catholic faith. Once again, the connection between sacraments and sacramentals can be shown as a means by which those gathered can be more closely connected to the faith community and to God.

Faith provided a shared language that connected those who grieved with those who wanted to offer support during the period of mourning. Grief support within the faith community offered all members the opportunity to participate in the transformation made possible by the occurrence of death. As Christianity was transformed by the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, those who live nearly 2,000 years after Jesus' death can be transformed as well through their willingness to companion those who grieve the death of a beloved brother or sister in Christ. Perhaps in the vulnerability shown by those who grieve, the community can be reminded that adults are as vulnerable as children when faced with the uncertainties of life and the threshold of eternity.

The researcher's desire to grow in faith led her to United Theological Seminary. Her doctoral studies enhanced her relationship with God and the community of the faithful by providing a means to better understand the mystery which called people into relationship with God throughout the centuries. Considering a broad expanse of scripture and tradition provided the opportunity to grow in awareness of God's call throughout history into the present time.

As the researcher's cohorts in ministry attested through their own diversity in faith belief and lived practice, the practices of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture were not limited to a particular faith or religion or a particular ministry. During the past two years of in-depth studies the group enjoyed ongoing support and increasing encouragement for development of ministries that incorporated the practices of BBSN. Their discoveries drew them into greater collaboration with each other as well as with professional peers within each of their chosen fields. The group felt increasingly encouraged in their belief

that the practices of BBSN enhanced their ability to minister as Christ ministered regardless of the cohort's particular call to ministry.

“It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure, so that all you ask the Father in my name he will give you. The command I give you is this, that you love one another” (John 15: 16-17).

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APPENDIX A

PRE AND POST MINISTRY PASTOR INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

PRE MINISTRY INTERVIEW

- 1) What prompted you to want to offer grief support in our parish?
- 2) What gaps do you see in what is available in the community and/or the Archdiocese that this ministry might address?

POST MINISTRY INTERVIEW

- 3) Review answers to the Pre Ministry Interview questions.
- 4) What do you think the results have been?
- 5) Do you think the participants have received the grief support you hoped for?
- 6) What makes you think that?
- 7) Do you think grief support in our parish has been good for the larger parish community?
- 8) Why do you think that?
- 9) Do you think the participants have grown in their faith?
- 10) Why do you think that?
- 11) Are there any particular stories that come to mind regarding the value of having this ministry available?
- 12) What changes/suggestions would you like to see incorporated the next time we offer this?
- 13) What would you like to see offered through the archdiocese if grief support becomes available that is different from our parish ministry?
- 14) Other thoughts/observations?

APPENDIX B

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT PROMOTING MINISTRY

Hope Cottage Companions, a six week ministry of grief support, will be offered to adults of St. Gerald parish and the community, beginning November 9 and continuing through December 21, 2006. The sessions will be held from 7 – 8:30 p.m. in the school library at St. Gerald Elementary and Junior High School. Due to the nature of the group and because we want each person to benefit as fully as possible, the number of participants will be limited to 10. Participants are asked to make a commitment to attend all six sessions. If you think you might benefit by making this six week commitment on your journey through grief, please call Cheryl in the church office at 331-1955. You will receive a phone call from the facilitator confirming your participation prior to the first session.

APPENDIX C

LETTER FROM PASTOR

St. Gerald's Catholic Church
7859 Lakeview, Ralston, NE 68127
Phone: Office: 402-331-1955 Home: 402-339-70-54
Cell: 402-598-8138 Fax: 402-339-8733
E-mail: frgary@stgerald.org
October 27, 2006

First Name Lane Name
Address
City, State Zip

Dear First Name,

May Christ's peace and comfort be with you! Losing a loved one is like losing part of ourselves. Love creates a oneness between people and death tries to tear that apart. There is a void and emptiness left behind after the death of a loved one. So it is very natural to experience many painful emotions and find oneself struggling to get on with life. "Moving on" does not happen over night. It is like a wound that takes time to heal.

As a caring parish we want to reach out and help. Beginning Thursday, November 9th, the parish will off a "grief support ministry". We invite you to be part of these sessions aimed to help heal and grow beyond the pain of your loss.

If there is anything the parish or I can do to help don't hesitate to call.

In the peace of Christ,

Please call the business office if you are interested in being a part of this support group.

APPENDIX D
WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

I understand that Valerie Conzett is developing a grief support ministry program entitled Hope Cottage Companions. This program will be offered at St. Gerald Catholic Parish between November 9 and December 21, 2006.

My name and signature below indicate that my participation in this six week series will provide information which may be included in the written body of her Doctoral Studies and may contribute to ongoing understanding in the field of grief support. The information shared during our sessions will be handled in a manner which does not specifically name me as a participant.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYER

Opening Prayer:

Holy One, it is our grief that brings us together in this place. We come before you to reflect, to listen, to share our stories. We are gathered here with those who have died. May we be a blessing for each other in our journey from loss to healing. Amen.

Closing Prayer:

Holy One, our grief is new and our wounds are tender. Be with us as we leave the safety of this circle. We ask that you be especially present to us this week and wrap us each in the warmth of your loving arms. Bless us with the comfort of your healing love. Amen.

APPENDIX F
BLESSING RITUAL

(Name) _____

God created you

God is with you

God loves you

God blesses you.

Each person makes the sign of the cross as Holy Water is passed.

Go with God and live as blessed.

Amen.

APPENDIX G
PRAYER DOVE

Holy One, it is our grief that brings us together in this place. We come before you to reflect, to listen, and to share our stories. We are gathered here with those who have died. May we be a blessing for each other in our journey from loss to healing. Amen.

APPENDIX H

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT REQUESTING LINENS

You Can Help!!

Remember the linens that your mother or grandmother used around the home? Often they graced sideboards or dressers and came in colors of cream or white and were adorned with embroidery or subtle embellishment. These linens are often seen now at garage or estate sales. If you have some of these small sized linens, washed and with no stains or tears, and no larger than 12 X 18 inch rectangles, 12 inch squares, or 18 inch circles, that you would be willing to donate, please bring them to the parish business office or place them in the basket located at the Hope window through November. These linens will be used in ministries offered through our parish and the Family Life Office. Thank you for your generosity!

APPENDIX I

FACILITATOR PAGE TEMPLATES

Hope Cottage Companions Facilitator Page

Session One, Two, Three, Four, Five or Six: (Session underlined)

Theme:

Key Questions:

At home reflection:

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 preparation: (Session underlined)

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 steps: (Session underlined)

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 notes: (Session underlined)

This space can be for things forgotten, things that could have been done differently/better etc. and ideas for the next Session.

Session 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 narrative: (Session underlined)

This space is for recording of actual discussion during the Session. This is confidential information shared only with the pastor on a need to know basis.

APPENDIX J
WISDOM WALK

Welcome to Hope Cottage Companions.

I have called you by name, you are mine...and I love you.
Isaiah 43:1, 4

As we journey together, may we each find hope and reassurance
through knowing that we do not walk alone.
As Sacred Scripture tells us,
whenever two or more are gathered, there am I.

We are indeed walking with the holiest of Companions at our side.

May we experience blessing in this time together.

Prayerfully,
Fr. Gary and Valerie Conzett

November 9, 16, 30, & December 7, 14, 21, 2006
St. Gerald Catholic Parish, 7 – 8:30 p.m.

PAGE ONE

As we begin this journey, you may find it helpful to keep this folder in a special place so that you are able to record thoughts that come to mind during the week. You may also want to put special prayers or readings in the pockets to share with the group when we gather each week. You may also want to keep personal reflection items here. You do not need to share anything in this folder if you choose to.

Please bring this folder to each session. You will receive a page to add each week and on those pages will be Scripture, quotes or other materials to help you journey through this time of grief.

On this first page you are invited to write the following -

My loved one's full name ...

My loved one's date of birth ...

My loved one's date of death ...

The relationship I have with my loved one ...

i.e. father, sister, wife, husband, mother, friend etc.

Three words that come to mind when I think about my loved one are

-
-
-

PAGE TWO

When you return the second week you will receive a dove to place on this page.

PAGE THREE
HOLY LISTENING

Hope Cottage Companions Wisdom Walk Resource Page
Session Two, Three, Four, Five or Six: (Session underlined)

What did you hear shared last week?

Was there anything that stayed with you during the week?

Did you hear or say anything that brought hope to you?

“Hope is that thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune
without the words and never stops at all.” Emily Dickinson

PAGE FOUR

Hope Cottage Companions Wisdom Walk Resource Page
Session Two, Three, Four, Five or Six: (Session underlined)

During each Session, our sharing will focus on who we are and how we have come to be here. We will listen to words and silence as our journey of grief is shared with others who join with hearts and minds that have been broken open with an experience of death. Please look through the Scripture provided on page five or the quotes on page six and see if any of them hold special meaning for you. Write the Scripture or quote below along with any thoughts that come to mind. You may also write a different Scripture or quote here that has special meaning for you. It will be your choice whether to share what you write here with the group.

PAGE FIVE
PRAYER PROMPTS THROUGH SCRIPTURE

Hope Cottage Companions Wisdom Walk Resource
Prayer Prompts through Scripture

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4

God will wipe away every tear. Revelation 7:17

And this hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:5

My eyes run with streams of water ...My eyes flow without ceasing ...Till the Lord from heaven looks down and sees. The waters flowed over my head, and I said, "I am lost!" (Lamentations 4: 48, 49, 50, 54)

And the Lord,
He it is that doth
Go before thee;
He will be with thee,
He will not fail thee,
Neither forsake thee:
Fear not,
Neither be dismayed. Deuteronomy 31:8

In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world. Jm 16:33

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4

The Father of mercies...consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction. 2 Cor. 1:3, 4

God will wipe away every tear. Rev. 7:17

The Lord will destroy death forever, God will wipe away the tear from our cheek. Isaiah 5:8

I have called you by name, you are mine...and I love you. Isaiah 43: 1, 4

PAGE SIX
PRAYER PROMPT THROUGH QUOTES

Hope Cottage Companions Wisdom Walk Resource
Prayer Prompts through non-Scriptural Quotes

To love is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrong and possibly broken. C.S. Lewis

Sorrow makes us all children again. Ralph Waldo Emerson

"It is worth noting that the most blessed events in Christ's life emerged out of the sacred dark: his birth upon a midnight clear, his death under a glowering sky and his resurrection from the pitch-black tomb. The dark is not just a hiding place for evil, it is also filled with divine potential!"¹

"Prayer means entering into communion with the One who loved us before we could love. It is this "first love" (1 John 4:19) that is revealed to us in prayer."²

"Dear God,
As you draw me every deeper into your heart,
I discover that my companions on the journey
are woman and men
loved by you as fully and as intimately as I am.
In your compassionate heart,
there is a place for all of them.
No one is excluded.
Give me a share in your compassion, dear God,
so that your unlimited love may become visible
in the way I love my brothers and sisters. Amen."³

I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness and the willingness to remain vulnerable. Anne Morrow Lindbergh

There are chambers one does not open in the corners of the mind,
Locked and the keys discarded
For the rust of years to find.

¹ Fitzgerald, *Blessings for the Fast Paced & Cyberspaced*, 49.

² Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing*, ed. Wendy Wilson Greer (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 66.

³ *Ibid.*, 208. ***CHECK***

Then at the appointed hour,
 Like the chiming of a clock,
 Memory picks up the key
 And turns it in the lock. Submitted by group participant

Along the Road by Robert Browning
 I walked a mile with Pleasure;
 She chattered all the way,
 But left me none the wiser
 For all she had to say.
 I walked a mile with Sorrow
 And ne'er a word said she;
 But oh, the things I learned from her
 When Sorrow walked with me!

Ralph Waldo Emerson "Sorrow makes us all children again."

Listening is an attitude of the heart; a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals. J. Isham

We are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full. Marcel Proust

It is sweet to mingle tears with tears; Grievs when they wound in solitude, wound more deeply. Seneca

"The friend who holds your hand and says the wrong thing is made of dearer stuff than the one who stays away." Barbara Kingsolver

Henry Ward Beecher who in the year of his death, 1887, said, "Now comes the mystery."

Edward Hays, page 123, God is forever beckoning to us saying, "You are my beloved."

L'Engle, March 2, "But a child – Mr. Jenkins asked. One small child – why is he so important? It is the pattern throughout Creation. One child, one man, can swing the balance of the universe."

March 4 "If we are numbered, not named, we are less than human. ...When we respond to our names, or call someone else by name, it is already the beginning of a community expressing the image of God. To call someone by name is an act of prayer."

October 7 "But the happiness offered us by the Beatitudes is not material; it is more spiritual than physical, internal than external; and there is an implication which I find very exciting that the circle of blessing is completed only when man blesses God, that God's blessing does not return to him empty. This completing of the circle is difficult for adults to comprehend, but is understood intuitively by children. Our youngest child,

when he was a little boy, used to have intimate, leisurely, and long conversations with God. And one night this little boy, when he had asked God to bless family and friends and animals, said, 'And God! God bless you, too.'

"It is worth noting that the most blessed events in Christ's life emerged out of the sacred dark: his birth upon a midnight clear, his death under a glowering sky and his resurrection from the pitch-black tomb. The dark is not just a hiding place for evil, it is also filled with divine potential!"

Fitz "God's creative power transmitted to humankind is a spectacular blessing. For God is bringing us into being, and it did not have to be so!"

When Faiths Collide by Martin Marty: One of the most beautifully written portions of the book speaks of the gifts of true hospitality. "The important point is this: during the time that either of us is within the gate or under the roof of the other who is strange to us, much occurs. We greet, eat, gesture, listen, speak differently because of the presence of the other, become sensitive to the changes we must make in our own outlook and community, and emerge as different beings than we were before the possibly tense but often enjoyable experience of mutual hospitality." Page 130

Marty quotes Darrell Fasching, "To welcome the stranger ... inevitably involves us in a sympathetic passing over into the other's life and stories and a coming back into our own life and stories enriched with new insight. To see life through a story which requires us to welcome the stranger is to be forced to recognize the dignity of the stranger who does not share our story." Beyond Absolutism and Relativism: The Utopian Promise of Babel in *The Ellul Forum*, January 1994, Issue 12, Department of Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL., p. 9. Quoted by Wiggins, *In Praise of Religious Diversity*, p. 7.

Albert Einstein once reflected on the purpose of man's existence: "Strange is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to a divine purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: That we are here for the sake of others...for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day, I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of people, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received."

"Keep away from the wisdom that does not cry
The philosophy that does not laugh
And the greatness that does not bow before children." Gibran

You are “a breath of the power of God...a reflection of the eternal light...more splendid than the sun.”⁴

“If you love listening you will learn. If you lend an ear, wisdom will be yours.”⁵

“Man is but a network of relationships, and these alone matter to him.”⁶

“In talking together, both sides, the accompanying and the accompanied, experience something new. Those who accompany help the grieving, so as to support and encourage them, and those accompanied teach the others by telling their own experience. So the first question is not ‘How can I help?’, or ‘What shall I say?’ but ‘What does he or she want to tell me?’ Listening to each other and talking to each other then generates a dialogue in the face of death and with the pain of grief, until the loss can be accepted and, through a transformation, a new community with the dead comes into being. Grief for the one lost can be transformed into gratitude for what has been experienced. The fellowship with the beloved person doesn’t have to be broken off; it can be transformed in such a way that we live with them, just as formerly they were a part of our own lives, and the community shared with them does not have to be forgotten.”⁷

⁴ Rupp, *The Star in My Heart*, 51.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶ Antoine de Saint-Exupery, quoted in Thomas Attig, *How We Grieve*, 128.

⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *In the End - The Beginning*, 124-125.