

Grief

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that she did not make much of an effort to go to church during that time. When she did attend Mass, Bartlett said, she felt she was just going through the motions.

Like most grieving people who experience anger, Bartlett said she knew she had to deal with her hostility because it was also producing feelings of guilt.

"I knew I had to let it out," she acknowledged.

Bartlett said she finally managed to vent her emotions through the help of her husband, Bill, who was then her fiancé.

"I started going back to church, and it was really my husband who helped get me there, and now I'm getting on with my life," remarked Bartlett, a parishioner of St. Mary's Church in Rochester.

A disease rather than God was the target for anger experienced by Sharon Penafeather following the death of her son.

Patrick Penafeather was a freshman at Niagara College when he died of spinal meningitis on Feb. 16, 1988. "I was mad at meningitis, not at God," his mother recalled.

In fact, Penafeather noted that grief strengthened her faith. "If I didn't have my faith, I don't know what I would have done," said the 41-year-old Wounded Healers' group member.

Since the death of loved ones causes the greatest and most unavoidable pain the average person experiences in his or her lifetime, the period of bereavement is the time in which many Catholics rely most on their faith, according to those interviewed by the *Catholic Courier*.

"I look at people who say they have no faith and I think, 'Who do they turn to?'" Penafeather remarked. "Even with faith, sometimes you think you are going crazy."

And at times such as that, it is extremely important for those who are grieving to reach out to others for help, according to Therese Goodrich.

Goodrich, national director of the bereavement support group Compassionate Friends, Inc., brings personal experience to her work. Explaining that people need to share their grief with those who have gone through similar experiences, she said her organization — an international support group with 636 U.S. chapters — provides such understanding and friendship for bereaved parents and siblings.

When Goodrich's 15-year-old daughter, Paula, died after being hit by a car in 1971, Goodrich and her husband began reaching out to similarly stricken parents at their parish, St. Irenaeus in Park Forest, Ill.

Goodrich said that after Paula's death, she was so busy taking care of her other eight children — and talking with them about Paula's death — that she had little time to be angry about her loss.

"I never really got angry at God," Goodrich said. "When I felt angry, I focused my anger on the person driving the car (that killed Paula). But I don't think anger is a test of your faith. It's OK to be angry with God."

Goodrich recalled that the most important realization she came to following her daughter's death was the affirmation of her faith in the resurrection. Although she always thought she believed in God's

promise of the resurrection on the last day, only when she was tested did Goodrich learn that she really *did* believe.

"It was like being reborn again in my acceptance of the resurrection. It was a big leap in my faith," she said.

Goodrich noted that her strong faith gave her a great deal of courage during a time when she needed it so badly.

"I don't think that you will find any parent who has lost a child that doesn't believe in the resurrection. You know deep, deep in your heart that you will be with your child again. And it has to be a beautiful, beautiful place."

Perinton resident Gary Graneth likewise clings to a hope that he eventually will be reunited with his daughter Jennifer, who died in a car accident when she was 12.

The St. John of Rochester parishioner said his faith gave him insight into life and also strengthened his belief in the afterlife.

"You only hope you are doing the right thing so you could be with them," Graneth said. "You want to be with your child, happy in heaven."

Because Graneth has found comfort in his faith's promise of the resurrection, he said he cannot understand how atheists survive the death of loved ones.

"How can it be bearable?" asked the 44-year-old Graneth. "I sympathize for those people. It would be so meaningless if you didn't have a plan."

Observing that his daughter had attained the eternal reward toward which all Christians strive, Graneth, a Kodak employee, said it was his faith that pulled him through the painful ordeal of his daughter's death.

"I have a few questions to ask the good Lord when I see Him ... but I relied on my faith at that time and it really helped," explained Graneth, a member of the Compassionate Friends chapter in Perinton.

Regular church attendance similarly provided comfort for Joan Mulholland, 60, and Arlene Corsiglia, 58, two St. John of Rochester parishioners and Compassionate Friend group members who experienced the deaths of their sons.

"I always went to church, but more so after my son died. I would have felt guilty if I didn't go to church," said Mulholland, whose son, Kevin, died when he was 27. "Now I go daily, and it really carries me through the day."

Corsiglia — who converted to Catholicism at the age of 14 — said her faith was definitely strengthened when her 19-year-old son Tony died in a car accident during his sophomore year at Bowling Green University in Ohio. Corsiglia added that she was thankful for the spiritual support she received from her friends.

"So many people would say they prayed for you and you knew it," Corsiglia observed. "You know you didn't do it alone."

Although her experience differed from those of Mulholland and of Corsiglia, Barbara Mahler — whose 12-year-old daughter was dying of a rare brain disease — also saw in her healing process the action of forces beyond herself.

"I was grieving before Jacki died. I went through the grieving process before she died, and she helped me through it," noted

Mahler, 52, a member of Compassionate Friends. "The strength the Lord gives you blows my mind. You know God is working through the whole situation."

Father Farrell stressed that if mourners are deeply rooted in their Catholic beliefs, their strong faith will "sustain them over the long haul."

"Faith is not just a shot in the arm to get you over the rough spots," Father Farrell said. "It will bring you to acceptance and peace, so we can continue to live our lives."

Nevertheless, picking up the pieces is difficult for many griever, especially when people offer inappropriate comments or advice. Although statements may be made with good intentions, some remarks may prove even hurtful, according to Sister Christine Lloyd, SSJ, pastoral assistant at St. Mary's Church in Auburn.

Sister Lloyd, a member of Wounded Healers, said the caring actions of friends and acquaintances can often speak louder than words to those who are grieving. Sometimes, she said, a hug or the touch of a hand provides great comfort.

"Or say something like, 'I don't know what to say,' or 'I care,'" suggested Sister Lloyd, whose father died of a heart attack when she was 16.

Although Sister Lloyd said onlookers typically expect the bereaved to overcome their sorrow within a few months, she said this is an unrealistic expectation.

"Around three or four months later when the bottom really falls out and you are at your lowest energy level and your greatest grief, people ask if you are over it yet," the pastoral assistant noted.

Grief and a lack of interest in life made those months virtually unbearable for Nancy F. Guido, whose husband, Al, died of a heart attack in 1977.

"I was like a piece of stone as a person," she recalled. "We met when I was 16, and when you lose someone that close,

your life stops."

A parishioner of St. Mary's Church in Auburn and a member of Wounded Healers, Guido recalled one night during those months when she was sitting home alone watching television and feeling extremely sorry for herself.

"I remember lying there saying, 'Why was I picked? Why me?'" she said.

Then, all of a sudden, a door in the house fell off its hinges. Before his death, Guido had repeatedly asked Al to fix the door. She said she began laughing "because only Al would have done that," and found great comfort in the incident because it was a sign of her husband's presence in her life.

Penafeather, a parishioner at Sacred Heart Parish in Auburn, said she came to her own comforting realization in an appreciation of nature.

She had frequently wondered why she often broke down in tears at the sight of natural beauty, such as a body of water, a sunny day or a full moon. "Then I thought maybe it's part of the beauty that Pat is experiencing every day," she said with a smile. "After you spend so many years with a person, how can they leave you? I don't think they completely do."

Like Guido and Penafeather, many griever have found their individual ways — coupled with faith — that help them to deal with their losses. Although strong faith does not eliminate the pain, it provides a sense of hope, according to Father Farrell.

"Faith doesn't take away the grief, but it takes away the need for despair," he noted.

Mahler agreed that although her faith has strengthened her spirit, the pain of her loss at times has been excruciating.

"Just because you have faith, doesn't mean you don't hurt," noted Mahler, a parishioner at St. John's of Rochester.

"But," Corsiglia quickly added, "it gives you something to cling to."

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