



Grief & Bereavement Ministry

Catholic Courier
Special Section
November 2, 1995

Support in shared grief

Numerous bereavement groups responded to a recent *Courier* request sent to parishes and Catholic institutions in the Diocese of Rochester for support group information. Anyone interested in attending a meeting should call the group's coordinator to confirm the time and place. The groups welcome anyone and several offer educational resources. A listing follows.

Bereavement Support Ministry, St. Ambrose Church, 25 Empire Blvd., Rochester, 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday of every month in rectory. Coordinator is Sister Roberta Rodenhouse, RSM, pastoral associate, 716/288-5000.

New Dawnings bereavement support group, Holy Cross Church, 4492 Lake Ave., Rochester, 7:30 p.m. fourth Tuesday of every month, in Holy Cross School cafeteria. Coordinator is Sister Kathleen O'Connell, RSM, 663-2244.

Bereavement Support Group, St. Philip Neri Church, 1782 Clifford Ave., Rochester, in rectory at 1 p.m. third Thursday of the month. Coordinator is Mary Linder, parish visitor, 482-2400.

Caring and Sharing Bereavement Group, Holy Rosary Church, 414 Lexington Ave., Rochester, 10:11:30 a.m. the third Thursday of every month, in rectory. Coordinator is Sister Carole Proia, SSJ, 254-8180.

Mending Hearts, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, 1089 Joseph Ave., Rochester, 5:30-6:30 p.m. third Monday of the month, in rectory. Coordinator is Sister Livia Ann Ruocco, RSM, 467-2725. **Porpourri Group, an extension of Mending Hearts, offers different spiritual emphasis, 11 a.m. second Wednesday of every month.**

Bittersweet for widowed/separated/divorced persons, Holy Ghost Church, 220 Coldwater Road, Gates, 24 p.m. second and fourth Sundays of the month in the North Room in the church. Coordinator is Elizabeth Reinholz, 594-8202.

Bright Horizons support group for divorced/separated/widowed people, St. Theodore's Church, 168 Spencerport Road, Gates, 7 p.m. first Thursday of each month in the Parish Life Center. President is Mary L. Battisti, 429-6576.

Church of the Good Shepherd Bereavement
Continued on page 4A



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

From left, Madeline Bloom, Helen McMerney, and Monica Kermis listen to Mary Wegenka from Park Ridge Hospital discuss health care proxies during a New Dawnings' bereavement support group meeting at Rochester's Holy Cross Church Oct. 24.

Grieving need help to heal the hurt

By Kathleen Schwar
Copy editor/Staff writer

It's not how long you grieve; it's how well, two Auburn grief consultants say. Grieving a loss, particularly a death, is "actually the only way to get through it well," Sister Christine Lloyd, SSJ, said. "You are entitled to feel the pain."

Her associate, Jeannette Berretta, R.N., added, "For as long as it takes."

The two founded the Wounded Healers' Bereavement Support Group in Auburn in 1989 to help people deal with the grief process. Their credentials include certification in thanatology (the study of death) from the New England Center for Death Education at Mount Ida College, Newton Center, Mass.

They hold open monthly support meetings and also offer help to businesses and schools.

No matter how you "prepare" or expect to grieve, the actual grief is far different, they said. In many cases, they step in with advice after a death — for instance, at Union Springs High School last spring after a student died in a fall from Moonshine Falls southwest of Auburn; at a Syracuse insurance company last summer after a young mother died in childbirth; and even for a daughter 30 years after she

watched her mother jump from a bridge.

But the two consultants do prepare people to be supportive whenever a death occurs.

Sister Lloyd and Berretta are working with St. Joseph's School in Auburn (formerly St. Mary's and Blessed Trinity schools), for instance, to develop a protocol which should be updated every year, they said.

A teacher will learn, for instance, not to throw away

poetry a student wrote before committing suicide in the belief that it would only hurt the family. An employer will learn not to clean out a deceased employee's desk, but to offer family members the opportunity to do so. Priests can learn to let mourners take active parts in funerals — maybe closing the casket, or putting the pall over the casket, or having a child participate in an offertory procession.

And anyone, no matter what her or his role, can learn how important it is to lend an ear to someone in grief. If grief is stifled, Berretta said, "It can piggyback on itself" after the next trauma.

Grief is often stifled, perhaps unintentionally:

• A man whose wife died of multiple sclerosis after 27 years of marriage will never forget hearing, "You should have expected this."

• A father whose son died working on a car that crushed him will never forget his supervisor asking, "Now is everything squared away?"

"The more we work with bereavement, the more horror stories we hear how things are done," Sister Lloyd said. "Our whole culture is not that comfortable with death and being supportive. We give people three days and they're supposed to be back to work."

"People feel inadequate because they can't fix it," she continued. "Sometimes the ones you are missing are your best friends; they aren't coming around."

Some people don't even send cards later, afraid they "will remind the person their loved one is dead," she said, noting, "It isn't just a fear of death, but a fear of intimacy. It is sacred ground to be on with people."

Today, the father and mother of the youth crushed by a car in 1983 join Sister Lloyd and Berretta as core team members of Wounded Healers'. Newell and Peggy Cole of Seneca Falls listened to Union Springs High School students during counseling there and also help at monthly support group meetings attended by people from as far away as Palmyra and Geneva. (Meetings are at 7:30 p.m. the first Tuesday of each month at St. Joseph's School's

17 Clymer Street campus — the former St. Mary's School.)

"Years ago there wasn't that type movement in any place," Newell Cole said. "Everybody is there for a short period after the funeral and then they go and do their own thing. People have to move on and in most cases they have to do it on their own."

The Coles said they were fortunate that before Wounded Healers' was founded, Sister Lloyd (then youth minister at their parish, St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls) and Berretta were friends of theirs. Sister Lloyd personalized her readings at the funeral parlor and the two continued to visit the family afterward.

It helped to have someone care that their son, Mark, be remembered, the Coles said, noting that he is always in their thoughts. Their first Christmas without him, they presented checks from him to their other four children during an informal ceremony at the cemetery. It helped them realize, Peggy Cole said, that "he is still with them in spirit." Since that time, Newell Cole said, "I've read that grieving is work. You have to make a concentrated effort to search out the answers, to talk with people."

Parishioners of St. Ambrose Church in Rochester realize
Continued on page 4A