

# Priest explores men's experiences of grief

By Mark Pattison  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — There are too few books about grief written by men and meant for men, said a priest who has written such a book.

As far as Father Robert Miller knows, his is one of only two on the market. And the other looks at grief in a more factual and less personal way than does his own book, *Grief Quest*, published through One Caring Place, Abbey Press, St. Meinrad, Ind. 47577.

"There's a lot of common male wisdom out there on grieving," said Father Miller, a priest for 20 years. And he hopes to continue to tap into it.

To prepare, he asked several people to give their own encounters with grief. One was Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago.

"I'm sure you know his history well," Father Miller told CNS in a telephone interview from Chicago, where he is in parish ministry.

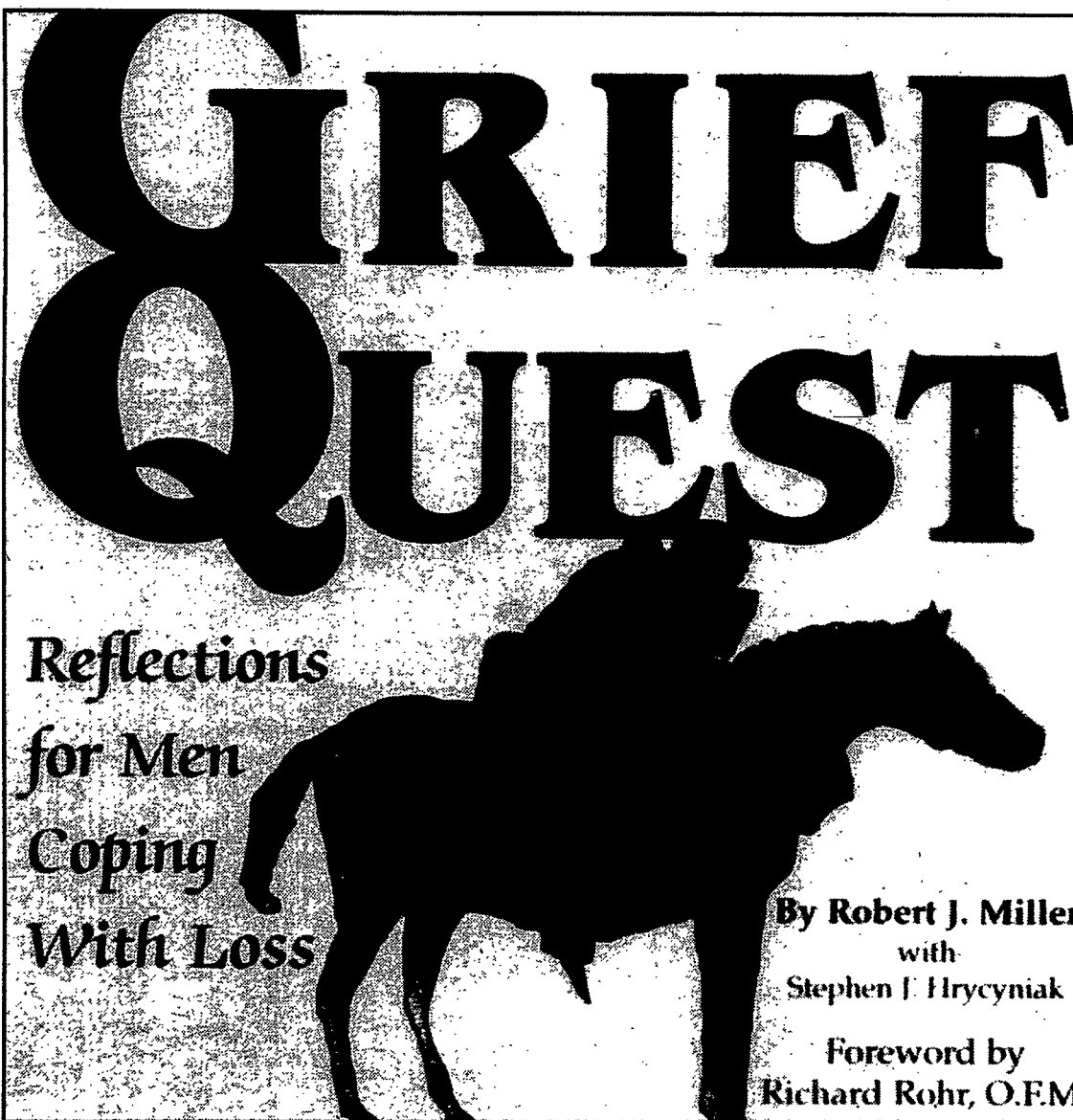
In a two-year span, Cardinal Bernardin was struck first by allegations that he had sexually abused a teenage boy years ago when he was archbishop of Cincinnati, charges later withdrawn by the supposed victim. Then, last year, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and — since the time Father Miller contacted him — has been given only a few months to live.

After asking the cardinal for an account of how he grieved, "he gave me five pages of single-spaced (typewritten) material," Father Miller said.

Father Miller's own grief quest, which he uses in the book, was the death of his father when the priest-to-be was 16 years old. "It took me a good 16, 17 years to really grieve it," he recalled.

"As I look back on it, there was nothing out there for me. (*Grief Quest*) is the kind of book I wished I would have had the chance to read" back then, Father Miller said.

Grief is "not efficient," but instead is "a process," Father Miller said. "It's not like taking your car to a garage, you've got a problem or you want to get the oil



By Robert J. Miller  
with  
Stephen J. Hrycyniak

Foreword by  
Richard Rohr, O.F.M.

CNS photo

Believing there are too few books to help men overcome grief, Father Robert Miller has written a book of reflections for men coping with loss.

changed and somebody fixes it right up for you," he said.

Yet his struggle to come to terms with the death of his father did not affect his own pastoral efficacy when dealing as a priest with others who were grieving.

"I could help others a lot better than I could help myself," Father Miller said of those times.

One inescapable fact for men, according to the priest, is that "as we get older, we seem to have more griefs, because we are more aware of them."

He said that for him it "dove-tailed" well that he could finally go through all the grieving he needed after the death of his fa-

ther, then write *Grief Quest*, and now deal with the health difficulties of his mother.

Father Miller called it "accepting the real world. You tap in not only to grief, but other things."

In the short time it has been available, *Grief Quest* has been given a good reception, especially at meetings of book retailers where Father Miller has been to promote the book. There, people have confided to him about "the restraints of being a man" and how often men find themselves without true friends.

"Two-thirds of the people who came up to me said, 'There's a man I know — a husband, an uncle — who just lost something and

they really need this book,'" Father Miller recounted. At one recent exposition, he said, "I heard a lot of men say, 'I really don't have a whole lot of friends. I have drinking buddies.'"

That doesn't bode well for men's spiritual lives either, he said.

"Spirituality means to know a deeper relationship with God," Father Miller said, but "men somehow tend to perceive church as being a woman's thing," because of the higher degree of lay women's involvement in parish life.

A Redemptorist when ordained in 1976, Father Miller recently became incardinated into

the Archdiocese of Chicago, where he had been ministering for several years.

He is a co-pastor at Holy Angels Parish there. He had been asked to be administrator when its pastor, Father John Calicott, was accused of clergy sexual abuse. The situation served as another reminder, Father Miller said, that grief can be tied not just to death but to other profound losses. When Father Calicott was closed, Father Miller said he was asked to stay on at the parish.

*Grief Quest* contains eight "Cardinal Rules of Crisis." Even though they appear at the end of the book, Father Miller urges men to read them first if necessary. They are:

- "You will survive despite your pain."
- "Self-hatred is a lie."
- "You are still beloved, valuable and worthwhile in God's eyes."
- "Your pain has been seen and redeemed by Jesus Christ on the cross."
- "One day at a time!"
- "Postpone any important life decisions until later."
- "Structure helps maintain sanity."
- "Reach out to loved ones."

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