

**DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF CARE BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY AT  
NEW YORK WORSHIP CENTER CHURCH IN JAMAICA, NEW YORK**

A Professional project submitted to the Theological  
School of Drew University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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**DEDICATION**

In memory of my elder brother whom I long to meet in heaven

Gregory Scott Pender

September 20, 1970 – September 27, 1970

## ABSTRACT

# **DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF CARE BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY AT NEW YORK WORSHIP CENTER IN COLLABORATION WITH J. FOSTER PHILLIPS FUNERAL HOME**

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The intent of this rigorous academic and practical project was three fold. Our first intent was to provide a bible based grief support group for church and unchurched adults grieving the loss of loved ones. It was also our intent that our learning and experience would develop into a viable grief support ministry at New York Worship Church, a ministry that is scarcely available to non-existent in most churches. Thirdly, it is our intent that this project would serve as a model helping other churches and funeral service providers to see the mutual benefits of working collaboratively to provide a similar ministry to the constituents of their communities.

The project was carried out over a six-week period, which included a weekly video seminar on a grief-related topic. The videos featured respected counselors and teachers who have faced their own grief and who share insights on how to walk through grief in a healthy way. There were also personal testimonies of people who shared their struggles and what helped them. After, each video, time was spent in small group discussion of the concepts from the video and how they apply to participant's day-to-day

struggles and life. I and other leaders from New York Worship Center Church facilitated these discussions.

The Lay Advisory Committee was carefully recruited and included among others a Licensed Funeral Director; a Licensed Social Worker, and a Practicing Attorney. These professionals not only served extremely well as co-facilitators, but their expertise and knowledge proved to enhance each session. I would be remiss not to mention that Ms. Jameison, our attorney was so committed to the integrity of the project and to those who would benefit from it, offered pro-bono legal assistance to each of the participants as they had need concerning the estates of those who had recently passed away.

By the end of the first session all involved could tell that this project was going to be a tremendous success. It was also confirmed through comments made by the participants, that the idea to bring this opportunity to the community as a collaboration between New York Worship Church and J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home was not only a very smart idea, but a very considerate way to give back to the community. This project demonstrated the effectiveness and projected outcomes of the Congregational Growth and Community Development area of study. By identifying a need within our local community and by finding a way to meet that need with a community partner helped to demonstrate what it means to live out the gospel and share the love of Jesus Christ. I and the Lay Advisory Committee members were all transformed by this experience, but more importantly the participants received the necessary tools, and ministry that was needed to help them move from mourning to joy.

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Next, I am eternally grateful all of the persons who served on my Doctoral Advisory Committee (DAC). I am indebted to each of them for their personal sacrifices and contribution to the success of this most important ministry initiative. They are listed alphabetically:

Mr. Anthony Carthan, Ms. Shawneequa Dicks,  
Ms. Kerry Jameison, Rev. LaKeisha Merrick-Pender,  
Mr. Charles Shell, Chair; Ms. Gail Sumler, Ms. Cher Windam

Also to the New York Worship Center Church family, thanks for allowing me to serve along side you as we endeavor to continue the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ.

Finally, I want to thank my partner in life and ministry, Rev. LaKeisha Merrick-Pender whose love and support has motivated me to pursue all that God has purposed for my life. Thank for pushing me. I Love You!



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The only thing more dreadful than the thought and anticipation of one's own mortality is the actual death of someone we love. Whether, it is an expected death do to old age, some chronic illness or the result of something tragic and/or unexpected; death disrupts our lives and in many ways leaves us to excogitate and struggle through the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and even financial carnage the loss of loved ones can leave behind. The research for this thesis argues that human loss is the worst type of loss any human can experience. Separation through death has such a profound effect on the human condition it is no wonder the writer to the Corinthians wrote, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death."<sup>1</sup> Death is indeed, humanity's worst enemy, and until it is destroyed at the second coming of Christ, grieving peoples will need help and guidance as they journey through the vicissitudes associated with grief.

This Doctor of Ministries Project, a collaboration between New York Worship Center Church and J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home seeks to develop a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry that will not only provide hospitality, fellowship with others, and pastoral care; most importantly it will provide a bible-based curriculum that is designed to help grieving people move from mourning to Joy.

The vision for this project is the outgrowth of my bi-vocational work and experience as a licensed funeral director and ordained minister I have had the privilege

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1. 1 Corinthians 15:26, NIV.

of working with some of the most prestigious funeral service firms in New York City, and over the span of two decades I have personally assisted thousands of families with the arduous task of making final arrangements for their deceased loved ones. Much of my preparation for the pastoral ministry came about not in the context of a parish setting as such, but in conference rooms with grieving and distraught families, counseling and guiding them through the worst of times in their lives.

To that end, when I entered Drew Theological School as a seminary student, I arrived with a few years of pastoral experience. Therefore, when it was time to choose a site for supervised ministry, I thought it would probably be a good idea to choose a non-parish setting. After discussing this with my advisor, it was decided that I would do this work at J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, where I work as a licensed funeral and manager of operations. The funeral home is a family owned and operated business that was established in 1929, and is situated just minutes from our church, and conducts between five and six hundred funerals annually. The firm is located in Jamaica Queens, New York and serves a predominately African American community.

Given the large number of unchurched individuals and families served by the funeral home, my supervised ministry project was to establish an in-house pastoral care program, the like of which, to my knowledge is the first of its kind to be offered in a funeral home. The purpose of this ministry was to offer pastoral care, counseling, prayer and home visits on an on-going basis to families served by the firm whom for the most part do not have a pastoral relationship of their own through a local church. Once up and running a select number of local pastors from the community would be invited to share in this ministry on a rotational basis. The benefits would be mutually beneficial. The

funeral home would enhance its over-all customer service; immediate no-cost pastoral care would be available to those who request it; and the pastors involved in maintaining this ministry would have access to a tremendous evangelistic/outreach opportunity to possibly gain new members for their churches.

Although this ministry has been a great success, I began to sense that something was missing. The brokenness I observed in the people who came in and out of the doors of our funeral home required something more than an occasional prayer and or word of encouragement. Something more robust and specific to meeting the needs of grieving people was in order. This is when I discovered “GriefShare.” GriefShare is a bible-based curriculum designed to provide grief support in a community setting with others. Each weekly presentation features insights from Christian experts and personal stories of people grieving a death. The curriculum is currently being used in many of churches across America.

The research conducted for this thesis, along with my own observation and experience, provides several key insights that reflect the profound effects of grief on the human condition as well as the validity and relevance for this project. The first of which is, no matter how much we dislike thinking and talking about death, all of us, before our own demise will most likely experience the death of a loved one. The sense of loss and grief associated with these experiences and how we deal with them will be uniquely our own. While some will easily go through the grieving process, accept the loss, and move on with relative ease other people will get stuck, unable to move forward. Death is no respecter of persons and neither are the gripping effects of grief.

Another key insight observed in the research for this project is that those who know what to expect emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually tend to have a healthier grieving process. According to the American Cancer Society,

When a loved one dies, it affects all their family members and loved ones. Each family finds its own ways of coping with death. A family's attitudes and reactions are shaped by cultural and spiritual values as well as by the relationships among family members. It takes time for a bereaved family to regain its balance."<sup>2</sup>

In the act of rebalancing it is necessary to understand the difference between grieving, bereavement and mourning. When a death occurs, grief is the natural response and should be expected. Grieving involves feeling many different emotions over time, all of which help the person come to terms with the loss of a loved one. Bereavement is what a person goes through when someone close to them dies. It is the state of having suffered a loss. Mourning is the outward expression of loss and grief. Mourning includes rituals and other actions that are specific to each person's culture, personality, and religion. Bereavement and mourning are both part of the grieving process.

Understanding that individuals will not all experience bereavement and mourning in exactly the same way should also help with understanding that the time it may take to go through the grieving process also varies. The problem with this is "Many people think of grief as a single instance or short time of pain or sadness in response to a loss -- like the tears shed at a loved one's funeral. But grieving includes the entire emotional process of coping with a loss, and it can last a long time. Normal grieving allows us to let a loved

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2. American Cancer Society, Coping With the Loss of A Loved One, <http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/cid/documents/webcontent/002826-pdf.pdf>. (accessed November 7, 2016)

one go and keep on living in a healthy way.”<sup>3</sup> However, the fact is, “grieving is painful and it’s important that those who have suffered a loss be allowed to express their grief. It’s also important that they be supported throughout the process. Each person grieves differently. The length and intensity of emotions people go through varies from person to person.”<sup>4</sup>

I have personally witnessed individuals who had seemed to have gotten over the worst of their grief, only to watch them digress back into deep despair. This happens because it is normal for people to feel better for a while, only to become sad again. “Sometimes, people wonder how long the grieving process will last for them, and when they can expect some relief. There is no answer to this question, but some of the factors that affect the intensity and length of grieving are: 1) The kind of relationship one had with the person who died, 2) The circumstances of their death, 3) One’s own life experiences.”<sup>5</sup>

A thorough analysis of the grieving process reveals the following: People may go through many different emotional states while grieving. The first feelings usually include shock or numbness. Then, as the person sees how his or her life is affected by the loss, emotions start to surface. The early sense of disbelief is often replaced by emotional upheaval, which can involve anger, loneliness, uncertainty, or denial. These feelings can come and go over a long period of time. ...People have many different ways of dealing with loss, so there may be many different, equally intense emotions. During this time, grief tends to come in waves of distress. The person may seem disorganized. He or she may have trouble remembering, thinking, and doing day-to-day activities. This can last for weeks to months. Some or all of the following may be seen in a person who is grieving:

- Socially withdrawn

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3. Ibid., American Cancer Society.

4. Ibid., American Cancer Society.

5. Ibid., American Cancer Society.

- Trouble thinking and concentrating
- Become restless and anxious at times
- Loss of appetite
- Look sad
- Feels depressed
- Dreams of the deceased (or even have hallucinations or “visions” in which they briefly hear or see the deceased)
- Lose weight
- Trouble sleeping
- Feels tired or weak
- Becomes preoccupied with death or events surrounding death
- Dwells on mistakes, real or imaged, that he or she made with the deceased
- Feels guilty for the loss
- Feels all alone and distant from others
- Expresses anger or envy at seeing others with their loved one

During this time, a grieving person needs a lot of emotional support. Finding support can be the key to a person’s recovery and acceptance of the loss.<sup>6</sup>

To that end, the importance of community cannot be overemphasized. Whenever a death takes place, it is important for those left behind to be able to lean on other people who care about them. Drawing loved ones close rather than avoiding them, and accepting professional assistance when available is crucial to the healing process. To suggest that the loss of a loved one is a traumatic event in anyone’s life is an

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6. *ibid.*, American Cancer Society.

understatement. In fact, when these losses happen they happen in community and all who were connected to the decedent are impacted. This is why the American Institute of Health Care Professionals, argues “Traumatic loss affects the social structure. Since we are social creatures by nature, the butterfly effect blows through the winds of life and affects every aspect of humanity.”<sup>7</sup> Since grief happens to us all in the communities we live in, it is only right to assume that opportunities to provide help, guidance, love and whatever else may be needed by those who are affected by grief be made available in community. The Community of Care Bereavement Ministry being initiated through this project hopefully will serve as an example of this. If we are successful in reaching our goal scores of people will be prevented from experiencing more difficult issues such as complicated grief and unresolved grief, areas of study, which are not the focus of this thesis.

In preparation to launch the project I will send out letters to all of the families served by J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home within six months of the first session. This will equate to about two hundred and fifty letters. Statistically we should get a favorable response of about 10 to 20%. If our prediction is correct, our first group will consist of 25 to 50 participants. As a way of giving back to the community the funeral home will cover the cost of materials for all participants. New York Worship Church will provide refreshments and any other assistance as may be needed including transportation to each weekly sessions.

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7. The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Grief Counseling Certification: Grief Counselors and Traumatic Loss Effects On Society, <http://www.alhcp.org>. (accessed November 7, 2016)

Participants will meet for six weekly sessions. During a typical meeting, they will view a 30-40 minute video. Each video features Christian grief-recovery experts and the stories of people who've healed from the death of a loved one. After each video, participants will discuss what they've have learned. They will also have opportunities to share the challenges and victories they're experiencing. Each GriefShare participant will also receive a workbook. Its daily Bible study helps participants discover what God says about their situation. During group discussion, participants will be encouraged to share what they're learning from their Bible study.

Although funeral homes are not known to offer services beyond what is associated with burials and cremations. By offering this program in collaboration with New York Worship Center Church we hope to change this trend by encouraging other funeral homes and churches to work collaboratively to offer a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry or some other resource to help grieving people move from mourning to joy.



## CHAPTER TWO: BECOMING A BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR

### TWO JOBS ONE MINISTRY

I first started thinking strongly about becoming a funeral director while in middle school. Even for me, it seemed a bit of a strange idea, considering, my family was not in the funeral business. At that same time, I also felt compelled to pursue ordained ministry as my vocation. Being a teenager, I was conflicted and felt confused at times about which of these noble professions best suited my personality and natural ability. In fact, a perusal through my high school yearbook would prove, the people who knew me best, knew that I would most likely pursue one or the other. This is because I talked about both professions with great passion and enthusiasm.

While many people never follow through with what they said they'd be when asked, "*what do you want to be when you grow up?*" Either through divine inspiration, determination or both, I became both a licensed funeral director and eventually an ordained minister. My experience as a funeral director has had a profound impact on my preparation for ordained ministry. I have often wondered how different my life and ministry would have been had I not become a funeral director first. It's amazing how much an aspiring minister can learn about ministry from funeral directors. For example, I am a better preacher because of the preaching I have heard at funerals over the years. Having made thousands of funeral arrangements, I have acquired tremendous interpersonal, communication, leadership and management skills. I have also learned to

be genuinely compassionate, empathetic and a good listener. These skills and qualities naturally engender me to care for and comfort others.

In some religious circles, “bi-vocational ministry is not looked upon favorably. In fact, bi-vocational ministry is revered by some as “second-class” ministry; performed by people who don’t have the gifts to serve a larger church. At times, those who don't understand the need for bi-vocational ministers question our commitment to ministry. Some continue to refer to us as “part-time” preachers.”<sup>1</sup> However, these stereotypes are simply not accurate. Not all bi-vocational pastors are bi-vocational because the churches they serve cannot afford to bring them on full-time. Neither are we bi-vocational because of a lack of commitment. Nothing can be farther from the truth.

Throughout scripture, we can find a number of individuals who worked bi-vocationally or “wore many hats” in order to fulfill the work that God had assigned to them. For example, Samuel worked as prophet, priest and judge; David was a musician, King, and military commander; Paul was an Apostle and tent-maker. As a matter of fact, one of the most successful and extraordinary bi-vocational pastors of the 21st century is my pastor, the Reverend Dr. Floyd H. Flake, Senior Pastor of the Greater Allen AME Cathedral of New York. While pastoring the 57th largest church in America, Pastor Flake served as a United States Congressman and thereafter, President of Wilberforce University. His work not only transformed Southeast Queens, New York, a community once ravaged by the drug epidemic of the eighties and early nineties. He also led efforts to complete a number of housing and community development projects. Rev. Flake then went on to use his wisdom and experience to revitalize Wilberforce University, his once

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1. Dennis Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry* (Nazarene Publishing House. Kindle Edition, 2014). Kindle Locations 59-61.

struggling alma mater. Rev. Flake's work as a bi-vocational minister continues to serve as a model for pastors and leaders all over the United States.

As I have already stated, my journey to becoming a bi-vocational pastor began when I was in middle school. I was raised in the church, and the work of the church has always been very important to me. Over the years, I served my local congregation in many capacities such as musician, Sunday school teacher and youth leader, and I'd like to think that each of these responsibilities have also contributed to my overall professional development. It was through that work that, I began to sense what I considered to be God's call to the ministry. However, I was still very much interested in pursuing a career in funeral service. What I needed to do was to discern God's desire of me.

While working through those issues, my interest in funeral service was being further developed under the influence of the late James A. Perkins. Mr. Perkins was the owner of a local funeral home in the city where I grew up. Beyond his robust personality, what impressed me most about Mr. Perkins was his compassion for the people he served. Mr. Perkins was the consummate professional. He was also very charismatic and he treated everyone with respect. He would never turn a grieving family away because of their inability to pay for his services. Mr. Perkins was very generous and well-loved in the community. I thought of him as a kind of a celebrity. Mr. Perkins could hardly walk from his office to the corner with a passerby honking their horns, waving and shouting pleasantries toward him. After school, he allowed me to shadow his staff in order to learn as much as I could about the funeral business, giving me the exposure I needed to solidify my decision to pursue funeral service as a career.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the influence of my parents and the role they played in helping me to realize my potential and ability to do whatever I set my mind to do. As entrepreneurs themselves, I learned first-hand what faith; prayer and hard work can produce. My parents gave me my entrepreneurial spirit and by their own example set a high standard excellence. What I learned from my parents growing up is what Anne Wimberly talks about in her book *Soul Stories, African American Christian Education*. She says “we learn and mature as persons, and grasp meanings of liberation and our vocation or purpose in life in caring, face-to-face human relationships in family and community.”<sup>2</sup> My parents, Mr. Perkins and the many men and women in my home church who helped to nurture my faith collectively helped to set me on the path toward bi-vocational ministry and for each of them I am eternally grateful.

Once I graduated from high school, instead of going directly mortuary school in New York City where I had been accepted, I decided to enlist in the United States Air Force and attend mortuary school in North Carolina. At least that was the plan. The amazing thing is how everything came together in the end. When I arrived at Pope Air Force Base, I was given a job that I didn't really like, but it afforded me the opportunity to work at night and study mortuary science full-time at a local college during the day. For two years I was able to attend school without interruption, while serving on active duty during the height of the Gulf War. All the while I rejoiced knowing “the steps of a

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2. Anne Wimberly, *Soul Stories, African American Christian Education*, (Nashville: Abington Press, 2005), 2.

good man are order by the Lord".<sup>3</sup> By this time, I was confident that every decision that I made was leading in the path that God had purposed for my life.

Eventually, I completed both my military service and mortuary science degree within a couple of months of each other and then joined my twin brother in New York, who had also decided to become a funeral director, to begin my career in funeral service.

Through the years, I have worked for some of the most prestigious funeral service firms in New York City. I have been involved with thousands of funerals. I have heard just as many sermons and have witnessed practically every religious funeral rite and/or ritual there is. All of which has helped me to confirm my call to bi-vocational ministry. I no longer felt the need to hold in juxtaposition Christian ministry and funeral service as an either/or. Over time God has revealed to me, though I have two jobs, I have yet one ministry and it has been a great joy to serve the church and the community in this dual role.

Through my work as a funeral director I have been able to live out the gospel in very unique way. Jacquelyn Taylor, Executive Director at New England Institute at Mount Ida College and former President of American Board of Funeral Service Education wrote about the most important work that funeral directors provide in every community around this nation and around the world. She writes:

There can be no greater endeavor than that of serving one's fellow human beings at a time of great need. There is no higher calling than to do things for people that they cannot do for themselves. There is nothing more rewarding than creating peace and order from turmoil and chaos. This is the privilege that the funeral director has every day of his or her professional career. We are honored that grieving families entrust to us all that remains of a treasured person. It is a trust that must be kept inviolate. Because of our connection to the ultimate mystery and the fact that the funeral director does what only a handful of people worldwide do,

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3. Psalm 37:23

our occupation is frequently misunderstood and subjected to caricature. But we perform a valuable—even vital—service. We care for the living by taking care of the dead.<sup>4</sup>

When I think of my journey and how I came to be a bi-vocational pastor, I think of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who once wrote “life is a journey, not a destination”.<sup>5</sup> I believe this is even true as it relates to choices we make about our careers and the work we spend our lives doing. Through the process of discernment and discovering we can realize God’s purpose for our lives, hopefully we’ll find ourselves doing meaningful and purposeful work that glorifies God and edifies others. This is exactly what I hoped to accomplish through this Community of Care Bereavement Project.

My years of experience as a licensed funeral director and pastor has given me a unique perspective and understanding as it relates to the diverse needs of people grappling with grief due to the death of a loved one. The purpose of this project is to draw upon what I have learned theologically and practically through my studies and experience to provide a bible-based grief support ministry that will facilitate healing and restored hope and faith in the lives of grieving adults.

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4. Robert G. Mayer, *Embalming, History, Theory, and Practice*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), XV.

5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *GoodReads*, <http://www.goodreads.com> (accessed September 19, 2016)

### CHAPTER THREE: THE COLLABORATION

Reflecting on her own experience with grief after the death of her mother, Carleen Brice in her book, *Lead Me Home: An African American's Guide through the Grief Journey* writes...

After she died, I hurt more than I ever thought possible. I sobbed so hard at times that I was unable to stand, or even sit up, often collapsing on the floor in a pool of tears. I was scatterbrained, forgetting where I was going while driving down the street. What mind I had left was full of fear. I expected everyone I loved to die at any moment. And when I wasn't angry, I felt guilty for not being a better daughter.

My reactions were part a combination of feelings, thoughts and actions known as the grief process. I've since come to think of grief as a journey—a strange odyssey with a brutal beginning, and interminable, desperate middle and a spirit-restoring end. On this journey, we leave the safety of all that we have known and travel through terrifying, unfamiliar lands.<sup>1</sup>

Carleen's experience is reminiscent of what many people experience after the death of a loved one. Another way of understanding Carleen's journey is to consider what Elizabeth Kübler Ross describes in her work as "the five stages of the grieving process."<sup>2</sup> Ross, argues that in no particular order and with possibility of repeating a stage before moving on to the next, grieving individuals will experience denial, anger,

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1. Carleen Brice, *Lead Me Home: An African American's Guide through the Grief Journey* (New York: Avon 1999), 2.

2. Elizabeth Kübler Ross, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York: Scribner 2007), 7-28

bargaining, depression and hopefully at some point acceptance. It is because of stories like Carleen's that my Doctor of Ministry Project is to develop a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry for churched and unchurched adults that is bible based and Christ centered. The project developed through collaboration between New York Worship Center Church in Jamaica, New York, where I have served as senior pastor since 2008 and the J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, also in Jamaica, where after twenty-two years of experience as a licensed funeral director, I serve as manager of operations. J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home has served the South-East Queens, New York community since 1929 and provides services for over five hundred families annually.

Why a collaboration? I chose to do a collaboration for a number of reasons, but, mainly because collaborations involve individuals and organizations that realize their potential to achieve a greater level of success by working together through a shared or common vision and mission than by working alone. Churches and funeral homes around the world share the common goal of providing care, guidance and resources to assist, help and comfort bereaved families and their friends after a loved one has passed away. The problem is that once these professionals have performed their respective duties, scores of grieving individuals and families are left to process their grief alone, without sufficient pastoral care from their pastors and church family or adequate after-care from their funeral directors.

With this in mind, as I sat through the Doctor of Ministry orientation with Dr. Carl Savage and my colleagues in the *Church Growth and Community Development* cohort the idea for this project began to germinate. However, it was during my first class, *Church Growth Shaped by Community Outreach and Mission*, taught by the Reverend



Dr. Kevin Miller, that I realized the impact this project could have on my church and community. This project would not only afford me the opportunity to share what I had learned and experienced over the years through both my vocation and profession. But a model would develop to help other churches and funeral homes that are of good rapport with one another to work collaboratively in a unified effort to bring healing and wholeness to their constituents. Getting people to move toward healing and wholeness is another way of realizing growth within the church and community. This, as Dr. Miller explained, is the learning objective for my cohort to “explore the role of community and mission in church growth while taking the premise that we must first build community before we can grow congregations.”<sup>3</sup>

This project is about doing real ministry, and real ministry is about helping people experience the love God and to trust in God in spite of the realities they face, including the reality of death. This is important because when a loved one dies many people become angry with God so much so that they reject his love and power to heal their grief. The reality is, death is all around us and we will all experience its wrath and the grief it leaves behind. Therefore, all grieving people need is a safe place to work out their feelings and issues about their faith so that healing through God’s love can be made manifest in their lives.

What safer space can there be, then space made available by a local church or funeral home where trust, mutual respect and personal relationships have been long established? It has been my experience that vulnerable people are more likely to seek out and receive help in places where they feel comfortable. To that end, one advantage I

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3. Miller, Kevin. “*Church Growth Shaped by Community Outreach and Mission.*” Lecture at Drew University, September 29, 2014

discovered was that unlike other outreach initiatives, we didn't have to worry too much about who would participate. Our church roles and funeral home databases are filled with prospects in need of a grief support ministry.

The collaborative effort between New York Worship Center and J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home is just one example of how the faith community can reach out to the wider community across many disciplines working together to advance the Kingdom of God and bring healing to people's lives. To this point, Mellisa M. Kelly argues,

The experience of grief has been a source of intriguing and curiosity throughout history, and it continues to stimulate thought and theory in various fields, church as theology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and medicine. Unfortunately, while so many fields are concerned with grief and with those who are grieving, these fields tend to function in isolation from each other. A striking example of this phenomenon is the substantial disconnection that exists between the world of ministry and the secular world of grief research, theory and care.<sup>4</sup>

What I take from this is that churches today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century need to get more comfortable doing business with secular organizations if for no other reason than the fact they are often better positioned to help with the demands of supporting relevant ministry. I have learned to resist the kind of thinking that suggests that organizations labeled as secular, means that that organization or the people that run it are evil, worldly or anti-Christ. As I think about this, funeral homes may look and feel like a church, but the truth is they are secular institutions that assist us in doing ministry in profound and meaningful ways.

Part of the motivation to do this project was my understanding of the goings on in the corporate world. As a pastor and businessman, I have learned more and more about business through my personal dealings and interactions with other business professionals

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4. Melissa M. Kelly, *Greif: Contemporary Theory And The Practice of Ministry* (New York: Tyndale 2010), 2

over the years and understand how the misunderstanding between business and church can get messy. However, effective ministry in the 21st Century demands our creativity and our willingness to take risks if we are to remain relevant. Ed Stetzer and David Putman argue,

Dynamic pastors are pioneering new methods and models to effectively reach their communities. Many churches are experiencing explosive growth because they are learning to connect with their communities. Pastors and churches are breaking the cultural codes of their communities. People are responding to biblically faithful and culturally relevant outreach.<sup>5</sup>

The integrity of this project is based on what Stetzer and Putman have researched.

The American way of doing business provides some undeniable facts. Namely, many successful corporate partnerships and collaborations have been key to the success of the American economy. For many years, American businesses have crossed sectors and industry lines to form partnerships and collaborations in efforts to leverage their ability to maximize profits and market share. This is exactly what I had hoped to accomplish through this project. Through this collaborative work, our objective is to maximize our unified potential to provide excellent pastoral care and support to grieving adults within our church and community.

Church leaders today should study personalities such as Warren Buffet, the most successful and well-respected investor in the world; Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft; movie and television producer, Brian Grazer; and Bernie Marcus, the founder of Home Depot; fashion great, Valentino; California based restaurateur, Susan Feniger; billion-dollar money manager, John Angelo; Four-time World Series title holder, Joe Torre and Studio 54 owner, Ian Schrager. Why? These men and women have become amazingly

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5. Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holmes 2006), 1.

wealthy and successful, because of the relationship they each share with a compatible business partner. These men and women understand that the road to success does not necessarily mean going at it alone. I believe whole heartily that whenever a church identifies a need within its community it should not sit idle, allowing that need to go unmet because of some limitation. Instead, that church should seek out a suitable partner who can come alongside her working together to meet the needs of the church and community.

In his book, *Working Together, Why Great Partnerships Succeed*, Michael Eisner not only provides details about the success those persons listed above, but he talks about his own success with former business partner, the late Frank Wells. Reflecting on his partnership with Frank, Eisner writes...

...my ten years with Frank Wells at Disney were the most successful of my career. Beyond the great vision we shared for the future, no one was more engaging than Frank, and no one's drive to support ideas—business and creative—was more insatiable. Along with a great group of executives we assembled, from inside Disney and our alma maters Warner Bros. and Paramount, Frank and I worked hard together and succeeded together...working with a handful of new partners—some successfully, some very successfully, some not so much—but none of the arrangements ever worked as seamlessly and effortlessly as the one I had with Frank Wells.<sup>6</sup>

As Co-CEO's of the Disney Company, Michael and Frank understood the importance of knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses and maintaining synergy. They also understood boundaries, common courtesy and respect. As Michael headed the creative side of the business, Frank headed the business side and they were careful to respect the role each played in the company. They demonstrated humility which is very

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6. Michael D. Eisner, and Aaron R. Cohen, *Working Together, Why Great Partnerships Succeed* (New York: Harper 2010), xii

important when working with others. Their love and mutual respect for each other created a working context that allowed both of these men to successfully grow, learn and discover together. Above all they understood and were committed to their shared vision and mission.

Whether one is involved in Christian ministry, community outreach or some joint business venture, shared vision and mission is essential for success. As a pastor and experienced funeral director, I can attest to the fact that many people suffer with varying degrees of unresolved grief in their lives. Because of this reality, a very special group of gifted and talented professionals from New York Worship Center Church and the incredible staff at J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home collaborated together to bring to our community, for the first time, a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry that is bible based and Christ centered. The success of this project proves that collaborative ministry has the potential to transform the way the churches do ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The first day the group met, some of the participants were extremely broken and vulnerable. One couldn't even speak. However, by the last session faith, hope, and joy had been restored and lives had been transformed by the Word and love of God. The collaboration was a huge success!

## CHAPTER FOUR: ON GRIEF

Speaking prophetically about the ministry of Jesus, the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed,

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion.*<sup>1</sup>

This passage helps us to understand that God is and has always been concerned about human suffering and loss. Carrie Doehring, in her book, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Modern Approach*, argues, "Loss is the most common source of human suffering."<sup>2</sup> In her work she identifies some of these losses as:

1. *Material losses*: which are extrinsic, that is, they involve losing assets.
2. *Relational loss*: the ending of possibilities for intimacy: physical, psychological, intellectual, aesthetic, recreational, spiritual, and sexual.
3. *Intrapsychic loss*: has to do with the loss of a symbol or ideal that may be associated with persons, places and things that play an important role within a person's inner world.
4. *Functional loss*: involves the loss of some function of the body.

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1. Isaiah 61:1-2 NRSV.

2. Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Modern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 70.

5. *Role loss*: involves the loss of a particular role, like the role of daughter, teacher therapist, or minister.
6. *Systemic loss*: involves changes in family systems, communities of faith, and other organizations.<sup>3</sup>

In all of our lives, we will experience one or more of these losses. However, no matter how profound or devastating a particular loss may be, no loss can compare to the loss of a loved one. Doehring, in her explanation of this says, “Death is the most profound example of relationship loss because there is no further opportunity to have contact with a person through one’s senses (seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling the significant other). The loss of physical interaction can be experienced as an ultimate separation from the person who has died.”<sup>4</sup> Detachment, in this way from those we love, is not only ultimate separation it is also the portal through which grief enters our lives. What then is grief then and what affect does grief have on those who have lost someone they love?

The study of grief, is too broad and complex to define it general terms. Grief must be contextualized. Therefore, for the purpose of this project, I will define grief as *the normal human response to the death (loss) of a loved one*. When someone we love dies, life, as we had known it comes to a screeching halt and everything about our lives is forever changed. Death, when it comes, either with or without warning, preparation or some level of expectation thrusts us into a state of shock, chaos and turmoil. In order to regain control of ourselves we must not merely learn to cope with our grief, but we must find the path toward healing and discovering for ourselves a new identity and vision for

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3. Ibid., 74-75.

4. Ibid., 75.

the future without the person who has died. Because people grieve differently, grief itself makes this process uniquely challenging for each person. Individual grief is as unique as our individual relationships with our loved ones.

Again, no two people experience grief in exactly the same way. The range of emotions, feelings and symptoms a grieving person may experience include but are not limited to the following: anxiety, bitterness, crying, depression, emptiness, fatigue, guilt, hopelessness, insomnia, jealousy, loneliness, mental fog, not trusting God, being overwhelmed, pretending, questioning, regret, sadness, turning to God, being unproductive, vulnerable, and worrying. From this list, we discover that there are words and phrases that represent practically every letter in the alphabet. Again, these are just a few of the sentiments that express a broad range of emotions and feelings experienced in the grieving process. The more intense ones grief is, the more difficult it is for that person to heal and move on with his/her life.

In my experience, I have seen far too many people find themselves stuck in their grief, simply because they did not understand it or how to recover from it. This is why, a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry for Adults is so important. Grieving individuals need to be taught and guided through a healthy grieving process.

What is not understood by many is that unresolved grief intensifies the problem of grief so much so that those suffering tend to have exaggerated feelings of hopeless, despair and ultimately feelings of anger and resentment toward God. However, a healthy grieving process will render one optimistic about the future, and instill within the sufferer a renewed faith, and sense of purpose. In other words, the way we handle our grief, or



maybe I should say, the way in which we allow grief to handle us, will determine whether or not, and at what rate of speed we move from mourning to joy.

No matter how many times one experiences loss, each time can feel like the first time. For this reason, help is needed in naming and identifying the range of emotions survivors feel and how they should respond to those feelings. One of the best ways to do this is to learn from the experiences of others. Listening to others express their experience with grief can be helpful in a number of ways. First and foremost, we realize that what we are experiencing is natural. Secondly, we can learn coping skills and ways to initiate a healthy grieving process. Thirdly, listening to others share their journey of faith while grieving can help increase faith in other and help other to draw nearer to God. The following vignettes illustrate these points.

Millie is a sixty-three-year-old Caucasian woman whose husband, George, died five months ago. Millie has had a sometimes harrowing life, including physical abuse and neglect as a child and removal from her family. Millie's first husband was physically and verbally abusive to her. Her second husband, George, was a kinder man, although their marriage was emotionally distant. At fifty-two, Millie decided to pursue a lifelong dream of teaching, and George supported her in this. When George became ill, a part of Millie resented having to leave her teaching job to take care of him, and she felt some relief when he died. But now the full reality of his death is hitting her. She is in terrible financial straits and may lose her home. She is not sleeping or eating well. She has had disturbing dreams in which she feels visited by George, who chastises her for feeling relief when he died. Millie feels like her life is falling apart, and she doesn't know what it all means. She is confused and terrified about her future.

Millie has struggled all her life to feel any sort of secure or loving connection to God. She feels that God was not with her when her parents abused her and she was taken away. God was not with her when she was moved from foster family to foster family. She has made her way in the world without any help from God. Millie says the closest she has ever come to naming her experience of God is the Bible story about the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to find the one that had wandered off. She is the one that has wandered off, but in her experience, the shepherd has never come to find her. Millie occasionally goes to church, and sometimes she finds the prayers and music comforting. She has not been to church since George's funeral.

Robert is a thirty-eight-year-old African American man who has been married to Grace for eleven years. He is pursuing a divinity degree as preparation for ordination. Robert and Grace tried to have a child for eight years, and they rejoiced when Desireé was born. Almost immediately, however, Desireé began to have health problems, and she died at three months of age. Robert and Grace were devastated. They turned to their community of friends, family, and church to hold them up. Robert experienced a crisis of faith as he realized that the theology he had embraced up to that point did not help him in his devastation. For many months, all he could do was to pray the psalms of lament and to rail against God. Robert felt that he had to let God know exactly how he was feeling. He also questioned whether he could be a minister and deal with people's horrible losses. Very gradually, over the past year and a half, Robert has begun to feel that he can now be a more compassionate minister because of his own heartbreak and devastation. With the help of their church community, Robert and Grace have begun to talk about creating a family.<sup>5</sup>

From these two vignettes, we get a glimpse of how traumatic grief can be in the life of individuals and families alike. Both Millie and Robert have experienced significant losses, but their response to their grief is uniquely different. The lesson here is that no two persons' grief is exactly the same. Another important observation, especially in Millie's case, is how her personal experience and historical context contributed to her suffering. However, the most important thing that we should take note of is that for both Millie and Robert, their experience with grief has challenged their faith in very profound ways. Both have questions concerning the presence of God not only in the midst of their suffering, but also about the events that led to their suffering. A healthy grieving process should not push survivors away from God, but rather it should cause grieving persons to seek after God's love and assistance.

Most people do not associate grief with process. However, contrary to popular belief, grief does not just go away with time. Unresolved grief will manifest into delayed

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5. Melissa M. Kelly, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and Practice of Ministry*: (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 1-2.

and/or complicated grief, which is much harder to overcome. The place where Millie is in her grief is different from where Robert is with his. This is largely due to the fact that Robert has allowed himself to go through a process in order to move from mourning to joy. Doehring calls this process *The Phases of Grief*.

The two phases of grief are: The *Acute Phase* and the *Long-Term Phase*. In the acute phase, grief comes initially as a shock in response to the fact that a loved one has died. During this phase, emotional imbalance is at an all-time high. One tends to feel confused and out-of-step with reality. Even though these feelings are real, the one experiencing them are usually not capable of “expressing the range and intensity of feelings that are part of the acute phase of grief... and the physiological symptoms like sleeplessness and loss of appetite may correspond to their psychological and spiritual pain.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to experience a healthy grieving process and move from mourning to joy, the acute phase must be fully experienced. It is apparent that Robert and his wife have gone through this process now find themselves coming to terms with the sudden death of their infant daughter. Initially, Robert’s faith was in turmoil and he found himself questioning his theology, which again is normal. Robert grew increasingly angry with God, mainly because, his “God why?” questions are never answered. However, because he works through the acute phase of grief, a year and a half later, Robert gains a new revelation about the future. He realizes that in his suffering, there is purpose, and that purpose is to use his experience to help others with their grief. “The more people can fully mourn their losses, the more they can redeem their suffering through the

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6. Ibid., 71.

construction of complex meanings that can bear the full weight of their suffering.”<sup>7</sup>

Robert and his wife were able to find healing because they fully mourned their loss.

To the contrary, Millie never fully experiences the acute phase of grief and therefore, she is stuck in the long-term phase of grief. Doehring argues again, “A person who is struggling with questions about the meaning of a past loss and is not experiencing the intense dynamics of acute grief is likely to be in the long-term phase of grief.”<sup>8</sup> Long before the loss of either of her husbands, Millie had experienced a number of significant losses in her life that began when she was just a child. As I mentioned earlier, context has a lot to do with how grief affects our lives. As a child Millie experienced abuse, neglect and detachment from her nuclear family. Together with the abuse and detachment, Millie continued to experience even more loss as she went from foster home to foster home. As a result, Millie never learned to grieve properly.

In the long-term phase of grief, the goal is to come to terms with the loss we have experienced through the process of meaning making. It is safe to conclude that Millie never found anything positive or meaningful as a result of her grief. What is clear though is that Millie has had a number of significant losses in her life, all of which complicated and prolonging her experience with grief.

So far, we have defined grief as it relates to the various types of human loss, with the loss of a loved one being the most profound. We understand that grief when it is initiated during the acute phase most run its course in order to avoid suffering through long-term and complicated grief. The question is, what are the steps or what’s involved in

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7. Ibid., 73.

8. Ibid., 71.

moving from acute grief to healing? And, why do some people get stuck in the long-term phase of grief? Perhaps, the best way to answer these questions is to consider the *Five Stages of Grief Theory* developed by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.

Most people who are familiar with this theory know that it details five distinct emotional stages of grief that terminally ill patients go through. The stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. It is believed that this theory also applies to people who are grieving the loss of a loved one. When a patient receives the news about a terminal illness, the most common response is “No, not me, it cannot be true.”<sup>9</sup> Well, a similar response is what is heard from the relatives of the one who has recently died, “No, she can’t be dead.” This denial is the beginning of the acute grief phase. In spite of the confirmed pathology reports concerning the terminal patient and the lifeless human remains before grieving relatives, the reality of what has happened is not yet ready to be accepted. In a healthy grieving process the denial stage is usually short lived and is soon replaced by acceptance.

When the transition from denial to acceptance is inhibited, it is usually due to feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment. This is the stage where a lot of “Why questions” develop. When answers to these questions cannot be found, anger quickly becomes rage. Even more perplexing is the ability to become envious of others who do not share our loss. When a husband dies and the surviving wife sees others, even strangers with their spouses, feelings of envy develop. A deep desire for the one who has died to return is intensified. Resentment toward others who have what we have lost and resentment toward God also develop during the anger stage.

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9. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1969), 51.

The bargaining stage is a very interesting stage because it's at this stage that grieving people begin to come to terms with their loss. Denial is no longer a reliable mechanism of defense. Being angry with others and lashing out at God is not proving to be effect either. Instead of blaming God for what has happened and the pain they feel, grieving people begin to bargain with God for relief. Most promise "a life dedicated to God" or "a life in the service of the church" in exchange for help with their grief.<sup>10</sup>

Something that must be understood about the five-stage theory is that there is no particular sequence in which a particular stage will be experienced and at any time a particular stage came be repeated. For example, one could move out of the denial stage and into acceptance and then unintentionally find themselves repeating the denial stage again. This could be a sign of the beginning of the long-term grief phase. At this point, the depression stage may have kicked in.

When the terminally ill patient can no longer deny her illness or when the widower realizes his wife is never coming home again the numbness, anger and rage will soon be replaced with a sense of great loss, which develops into depression. Not only does the loss of a loved one lead to depression, there is potential for depression to thicken with the aftermath of the loss. Examples of this aftermath include but are not limited to: mounting debt from medical bills, the loss of work do to absences, struggles with raising the children alone, having to be the sole bread-winner. These all lead to a greater degree of depression.

Finally there is the acceptance stage. Working through the previously described stages survivors will reach the stage where they are no longer angry or depressed about

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10. *bid.*, 93.

their loss. The ability to express prior feelings and to move on with life becomes easier. This is the outcome of a healthy grieving experience. Those once devastated by loss, have moved from mourning to joy. Hope concerning the future has been restored and hopefully, ones faith in God's love and promises of provision and protection has also been renewed.

Throughout this chapter, I have repeatedly made reference to delayed, unresolved and complicated grief. Although this project does not focus on these issues specifically, it is important that I stress the significance of not getting stuck in any one of these categories of grief. Each can be avoided by going through a full mourning experience. People who attempt to cope with their grief in isolation and refuse appropriate help in dealing with their grief take the risk of engaging in self-destructive behavior such as abusing drugs, excessive drinking of alcohol, violent and abusive behavior toward others and engaging in inappropriate relations. The only purpose this kind of behavior serves is to make the journey of moving from mourning to joy all the more difficult. The best thing that a grieving individual can do for his or herself is to seek out God's help through a well-trained and organized bible-based grief support group. Our Community of Care Bereavement Ministry for Adults is such a group.

## CHAPTER FIVE: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

### The Biblical Origin of Death

Arguably human beings are considered the greatest of all God's creations. As such, a close and critical reading of the creation narrative suggests that God intended to have an intimate and uninhibited relationship with human kind. When we consider all of creation, it is only the human being that is created in God's own image and likeness—both male and female. Beyond form, unique to humanity in contrast to the rest of creation is that God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”<sup>2</sup> How could this happen? How does the breath of God become the breath of life? In the Tanakh, the word *ruach* generally means wind, breath, mind, and spirit. In a living creature (*nephesh chayah*), the *ruach* is the breath, whether of animals or mankind... God

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2. Genesis 2:7 NRSV.



is the creator of *ruach* and in God's hands is the *ruach* of all mankind. In mankind, *ruach* further denotes the principle of all life that possesses reason, will and conscience. The *ruach* imparts the divine image to man, and constitutes the animating dynamic which results in man's *nephesh* as the subject of personal life."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, "*Ruach* may be understood as the Author of the animating dynamic of created order, the underlying Principle of creation, and the one that imparts the *nephesh* to the entire universe."<sup>4</sup> In other words, God is the creator and sustainer of all living things. God also in God's sovereignty determines longevity.

God as creator of all things is unquestionably a God of order. As God spoke creation into being, God did so sequentially in organized fashion. Before God created anything that was created, God first created what would be necessary to sustain that part of creation. For example, God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it."<sup>5</sup> Before this could happen, God first called into existence in sequential order those things that would allow vegetation, plants and fruit trees to sustain and produce life. In the same manner God created everything humankind would need to do the same.

After God created the first human family, God situated them in a utopian environment known as the Garden of Eden. In this environment all of the existential and spiritual needs of the human family were met. God created this environment so that the

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3. Hebrew for Christians, Hebrew Names of God: The Spirit of God as revealed in the Tanakh, [www.hebrew4christians.com/names\\_of\\_God/Spirit\\_of\\_God](http://www.hebrew4christians.com/names_of_God/Spirit_of_God). (accessed December 3, 2016)

4. Ibid., [hebrew4christians.com](http://hebrew4christians.com)

5. Genesis 1:11 NRSV.

human family would enjoy life on earth in perfect communion and fellowship with God and each other in perpetuity. Unfortunately, the human experience in the Garden of Eden would be short-lived, because of one act of disobedience.

In Genesis 3:1-19 it says, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”<sup>6</sup> Obviously, by reading the rest of the narrative the verb “you shall die” did not mean a sudden physical death, although physical cessation of life would also eventually happen. However, it did mean immediate spiritual death and change in the relationship between God and humankind which is explained later in this chapter. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.”<sup>7</sup> At that moment the relationship between God and humanity is changed forever, as is the relationship between Adam and Eve. Their relationship once filled with openness and honesty has morphed into a reality of fear, distrust and shame. Here marks the origin of death. The intimate and uninhibited relationship between the Creator and humanity has been severed.

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6. Genesis 3:1-3 NRSV.

7. Ibid., 3:6.

Not only was the human family displaced from the comforts and provisional securities of the Garden of Eden, but their act of disobedience ushered into the human experience the penalty of death, and suffering of every kind there is. Notice here the rest of the narrative which says, “And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”<sup>8</sup> This pericope of scripture suggests the dying process involves the breakdown of the physical body as a result of laborious physical labor, which is often the cause of underlying various sickness and disease.

The penalty for this act of disobedience is the reality of spiritual and ultimately the physical death of all human beings. This suggests that death was never God’s original plan for humanity. God intended for humans to live for eternity in constant fellowship and communion with God here on earth, hence the ‘*Tree of Life*’ of which the first family could eat freely. However, the good news of the gospel is that God has provided through Jesus Christ access to forgiveness and reconciliation, whereby fellowship and communion with God can be restored. This, however will not come to its fullness until *death* the final enemy of the Kingdom of God is destroyed forever at the second coming of Christ. Until such time, the reality is, physical death with all of its fury is something every person on earth will experience and suffer at the loss of loved ones.

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8. Ibid., 3:17-19

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, on grief, “Loss is the most common source of human suffering.”<sup>9</sup> And, in our lifetimes all will experience one or more of the following losses: *Material losses*: involving the loss of assets; *Relational loss*: such as physical separation, loss of memory and sexual intimacy; *Intrapsychic loss*: which has to do with the loss of a symbol or ideal that may be associated with persons, places and things that play an important role within a person’s inner world; *Functional loss*: involving the loss of some function of the body; *Role loss*: which is the loss of a particular role, like the role of daughter, teacher therapist, or minister; and *Systemic loss*: such as changes in family systems, communities of faith, and other organizations.<sup>10</sup> However, no matter how profound or devastating a particular loss may be, no loss can compare to the loss of a loved one. Doehring, in her explanation of this says, “Death is the most profound example of relationship loss because there is no further opportunity to have contact with a person through one’s senses (seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling the significant other). The loss of physical interaction can be experienced as an ultimate separation from the person who has died.”<sup>11</sup> Detachment, in this way from those we love, is not only ultimate separation it is also the portal through which grief enters our lives.

The truth is, most people, even people of faith fear death with great trepidation.<sup>9</sup> With only a few exceptions, such as the desire to avoid the experience of suffering through a long-term chronic illness or being institutionalized in order to maintain a certain quality of life, death is an unwelcomed reality for most. Most people prefer to

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9. Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Modern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 70.

10. *Ibid.*, 74-75.

11. *Ibid.*, 75.

avoid all thoughts and talk of their own demise. However, no matter how much we'd like to shy away from the topic, death is inevitable and unavoidable; as is human suffering and grief.

### The Effects of Death On The Human Condition and Society

As discussed briefly in the preceding paragraphs and in the chapter on grief. It is understood that human loss brings into the lives of those suffering the loss the worst kind of pain, sorrow and despair known to man. Historical biblical texts, provides some insight into the effects of death on the human condition and society as a whole. Since the penalty of death lies at the hands of the first family we should look at the effect of death and the experience of grief in their family.

Death is unavoidable and it invokes tremendous devastation on individuals, families, communities and nations alike. As Americans when we think about the national and international military campaigns our country has participated in the carnage left behind, the millions of lives loss and the families affected by those losses, it becomes easier to image the pervasive suffering that has taken place in our history, and the suffering that continues to affect people's lives today.

As I have stated throughout this thesis, no two people experience grief and bereavement in exactly the same way. Though there may be some underlining similarities, each experience is different. This also means the approach in providing grief support may also be different. Consider the impact of grief and suffering that was inflicted upon the residents of New York City after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The devastation was so extensive people are still seeking help from a multiplicity

of agencies and institutions in order to overcome their grief. Though two or more individuals may receive the same information, they will each hear something different and respond to that information in ways that are unique to their experience. This is one of the benefits of participating in a Grief Share group. Each person is able to receive the same information and yet move toward their healing at their own pace.

To further illustrate this point, consider the narrative about Job from the Old Testament. Job had experienced perhaps one of the most horrific episodes of grief any man could experience. In a single day, Job tragically lost all of his possessions and all of his children. No doubt Job's grief was intense and severe. However, while in the midst of his grief, Job had three friends, who for seven days sat quietly and mourned with him. They provided to Job what I like to call the 'Ministry of Presence.' I have learned over the years that there are some situations where being present is just as or even more valuable than any spoken words. Job's friends in their own way became a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry. Second to the being present is another valuable skill that needs to be employed when ministering to the bereaved; it is the skill of '*listening*' to the care seeker's story. According to Doehring, listening is the first step in the healing process.<sup>12</sup>

### The Church as a Community of Care

While most people have developed an aversion to death it remains an ever-present reality that no one can avoid or escape. However, there is much that can be done as it relates to how we care for ourselves and provide care to those who mourn and are

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12. Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Modern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 15.

challenged by grief and bereavement. The Christian community looks to the sacred text for guidance and instruction concerning how to live out their faith and theology in community. First and foremost we look to the life and ministry of Jesus, which serves as our primary example for Christian living. Jesus exemplifies the true meaning of what it means to live sacrificially, demonstrating unconditional love and concern for one's neighbor. Although death ushers into the human experience a barrage of circumstances and feelings that may seem too much to bear, the psalmist declares, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that God can act alone in interceding into the affairs of humanity, God most often does God's work through the church, the *Ecclesia* (the called out ones). The purpose of the church according to the writer of Ephesians is to use our God-given gifts to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ...to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."<sup>14</sup> What this passage says to me is that the work, function and growth of the church are based on love. The church is called to teach and demonstrate love as Jesus did especially toward the poor, the widow, and those who are suffering.

Jesus through His life and ministry teaches the church how to develop a theology for ministry that is developed out of genuine love and compassion. We learn from the gospels "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were

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13. Psalm 46:1 NRSV.

14. Ephesians 4:11-16 NRSV.

harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus was not only concerned about the existential needs of the people to whom He ministered, He was also deeply concerned for those who lost loved ones and found themselves struggling with sorrow, grief and bereavement. The New Testament provides a number of narratives that lend to the support of a grief support ministry as a legitimate work of the church. In the gospel of Mark we find Jesus responding to the outcry of a bereaved father who is grief stricken over the anticipated death of his twelve-year-old daughter. It has been said that there is no grief as that of a parent who loses a young child. I have personally witnessed the pain and agony of mothers and fathers who have held in their arms the lifeless body of an infant child, it is an awful thing to behold. Before arriving to the scene, it was announced to the father “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher anymore further?”<sup>16</sup> The mourners had gathered and the people all around were weeping and wailing over the girl’s death. However, Jesus was about to perform yet another miracle. He said to the father of the child, “Do not fear, only believe.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus dismisses the doubters from around the death scene and says to the “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about...at this they were overcome with amazement.”<sup>18</sup>

Understandably this was a unique situation that served to further establish the ministry of Jesus and to build the faith unbelievers. However, this act does not suggest that all who are faced with the challenges of a pending death or who suffer from some chronic illness

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15. Matthew 9:36 NRSV.

16. Mark 5:35 NRSV.

17. Ibid., 5:36

18. Ibid., 5:41-42



will be healed in the same way as this little girl. However, God is able and will send people into our lives who will help us to endure and get through our seasons of pain, sorrow and grief. To do this is the work and ministry of the Church.

Another New Testament example of God's grace and mercy in the midst of death, grief and sorrow recorded in Luke 7:11. In this passage, while in the town of Nain; Jesus stops the funeral procession of a young man, who was the only son of his mother who was also a widow. Given the cultural customs of that day, not only would this widow woman be left to grieve the premature death of her son, but her grief would also be intensified by the burden of trying to earn a living in what was a very patriarchal and agricultural society. Without a husband or son the likely hood that this woman would have any kind of quality of life to be spoken of was grim. Jesus again being moved with compassion and concerned for her plight, "Said to her, Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."<sup>19</sup> These texts again prove that God ultimately has complete control and authority over life and death. They also prove that although death was not God's original intention or choice for humankind; God extends love and comfort and grace to those who mourn and are affected by grief.

In my dual role as pastor and priest within my community my heart has been made heavy listening to the laments and cries of some grief stricken individuals who question the reality of God's presence to be with them in their season of grief and/or blame God for their grief. As stated earlier, death is not punishment from God, but the

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19. Luke 7:11-15 NRSV.

price of disobedience. Through this Community of Care Bereavement Ministry, we hope to eradicate this kind of thinking and communicate to all who participate that God through the church is willing and able to help them with their grief no matter how intense it might be. In my opinion, there is no better example of God's love and empathy for the bereaved than as demonstrated by Jesus at the death of his friend Lazarus. In the gospel of John we learn that after hearing about the death of Lazarus, "Jesus wept."<sup>20</sup> Because God and Jesus are one, this implies that God is touched by our grief.

The same concern that Jesus showed to Lazarus and to his sisters Mary and Martha defined the ministry of Jesus and that of the church. Theologically, the mission and vision for any Christian church is to model after the ministry of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah gives us a preview of what Jesus' ministry would look like long before Jesus would read from the scroll in Luke 4:18. The prophet in speaking of Jesus say declared, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion."<sup>21</sup> So then, it's made clear here that the ministry of Jesus would be inclusive of comforting and providing for those who mourn. Therefore, it is undeniable that there is a biblical and theological basis for a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry.

The theological implications throughout the scriptures are plenty. In the gospels we can look at the theological implication for this ministry in Matthew 25, where Jesus

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20. John 11:35 KJV.

21. Isaiah 61:1-3 NRSV.

implies that it is the responsibility of the church to care for the needs of those who are suffering and in need amongst us. Jesus says:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'<sup>22</sup>

Although grief and bereavement care are not named exclusively in the above passage, it is implied that it is the duty of the church to eradicate suffering on whatever level she finds it. Other passages found in both the Old and New Testament do however speak with more specificity of the churches moral responsibility to care for those affected by the various nuances of grief and bereavement understanding that human loss effects the livelihood and overall wellbeing of those left behind. Some of these include:

“Honor widows who are really widows.”<sup>23</sup>

“You shall not abuse any widow or orphan.”<sup>24</sup>

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22. Matthew 25:31-40 NRSV.

23. 1 Timothy 5:3 NRSV.

24. Exodus 22:22 NRSV.

“Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.”<sup>25</sup>

“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”<sup>26</sup>

“In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”<sup>27</sup>

The preceding verses provide for us the biblical support for a grief support ministry as well the theological frame work to discipline ourselves to care for people during their most vulnerable moments in life. Jesus demonstrates these truths during His crucifixion as he was concerned about the grief and overall wellbeing of His mother and friend. John wrote, “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Women, here is your son. Then He said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home”<sup>28</sup> At the hour of His death, Jesus placed his mother and friend into the care of each other. What better example of community care?

Both the Old and New Testaments establish a biblical and theological framework for this project and ministry. The bible also emphasizes the importance of community.

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25. Psalms 82:3 NRSV.

26. Isaiah 58:7 NRSV.

27. Acts 20:35 NRSV.

28. John19:26 NRSV.

Again, looking at the ministry of Jesus as our guide, we realize that most of what Jesus' did took place not within the confines of the temple, but in community amongst the people. Not only that, but Jesus also trained His disciples as the first Apostles who would inherit His ministry and take it to the next level outdoors in community. There is a certain attraction associated with doing ministry in community. At the birth of the Christian church it was said that,

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”<sup>29</sup>

This was a very vibrant and thriving faith community because of their willingness to function as a true village and community. Not only did they share in the study of the Word, but they also shared their personal possessions so that the needs of the community could be met. If there was a need in this community the people in the community met that need. And, because of their community values and structure, this community became attractive to those on the outside and the community grew daily. The idea to develop this project through collaboration between J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home and New York Worship Center Church was to demonstrate the fact that the greatest work that we could ever do in our community do, could only be done by working together in community.

It is clear that the communities in which we live can improve and become better communities when the people living in the community make the personal sacrifices to create a self-sustaining environment that meets the existential and spiritual needs of its

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29. Acts 2:43-47 NRSV.

constituents and honors God through faithful living. Not only are there corporate blessings in store for those involved in collaborative ministry initiatives, but there are personal benefits as well.

When death invades a family and severs the human attachment to the one who has died there are some personal needs that must be met in the lives of each one grieving that loss. Although one may share in a community sponsored grief support group such as the one described in this thesis, we cannot underestimate the importance of interpersonal relationships that help us to get through our seasons of grief. Through this project, it is our hope that those who share in this grief support group will have established new friendships so that by the time the group's last sessions ends each participant will be able to go back into community with the support of others who can relate to their grief and pain and also find help that may be needed during a moment of weakness or to share some positive development or word of encouragement. This is what I believe the writer of Ecclesiastes 4 meant with he wrote, "Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken."<sup>30</sup> It is true that where human relationships are concerned we are stronger together. This truth is what we hope to make evident through this Community of Care Bereavement Ministry.

Death is the last enemy to be destroyed and until that day, humans will contend with the reality of separation and suffering associated with the loss of those we love. However, God can and will provide help, healing and assistance through His church.

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30. Ecclesiastes 4:11-12 NRSV.

This Community of Care Bereavement Ministry is just one example of how God makes known His love and desire to help those who reach out to Him.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE PROJECT

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this project is to develop a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry at New York Worship Center Church in collaboration with J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home both of Jamaica, New York. In this chapter I will discuss the project in two phases. In the first phase I will discuss project preparation beginning with the selection of the Lay Advisor Committee. Then in phase two, I will provide an overview of the topic, activities and objectives of the six weekly sessions.

### Project Preparation

My project prospectus was approved with the full support of my advisor and I was eager to begin the planning and preparation stage of the project. I began by continuing to evaluate and narrow the list of prospective Lay Advisory Committee members, herein after referred to as the LAC. This group of individuals would assist me with the further development and execution of the project. Given the collaborative relationship between New York Worship Center Church and J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, I thought it best to include persons from both organizations to serve on the LAC. This arrangement not only provides the LAC the opportunity to work and learn from each other, but having staff from both organizations involved with the projects should facilitate the LAC's ability to effectively carry out the projects expected goals and outcomes. To that end,

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1. Romans 12:15, NIV.



considering the subject matter involved with the project and the vulnerability of all potential participants, I thought it best to seek out certain individuals whose professional backgrounds would not only lend to the success of the project, but who could be of assistance after the project phase to provide additional care, and guidance at the request of group participants. I was blessed in that within our congregation were people with the experience and credentials to best serve on LAC and assist in meeting the above objectives.

With the understanding that this project is perhaps the first of its kind, one of our expected outcomes for this project is that it serve as a model for other churches and organizations who share a mutual interest or mission collaborations that will benefit the communities they serve. Another important observation that I'd like to share is that it is extremely important to select the right people to work on projects like this one because of the sensitive nature and vulnerability of those who will be served by the project/ministry. It has been my experience when looking for volunteers, that leaders tend to grab whoever might be willing, but not be best suited for the responsibilities involved. For this project I thought it would be best to have as members of the LAC, certain professionals who possess certain credentials, knowledge and expertise in subject matter relative to death and dying, counseling, estate law and community organizing.

I was blessed to have been able to assemble an extraordinary group of people to work with me on this project. Each member of the LAC is presented here, in alphabetical order, along with a synopsis of his or her professional accomplishments. First we have, Mr. Anthony Carthan who is head of security at a private school in New York City. Mr. Carthan, during the nineteen sixties and seventies, learned from his mother strategies for

effective grassroots community organizing. He is also one of the leaders of our community outreach ministry at New York Worship Center. Ms. Shawneequa Dicks is one of eight-licensed funeral directors on staff at J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home. The Chair and I decided that it would be best to host the GriefShare sessions at the funeral home instead of our church. Therefore, Ms. Dicks agreed to accept the role as the weekly host and official representative of J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home during the project phase.

Next we have Ms. Kerry Jamieson, who is at the time of this project a Senior Staff Attorney at the Office of the Appellate Defender, where she litigates appeals for indigent criminal defendants convicted of felony crimes. Understanding the mounting legal and estate issues that arise after the death of a loved one, Ms. Jamieson will be available to provide pro bono legal assistance and advice to all of the support group participants as they had need. Then, there is Reverend LaKeisha Merrick-Pender who serves as Co-Pastor at New York Worship Center. In addition to her work at our local church, she is the Executive Assistant to the Co-Pastor and Church Administrator at the Greater Allen Cathedral of New York. Rev. LaKeisha, as she is called, is a gifted administrator who provided assistance with organizing the details of each of the six weekly meetings. Ms. Gayle Sumler is a Social Worker with thirty years of practical experience. Gail currently works at Long Island Jewish Hospital, which is a division of Northwell Health System. Gayle too would be available to provide additional care and counseling and as may be requested. Next, there is Ms. Cher Windham who is Manager of Operations for ABC News/Logistics. Cher has been awarded Two *Emmy* awards and has over twenty years of experience in her field.

The final member and Chair of the LAC is Mr. Charles Shell. Mr. Shell serves on the Greeters Ministry at New York Worship Center and after retiring from Verizon; Charles has worked at J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home as the facilities maintenance supervisor.

During the selection and recruitment process, I met with each of the prospective LAC members individually to discuss not only the overall scope and relevance of the project, but also, why I had selected each of them to work with me on the project. To my delight all of my preferred LAC prospects gladly accepted my invitation to share in this work of creating a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry. I presented each member a handout listing the duties and expectations of the LAC as outlined in the Doctor of Ministry Handbook<sup>2</sup>

### LAC Engagement

Our first formal meeting was held on Sunday, October 11, 2015 after the morning worship service. This gathering was more of a meet and greet as well as a time to discuss specific roles and responsibilities of the LAC. I expressed my profound gratitude to the group for pledging their personal commitment to this project. I also briefly explained how the idea for this project came about as a result of my personal experiences as a bivocational pastor. Also, during this initial meeting, it was agreed that all subsequent LAC meetings, with only a couple of exceptions would be held after morning worship on the second Sunday of each month. This arrangement would work best for all and would eliminate potential conflicts associated with trying to meet on a weekday evening. Before

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2. See Appendix 1 for responsibilities of the Lay Advisory Committee

adjourning the first meeting, each member was given a profile of the project prospectus to take and review for discussion at the next meeting.<sup>3</sup>

The LAC and I gathered for our second meeting on November 8, 2015. I was extremely excited about this meeting mainly because everyone by now had a better understanding of what it is we would be working to accomplish. Another reason I was excited is because, this would be the first time that all but one member in the LAC would get a first-hand glimpse into what it is I do as a funeral director. This is important, because most of the people who attend New York Worship Center are aware of my affiliation with J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home. However, not many are acquainted with my over-all responsibilities and duties. This is because I have made a conscious decision not to talk about my work at the funeral home from the pulpit or in general conversation with members of the church. My rationale is simple; I never want my occupation as a funeral director, to overshadow my role as pastor and shepherd to my congregation. Therefore, this second meeting gave me the opportunity to talk freely about the most important work that J. Foster Phillips provides to our community and my role in that process as a licensed funeral director and general manager of the firm.

In addition to dispelling many of the myths and fables which over time has casts a negative cloud over the death care industry, I explained to the LAC, that my experience in funeral service which spans over two decades and my years of experience in pastoral ministry along with the research conducted for this project warrant a bible-based grief support ministry for adults who have suffered the loss of a loved one.

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3. See Appendix s for Profile of the Project Prospectus

In addition to clarifying each person's role and the overall expectation of the LAC, I clarified that the LAC would disband at the completion and evaluation of the project and that the only other requirement would be for each member of the LAC to attend the site visit; the date of which, at the time of this meeting had not yet been confirmed. However, all were advised that the site visit would take place late April or early May, 2016.

After reconvening, I elaborated on the purpose of the project and what we hoped to accomplish by offering this grief support ministry to our community. More importantly, I wanted the LAC to develop a personal concern for those who would attend our meetings and for each of them to be genuinely concerned about the recovery process for each participant. So we spent a little time discussing our own experiences with death, dying and grief. We took turns going around the table and each of us shared something about when someone we loved had died and how we were affected by those experiences. We had a wonderful time of sharing, and all of us I believe left that meeting even more committed to what we would be doing going forward.

I then presented the LAC with GriefShare resource that we would be using as the curriculum for the project. We also spent some time discussing how we were going to market the project to the community and who our target market would be. As we prepared to end our meeting the agenda for the next meeting was approved, we prayed and adjourned the meeting.

On December 13, 2015 we were meeting for the third time. Prior to this meeting we had a couple of conference calls to discuss further the agenda for this meeting, namely who was our target group, how many people were we going to invite, how would we get

the people to sign up and actually show up? And, what sections of the GriefShare materials were we going to use.

After some discussion, I was able to convince the LAC that although the general public would be welcome to attend, our greatest chance for success would be to identify a captive audience of families most recently serviced by J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home. As I mentioned earlier in the thesis, J. Foster Phillips conducts on average five to six hundred services annually. Therefore, because we had no prior experience with offering a grief support group before, we did not want to invite more people than we could realistically handle. It was then decided that we would prepare for forty to fifty people. That meant we would need to send out about two hundred and fifty letters to hopefully get a commitment from twenty to thirty respondents who would actually show up.

Once that business was done we discussed a few marketing ideas, the need to draft an invite letter and a brochure describing the group, the agenda, the dates and times of each session. Assuming people would not be interested in committing to a thirteen-week program, it was decided that we offer a six-week program instead. This seemed a lot less intimidating. The six-week program would hopefully prove beneficial to the participants and more manageable for our team. The six topics chosen for this project are:

1. Is this real?
2. The journey of Grief.
3. Lessons on Grief Part One.
4. Grief and Your Relationships
5. Stuck
6. What Do I Live For Now?

For our fourth meeting, we reviewed a few brochure renderings and decided on a color flyer featuring a picture of me as the facilitator,<sup>4</sup> an informational brochure which provided pertinent information relative to the location, dates and times of each session and a brief description of each session.<sup>5</sup> I also shared an letter of invitation which I drafted to be mailed with the flyer and brochure.<sup>6</sup> We also confirmed that J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home agreed to cover the cost of postage for the mass mailing and the GriefShare materials. New York Worship Center Church would be providing refreshments each week. Before ending this meeting, the consensus of the group was to order fifty workbooks and all training and session material for training at our next meeting.

Our second to last meeting took place on January 10, 2016. This meeting served as a time to review everything we had planned and discussed since our first meeting. I had received all of the materials from GriefShare and we were able to review each of the sections we had planned to present over the six week period. We also engaged in some role play in order to get a sense of what our first group session would potentially look and feel like. Our level of anticipation and excitement was extremely high.

While we were going through the GriefShare videos and workbook the LAC and I remembered our discussion during our second meeting on November 8, 2016. During that meeting we all shared our own experiences with grief and the passing of loved ones. Almost instantly we could see how this project was going to transform the lives of those

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4. See Appendix 3 for Project Flyer

5. See Appendix 4 for Project Brochure

6. See Appendix 5 for Project Invite Letter

who were to share in this group. We were just a few weeks away from our first session and we could hardly wait to get started.

The last meeting before session one was held on February 7, 2016. The main purpose of this meeting was to do another over view of all of the preparations that had been made in anticipation of the first GriefShare session. The invitation letters, flyers and brochures were printed and prepared to be mailed on February 17, 2016. This would give enough time for interested persons to register and not lose interest because of an extended waiting period.

The invitation letters had been mailed and we waited a few days before calling those who had not already responded with interest. Though not present at the meeting, I informed the team that Ms. Thurston, the weekend receptionist at J. Foster Phillips, had volunteered to make follow-up calls ensuring that we would have a good response to the mailings.

The Chair and I did a Q&A session with the team to make sure that everyone had all the questions answered and we also spent a few minutes highlighting some key points from the GriefShare workbook covering the first session. We also made sure that we had copies of all the forms we needed to be completed by those who would be sharing in the group. We closed the meeting with prayer and reminded everyone that we would be arriving an hour early on Saturday, March 5, 2016 for the first session. The Chair and I agreed to arrive a little earlier than the others to set-up the refreshment table and to perform a test of the audio-visual equipment, making sure the video was working properly.



## EXECUTING THE PROJECT

### SESSION 1: Is This Normal

(March 5, 2016)

On Saturday March 5, 2016 our big day had finally arrived. As I made my way into the funeral home, up to the second floor and into the chapel that would be our meeting space for the next six weeks, I couldn't help but feel as though we were meeting in the conference center of some plush hotel. Staff from J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home was on hand to help Mr. Shell, our Chair with minor details such as placing appropriate signage leading from the main entrance up to the second floor as we made ready to receive our guests. Everything seemed to be in order. The funeral home was clean, and well appointed with a beautiful refreshing fragrance filling the air. I personally provided the refreshments that had been set out each week, and I was eager to get started.

I arrived early enough to test all of the audiovisual equipment that was setup. By this time members of the LAC began to trickle in and before long the room was beginning to fill up some familiar and not so familiar faces. I had determined that this project was sure to be a success by the mere fact that people were showing up. As more and more people filled the room, members of the LAC were greeting those present and assisted with making sure that everyone had signed the attendance sheet, completed a "registration form" and received a workbook.<sup>7</sup>

I quickly noticed that some of the people who had showed up for this first session were not very talkative and sat alone, scattered about while others were introducing themselves to others while helping themselves to a snack. There was a good vibe in the

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7. See Appendix 6 for Registration Form

room, in spite of the reason for our gathering. As the time to begin was getting closer, the LAC and I met in another room to pray and review the agenda for the day. Everyone knew their role and was in their respective places. This was our Super Bowl and we were ready for the kick-off.

Ms. Shawneequa Dicks, our host, licensed funeral director and official representative of the funeral home gave a brief welcome and congratulated all of the attendees for demonstrating the courage to be a part of what was to take place over the next six weeks. She expressed the fact that since 1929, J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home has always been involved in supporting the community, the local houses of worship and was pleased to host this GriefShare support group in collaboration with New York Worship Center Church. After giving her remarks, Ms. Dicks, then introduced me to the group as the official convener and facilitator. Upon taking the podium, I too expressed my sincere appreciation to those assembled for their response to our invitation and for joining us as we guide them on this journey of moving from mourning to joy. I then introduced each of the LAC members to the group as co-facilitators and provided a brief vocational sketch of each of them. A total of 21 people including the LAC were present for this first GriefShare session

Before getting into the lesson for the day, I thought that this would be the best to establish the ground rules for the next six weeks and to impress upon all involved the need for absolute confidentiality concerning the information and experiences that would share during our time together. Therefore, each participant was asked to sign a “confidentiality form.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, in order to aid the participants in establishing trust in

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8. See Appendix 7 for Group Guidelines On Confidentiality And Dating

us as the facilitators, the Chair and I thought the entire team should also sign in the presence of the participants an “accountability and confidentiality agreement” as well.<sup>9</sup> Once that business had been taken care of, I offered a prayer of invocation, and then shared briefly my bi-vocational experience and credentials as both a licensed funeral director and pastor. I further explained that it is out of that context of experience that this project came about.

I quickly shifted to explaining that each weekly session would run approximately 2 hours and that the schedule for the next six weeks would include the following:

- Open with prayer
- Welcome, announcement, introduce facilitator (10 minutes)
- Discuss workbook exercises from previous week (10 minutes)
- Watch Video (40 minutes)
- Small group discussion (55 minutes)
  - Object lesson
  - Ask first discussion question
  - Leader suggestions
- Wrap-up (5 minutes)
- Leader debriefing session and prayer

We were now ready to begin our first session by wrestling with the topic of the week, “Is this normal?” This proved to be a relevant question given the fact that those attending this first session are a group of people who have experienced different kinds of losses. Some had lost a spouse, child, sibling, parent or some other significant person in their

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9. See Appendix 8 Leader Agreement

lives. Naturally, because the losses were different so were their personal experiences and responses. It was important for me as the facilitator at the beginning of our dialogue to acknowledge the diversity of loss and experience in the room and to assure each person present that the material that would be covered during this session would be relevant to their individual and personal needs.

The effects of grief on the human condition have been thoroughly laid out in this thesis thus far. And, the one sure thing we have learned is that no two people grieve in exactly the same way. However, all grieving people experience a range of emotions that are the same but may yield a different response or disposition. In this first session there were several things we hoped each participant would have discovered, namely:

- Why their grief experience is harder than they imagined
- Why the intensity and duration of their emotion are normal and appropriate
- Despite how they feel right now, there is reason for hope<sup>10</sup>

As we discussed these ideas, it became quite obvious that a number of people, especially those who seemed a little withdrawn upon arrival just moment earlier now seemed to relax and appear less anxious.

Through the video presentation, and group discussion every participant was able to hear someone else describe a similar experience, feeling or thought that they too had experienced. Soon shouts of “oh that happened to you?”<sup>11</sup> And “you felt like that too?”<sup>12</sup>

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10. *Grief Share, Your Journey From Mourning To Joy*, (North Carolina: Church Initiative, 2015), 1.

11. Comment made during session one on March 5, 2016

12. Comment made during session one on March 5, 2016

Began to fly across the room. All of a sudden faces that were moments earlier downcast, began to show smiles because for the first time since the loss of their loved ones those sharing in this group, began to understand that what they were experiencing is in fact normal.

One of the main objectives covered in this session was to express the importance of giving oneself permission to grieve. This is to say that often shame and guilt can cause an individual to suppress their feeling and eventually find themselves conflicted by what is known as “A tangled ball of emotions.”<sup>13</sup> This is where life becomes more intense and chaotic, as one attempts to overcome their feeling relying on their own strength. The best way to avoid this is to open ones heart to God’s love and healing power. The psalmist said it best, “Listen to my cry for help, O God. Pay attention to my prayer. From the ends of the earth, I call to you when I begin to lose heart. Lead me to the rock that is high above me.”<sup>14</sup>

From this session we learned that feelings of anguish, bitterness, confusion, despair, emptiness, frustration, guilt, etc. are normal feeling when experiencing grief. We overcome these feels overtime by patiently expressing how we feel, and by leaning into rather than avoiding what we feel. In addition to spending quality time with friends and family, praying and studying the bible along with participating in regular worship also helps us to manage ones feelings.

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13. *Grief Share, Your Journey From Mourning To Joy*, (North Carolina: Church Initiative, 2015), 2.

14. Psalms 61:1-2 NRSV.

## SESSION 2: Challenges of Grief

(March 12, 2016)

Our second GriefShare session was held on Saturday, March 12, 2016. After the opening prayer, I offered a review of the key objectives from previous week's session. This proved to be very beneficial, especially to those who had missed the first session. The group was reminded that grieving individuals often feel a range of emotions after the death of a loved. Feelings of anger and bitterness, as well as feeling empty and even betrayed by God can become all consuming. I further explained that these and other feelings, too numerous to mention here, are a normal response for the bereaved. I expressed the importance of knowing that when life begins to feel intense and chaotic, when you feel like you might be losing your mind, the best response is to give yourself permission to grieve; to be honest about your feeling, and to lean into your grief by embracing it. Excepting it for what it is for what it is and to just go through the process. I transitioned into this week's session by sharing a statement from last week's video, which was "Grief is the price we pay for love, and the only way to avoid grief is to never love." This was a perfect segue way into this week's session "the Challenges of Grief."

During our second session, our discussion shifted slightly away from the feeling of grief and sorrow to focusing on the effects grief has on the mind, body and spirit. We discussed the fact that grief does not only make people feel bad, but that it also causes people to act badly and/or in unhealthy ways. It is common for persons dealing with grief to have feeling of depression, feeling lazy and lethargic, not wanting to go to work or to do simple routine things like bathing, and eating. An example of this is King David's response to the death of his young son.

“And the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them.”<sup>15</sup>

As a number of the participant began to share personal testimonies and experiences of feeling sick, losing weight and not wanting up to doing anything besides sleep, all could resonate with what David had experienced when his son had died. Ms. Hendricks, expressed to the group that her husband had died just a couple of months before prior to the start of this group, and that she could not bring herself to move any of her late husband’s belongings. She said, “The thought of merely touching any of my husband’s tools made me sad and angry, and all could do was cry.”<sup>16</sup> She continued to ride in the vehicle they shared with all of her late husband’s tool spread about. This is just one real example of the debilitating grip that grief can have on a person.

Another participant Ms. Purifoy, who couldn’t even introduce herself during the first session because she was so overwhelmed with grief, shared how she had not fully recovered from the suicidal death of her father before being thrust again into the grief cycle, now with the recent death of her mother. Ms. Purifoy, when she was finally able to talk said “I am so broken! I want to pray, but I can’t, this is so hard!”<sup>17</sup> Obviously her spirit was broken and she found it difficult to reach out to God for help.

As Ms. Purifoy continued to share the many challenges she was facing as a result of the recent death of her mother. It became obvious that she was perhaps suffering from

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15. 2 Samuel 12:15b-17, NKJV.

16. Comment made by participant during second session on March 12, 2016.

17. Comment made by participant during second session on March 12, 2016.

*complicated grief*, which this project does not address. Not only that, but like some of the others who had shared in these first two sessions, Ms. Purifoy had made attempts to fix herself, before reaching out for help. This has made her journey from mourning to joy all the more difficult. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, “my people...have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”<sup>18</sup> We learned in the second GriefShare that grief is not only effect the way we feel, but it presents certain challenges that effects the way we behave. Furthermore, we’ve learned that these challenges are not easy to overcome and we will need help. We ended the session by realizing that our help is found in talking to and trusting in God. Again looking at King David after his son died, we discussed how David talked to God and was soon able to overcome his challenges of grief.

When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, “He is dead.” So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” And he said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”<sup>19</sup>

### SESSION 3: The Journey of Grief – Part One

(March 19, 2016)

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18. Jeremiah 2:13, NIV

19. 2 Samuel 12:19-23, NKJV.



By our third session, which was held on Saturday, March 19, 2016, we had developed some real momentum and the legitimacy and relevancy for this Community of Care Bereavement Ministry was undeniable. Both the LAC and the participants in the group were beginning to express their appreciation for having this made available to them. Comments were made during the breaks and after the sessions about how convenient and smart it was for the church and the funeral home to work hand in hand in providing such a well-organized and professional event such as this was.

So far we had learned what was normal and what should be expected in the grief process. We also, learned that grief invokes certain challenges that not only affect the way grieving people feel but also how they behave and respond to their grief.

The main point of this third session is to convey the importance of not getting stuck in the grief process. In other words, no matter how bad one may be feeling, or how challenging ones grief may be grief is a process that every bereft person must get through in order to move on with his or her life in a healthy way.

In my opening remarks, I placed emphasis on the title of this session as “The Journey of Grief.” I suggested to the group, when a person or group of people embark upon a journey, the ultimate goal is to eventually arrive from point A to point B. I also pointed out that a journey by definition usually takes longer to complete than it does to complete trip. The point I was trying to make was that the only way to experience a healthy grieving process is to patiently go through each and every step until you move from mourning to joy.

During this session we talked about the importance of each group member setting goals and not allowing others to determine their next steps or timeline as it relates to the

healing process. This is most critical as well intentioned people tend to think that know better what's best for others in times of crisis.

There was much discussion as to how friends and family try to convince someone who is grieving to act prematurely in practically every possible way; some of these include but are not limited to:

- Relocating
- Selling home or business
- Starting dating
- Spending and loaning large sums of money

In the video for this week it was impressed upon all of the group members not to make any big decisions right away, especially without council from a trusted family member, friend or advisor. Instead of making any drastic or major decisions, our conversation this week was set around focusing on four specific goals:

#### GOAL ONE: ACCPETING THE LOSS

Concerning the first goal we discussed the necessity of accepting the loss of the person who had died. One of Dr. Elisabeth Kübler Ross' five stages of death is "denial." In the denial stage, shock and disbelief can cause an individual to refuse to accept the fact that someone has died. Denying the death only extends and complicates the healing process. Accepting the loss as difficult as it might seem is the first step toward recovery.

#### GOAL TWO: TURNING TO GOD

When recovery seems distant or seemingly impossible and when faith in God has been challenged this is the time to really focus on the second goal “Turning to God.” One young lady in the group found this to be a bit challenging, seeing that her son had been violently murdered. At this point, I led the group in a discussion concerning how easy it is to charge God falsely when bad and unjust things happen in life. Rather than blaming God for our pain and suffering, we should turn to God and to God’s Word for the healing we need.

We then discussed, the fact that as we study God’s Word and pray healing can begin to take place. I further explained, as our spirits are healed our thinking becomes clearer and our perspective on life readjusts toward those things that are good. Not only that but we become better able to express ourselves in ways that we couldn’t when grief first set in. This leads us to our third goal, expressing our emotions.

### GOAL THREE: EXPRESSING OUR EMOTIONS

As we continued in our time together, members of the group were introduced to the benefits of writing a “grief letter.”<sup>20</sup> The purpose of the grief is to tell people who may not grieve with you or with the same intensity, how they can best help in the healing process. The letter should also include commentary about how you the bereaved person is feeling. Finally, the letter should also include what others should or should not expect from you, as well as how they can specifically help you should be.

### GOAL FOUR: ESTABLISHING A NEW IDENTITY

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20. See Appendix 9 Grief letter

Our fourth goal for this session involved helping the group members in understanding the importance of establishing a new identity. The purpose of establishing a new identity is about adjusting to life without living in the shadow of the one who had died. During this session, we could not emphasize enough the importance of each survivor learning to differentiate themselves from their past. Anderson, the wife of a popular minister who has recently died, shared her experience of attending a recent denominational event. She had attended these kinds of events in the past with husband, however this time things were different. Things were so different that no one acknowledged her presence. She said “In the past everyone spoke to me at these events because I was always with my husband, but this time without him, it was as if no one noticed me or even knew my name. I felt so alone and disrespected.”<sup>21</sup> Establishing a new identity is not about forgetting the past, but being able to remember the past without getting sad. It is also about moving on with one’s life, in one’s own uniqueness.

#### SESSION 4: Stuck

(March 26, 2016)

“If you are not careful, three to five years from now your grief can be just as intense as it is right now.”<sup>22</sup> This was the warning given at the opening of our fourth session. In this session we discussed the following three objectives:

- How to prevent getting stuck in grief

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21. Comment made by participant during third session on March 19, 2016.

22. *Grief Share, Your Journey From Mourning To Joy*, (North Carolina: Church Initiative, 2015), 85.

- Common misconceptions that hinder healing
- Why your path to healing isn't always smooth<sup>23</sup>

From the outset I shared with the group the problem of getting stuck in their grief.

That problem being—once you get stuck in your grief it becomes very difficult to get out of being stuck and back to moving toward healing. Some of the examples of being stuck include:

- Uncontrollable crying when thinking about your love one
- Unable to handle personal belongings
- Unable to return to normal activities
- People around you think your loved one recently passed, when it had been a few years

Oftentimes people get stuck in grief because they hold onto old adages and fables that have potential to cause more harm and pain than comfort and healing. Some of these, which were discussed, are:

- “Time heals”
- “Stay Busy”
- “God to my loved one”
- “Healing is forgetting”
- “Progress is steady”<sup>24</sup>

All of us had heard these saying before because they are very popular sayings, but the truth is there implied meanings are simply not true as it relates to dealing with grief.

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23. Ibid., 85

24. *Grief Share, Your Journey From Mourning To Joy*, (North Carolina: Church Initiative, 2015), 85.

The truth is, as was discussed is that time really doesn't heal all things and neither does staying busy for that matter. The passage of time and staying busy in effort avoid facing reality is not a healthy way to grief and in fact these two culprits are perhaps the main cause of getting stuck in grief.

We ended this week's session impressing upon the group three things: the first, the only way to avoid getting stuck in grief is to do the hard work of going through the grief process. The process leads to healing and cannot be avoided. Second, never give in to feelings that inspire negative thinking and/or behavior under the guise of some false sense of gratification. Finally, the group was encouraged to make time for worship in spite of how they may have been feeling. I reminded them of Job's response to his grief after tragically losing his children and property. "Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing."<sup>25</sup>

## SESSION 5: Grief And Your Relationships

(April 2, 2016)

There was a lot of anticipation about this our fifth group meeting, mainly because this session dealt with grief and the volatility in interpersonal relationships. I explained to the group, that after spending two decades in funeral service, I had probably seen or heard

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25. Job 1:20-22, NRSV.

just about every conceivable thing that could possibly happen within any nuclear or extended family when there is a death.

I have also heard many people; especially seniors talk about the loneliness they feel after having lost their spouses and many friends over the years. Even worse is the rejection that is felt when there are surviving relatives and friends who never come around or show any interest because the person that died was the connecting link in these relationships. In the lesson for this week our learning objective is to learn not to be surprised when the people we thought would be around and remain close aren't close to us anymore. What is hard for many grieving people is to watch and be around other people whose are able to go on about their regular activities in spite of what has happened to them. Grieving people can become easily envious of others.

Another important insight we learned from this session is that each family member will have a different grieving experience. This means one member of the family may not be ready to go about a particular task or visit a once familiar place, such going back to church or to work or school. What we discovered through our dialogue is that going back into these familiar settings prematurely have the potential to trigger an array of emotions and possibly even a meltdown. In this regard we must show respect and be patient by allowing others to grieve in their own way.

Finally, in the second half of our session, we discussed the importance of grieving people not isolating themselves by avoiding simple things like answering the phone and meeting new people. It's critical at this stage in the process that grieving individuals do not back away from life but embrace it. Embracing life is best done by staying connected to the body of Christ and by spending time alone with God; knowing with God's help we

can begin to heal. To that end, joining a life group like this one can also be affective in getting one life back in perspective.

## SESSION 6: What Do I Live For Now?

(April 9, 2016)

After the death of a loved one most people working through the grief process begin to ask themselves questions such as:

- What's next?
- Where do I go from here?
- How do I get there?
- What if I'm not ready?
- What do I live for now?

These are some of the many questions this final session will hopefully provide guidance in finding appropriate answers. In doing so, the key objectives in this session are to help those who have traveled with us the past five weeks to find it in themselves with the information, encouragement, support and prayer they've received to understand the importance and necessity of moving forward with their lives. By now we hope to have conveyed that the journey through grief is a process and that the process is uniquely different for every grieving person. In this session we also reminded each of the participants that they have and will continue to make progress even though they will continue to feel moments of peace and moments of pain from time to time.

As each of the participants in the group has learned about the importance of leaning into their grief, to embrace it for what it is, we expressed in this last session the



importance of trusting in God as recorded in Matthew 6:34; and that by trusting in God they would eventually realize the help and healing that God provides instead of stress and anxiety. We also discussed in this last session the importance of not be ashamed to ask for help in moments of weakness and to seek out professional help is thing begin to get out of control.

Finally, we talked about the power of storytelling and the benefits of sharing stored memories of loved ones as a therapeutic mechanism that helps to remember without getting sad. When this happens one can truly say that I have moved from mourning to joy.

At the end of the session the LAC and I, along with each of the persons who shared in this support group was given time to express how they were blessed and transform even by what had taken place in this community of care over the past six weeks.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

The success of this project proves three things of which I'd like to address in this evaluation. First, that there is a desperate need for the development and expansion of grief support ministries in local churches everywhere. Secondly; collaborations work and; Thirdly, a successful ministry of this kind must have competent and compassionate leadership.

A survey of world religions would prove that sacred rituals and other certain practices relative to the disposition of human remains have existed for centuries. As such ancient and modern practices and traditions continue to this day, especially in the Judeo-Christian community. As already discussed throughout this thesis when a death occurs, usually it is a representative from both the church and/or the local funeral home who are immediately called upon to provide the appropriate guidance, service and expertise. However, in many if not most cases, once their obligations and or duties have been performed the bereaved are left to process his or her grief with very little to no assistance from either the church or the funeral service provider.

Although most funeral homes tend to support their local communities philanthropically as much as churches try to provide relevant ministries to their constituents, grief support ministries are few to non-existent. One of the observations made as a result of this project is that most of the registered participants were all active members of local churches within the community. However, sadly all of these people had

to look elsewhere to find help with their grief because no similar ministry was available where they worship. This project took place in Jamaica Queens, New York. It is important to note that Queens is the largest borough in New York City with a population over 2 million people. Communities this large certainly have a more than average mortality rate when compared to other cities. Therefore, the success of this project proves that there is a substantial need for the development and rapid expansion of grief support ministries through our community and abroad for the church and unchurched alike.

Furthermore the underlining theme of the Congregational Growth and Community Development Cohort is the notion that the local church cannot grow or be effective without first engaging the local community. Often times it is not a lack of concern as to why churches are not doing more effective and relevant work in their communities, but rather a lack of resources. It is for that reason I wanted to develop this project in collaboration with a community partner. Quite naturally the success of this project had much to do with the unique relationship that exists between houses of worship and funeral service providers. More specifically, this project was a success in large part because of the generosity of the principles of J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, Inc. They saw the need for this ministry and understood the mutual benefit of partnering with New York Worship Center Church to make this ministry available to our community. So that the leadership of our church and I could focus on the spiritual and logistical aspects of putting this project together, J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home not only provided the space for the weekly sessions they also covered the expense for the postage needed for the letters of invitation, stationary and all materials from GriefShare including the DVD curriculum and workbooks for 50 people. This was done in order to make the

support group available to the community free of charge. In the end, a viable and much needed ministry was made available to our community because of the collaborative efforts between a local church and business. Our success is proof that collaborations with others in community are possible and that they work.

Finally, none of the aforementioned would have been possible without a competent and genuinely concerned and compassionate group of leaders. I am grateful for the amazing men and women who worked along side me in guiding this project. The sensitive nature of this project as expressed throughout this thesis demanded not only a comprehensive curriculum in order to achieve the expected outcomes of this exercise, but the project also demanded a skilled group of facilitators who would bring into the learning context specific knowledge and experience that would best serve the diverse needs of the participants.

With the understanding that along with feelings of sadness, anger, denial and a host of other emotions, the death of someone we love forces upon us the necessity of seeking out help in order to tend to ourselves and other important matters of business that sometimes cannot wait until we have fully recovered from our grief. Therefore, it was incumbent upon me to recruit individuals to work alongside me who would have hearts to serve, and the expertise to assist the participants in this ministry with the initial guidance they would need to begin the process of reordering their lives. I am pleased to say that each of the individuals who worked with me not only met that challenge but each one exceeded my expectation.

These professional men and women who comprised the Lay Advisory Committee demonstrated the awareness that God had given them gifts, talents and knowledge to

make a difference in the marketplace and to carrying out the mandate of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is to love and care for our neighbors. Our work together over the six-week duration of this project presented a wonderful ministry context that was conducive for sharing, learning, and healing. A new awareness for marketplace ministry sprung up in each of us. Besides discussing the continuation of this grief support ministry other ideas were shared as to how churches can continue to partner with other organizations and groups in our community were discussed. I believe this project will serve as a good model for other ministries who need help with building a team of leaders for a particular project and who are considering collaborating with others in efforts to expand the Kingdom of God.

A significant contribution by the LAC as to their evaluation of this project is provided below. Each member was presented with a Leader Feedback Form and their responses were randomly selected to be included here.<sup>1</sup>

#### Leader Feedback

##### **How many of the six-sessions did you participate in?**

1. Five.
2. Five
3. Four

##### **What three did we do well?**

1. We provided a safe and comfortable environment for participants. The videos and curriculum provided a wide-range of discussion topics that were relevant. The group discussion gave participants an opportunity to discuss things in a way they could not do elsewhere.

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1. See Appendix 12 Leader Feedback Form

2. Counsel, Comfort, Consoled and remained Relatable.
3. Engaged the participants, explained the program and the lessons, allowed participants to share.

**What three things do we need to focus more on?**

1. Make the workbook more user-friendly (make things easier to find); Make a shortened version for those who cannot commit to 13 weeks.
2. Guiding the participant's relationships with others; help with moving forward without their loved one.
3. Having Christian music playing softly as we are gathering for each session. Spend more time review previous weeks lesson. Offer a follow-up with those who may have missed a session.

**What did you like best in serving as a leader?**

1. I most enjoyed seeing the participant's change and move significantly forward in their journey, back to healing after their loss.
2. Offering guidance, fellowship, a safe haven for people to share.
3. The fellowship with the other leaders and learning from Pastor Craig.

**What challenged you the most in serving as a leader?**

1. Trying to choose my words carefully and respond appropriately when dealing with the participants individually and as a group because their situations were different. Also, containing my personal feelings when the videos back memories of my own grief.
2. Being effective, saying the right thing at the right time. Not to push people too hard to accept and move on.
3. Nothing.

**How would you rate the impact GriefShare is having on the participants?**

1. A lot – very helpful.
2. A lot – very helpful.
3. A lot – very helpful.

**How can we be more effective in meeting the needs of our participants?**

1. Providing additional instruction for those who need more than 6 or 13 weeks to heal.
2. Offering more sessions. Letting people end when they are ready, not necessarily when the cycle is over.
3. Regular follow-up with each participant after the cycle has ended.

**How many of the participants are now visiting or have joined our church?**

1. At least one participant is involved in a portion of our ministry.
2. Most are members of other churches and appear to be happy. However, one participant joins our morning prayer. Others attending and interested in other parts of our ministry.

**How many participants prayed to receive Christ or made a recommitment as a result of attending GriefShare?**

1. All
2. Most. Not sure that 1 or 2 participants recommitted. All prayed.

I appreciated the insight provided by the LAC and I have every confidence that their contribution will only serve to increase the effective of future groups. However, at the end of the day, it is the impact that this ministry had on those came seeking help that matters most. As I alluded to earlier, my personal observation over the years as a bi-vocational pastor working in funeral service is that churches usually leave no stone unturned when it comes to delivering service and resources to the families of faithful members who pass on. Immediately after notification of a death, church members begin visiting at the home, delivering food, preparing meals, and performing domestic duties. This usually goes on around the clock and can last for days after the disposition of the deceased. While these willing workers are busy with their tasks, the pastor with or

without the assistance of an associate minister begins the process of planning the liturgy, designing programs and preparing the sermon. Sadly though in most cases after the benediction at the place of disposition the church is relieved that her responsibility to the family has been met.

In a similar manner funeral service providers often respond in much the same way. After services and merchandise has been selected, the remains properly prepared, the service conducted and the benediction pronounced they too end their care to the family. In both instances the church and the funeral service provider believe they have fulfilled their respective obligations to the bereaved family by providing by all accounts what we understand to be a good service. However, no matter how wonderful the celebration of life service may have been, it is after the service when all the professionals, well wishers, church members, neighbors and friends return to business as usual that the hard work of going through the grief process begins. This project was developed with the intention of helping local churches and funeral service providers to realize the need and benefit of working together and continuing their collaborative support to grieving families helping them to experience a healthy grieving process.

As with the members of the LAC the participants of this support group were also given a Participants Feedback Form<sup>2</sup> in order to contribute to the evaluation of this project. Their responses to were randomly selected and are included below. are a number of random responses presented to the individuals who participated in this project. I thank each of them for their candidness and answering these questions but more so for their

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2. See Appendix 11 Participant Feedback Form



courage to reach out for help. I trust that our efforts have assisted each of them on their journey moving from Mourning to Joy!

## Participants Feedback

### **What have you liked most about the GriefShare video seminars?**

1. The videos featured respected counselors and teachers who have faced their own grief and who shared insights on how to walk through grief in a healthy manner.
2. GriefShare videos seminars were informational. The team members were very interactive with each of us. The support group was a safe place to grieve and share.
3. The GriefShare Videos were very informative and provided tools for healing.

### **Has GriefShare had any impact on your life? If so, how?**

1. Yes. My life was tremendously impacted by the personal testimonies shared during each session. I enjoyed all of the sessions
2. Yes. GriefShare gave me the tools I needed to understand and start the process of grieving properly. The steps shared by Pastor Craig assisted in me in healing from the deaths of my parents and siblings.
3. Yes. GriefShare has had a great impact upon my life. It has given men tools to help with the healing process.

### **How could we improve GriefShare the next time?**

1. Offering the extended version (13 Weeks) would be a definite improvement.
2. For me the group and the leadership team were on point with delivery and giving us a place to speak.
3. GriefShare was organized so that it would be most beneficial to the participants. I would not change the dynamics of the group. Maybe we can try a different day and time for equal opportunity participation.

### **How was your discussion group experience like?**

1. We shared our lives with each other by crying, hugging and listening to and discussing scripture from the bible that related to our grief and problems
2. When I first arrived, I could not speak about my grief. As I attended subsequent sessions the videos, group discussions, divine intervention and Pastor Craig's became a God sent.
3. Our discussion group was trust worthy and confidential, a solace for each group member, a safe place.

**What was your experience with your support group facilitators?**

1. Pastor Craig and his staff were friendly, warm and welcoming. Each of the volunteers showed concern for all of those in the group. The atmosphere was one where God's love became alive and was conducive for healing.
2. My experience was that all of the facilitators were not only experienced and knowledgeable; they were all very kind, which contributed to a great experience.
3. Our group facilitators were very supportive, knowledgeable and compassionate. They made every effort to meet the needs of each group member.

**Any suggestions for improving the group?**

1. Continue the sessions
2. Please continue this group, there is a need!
3. I was pleased with the progression of the group from week to week. Group members were afforded an opportunity to express their innermost thoughts during each session.

**Next steps?**

1. I'm interested in serving on GriefShare leadership team
2. I'd like to join a bible study to continue growing in God's Word.
3. I want to go through GriefShare Cycle again
4. I am interested in establishing a GriefShare ministry in my church.

In my conclusion, I must share that the LAC and I in our debriefing after each group session marveled at the progressive and obvious impact of this ministry in the lives of

each participant who gathered each week in faith to hoping for a little more God's love, grace and mercy. Our time together proved to be spiritually, and emotionally beneficial to all involved. By the end of the final session we could physically see the transformation that had taken place in people who were on the first day confused, bitter, angry and very sad. We were all blessed through this experience. Although the intention of adding new members to our church was not the intent of this project, I am happy to report that at least once participant did. And that other have shared in other aspects of our ministry. To God be the glory!

As far as next steps for future grief support groups are concerned we hope to do the following:

1. Continue our work with J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home.
2. Train other pastors and ministry leaders and develop a rotating schedule of facilitators.
3. Offer both a 13-week cycle and two 6-week cycles to accommodate more people.
4. Develop a follow-up system in order to keep-up with participants who complete the program.
5. Implement a reunion fellowship for participants share testimonials and to further develop the new relationships established within their respective groups
6. Seek certification as a certified Christian Grief Counselor with the American Academy of Grief Counselors.

## APPENDIX ONE

### DOCTORAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE BRIEFING

Initial Meeting  
October 11, 2015

#### THE DOCTORAL OF MINISTRY PROJECT

**A Doctor of Ministry Project** is a body of work specially designed to enhance the candidate's competence in ministry, while at the same time making a significant contribution to the candidate's setting of ministry. It is an act of ministry designed, planned, executed, and evaluated within a specified time period. Implemented on the basis of a carefully devised prospectus, it requires the involvement of laity and utilizes the various roles and competencies of the candidate such as leader, enabler, planner, recruiter, theologian-in-residence, trainer, organizer, supervisor, and administrator.

#### THE LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Local Advisory Committee is a select group of mostly lay persons associated with the Candidate's ministry context, who are chosen by the candidate to work with her or him as a team to plan, execute, and evaluate all aspects of the professional project. By design, the professional project is a well-defined and disciplined ministry of the whole church. To succeed, the project must have the support of the church or other ministry context in which it is undertaken. The work, guidance, feedback, and evaluation done by the Lay Advisory Committee are not only a program requirement, but also an essential ingredient in the success of the project.

*Candidates are expected to have a functioning Local Advisory Committee in place by the fall of the second year.*

#### TASKS OF THE LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Committee members are expected to work supportively and collaboratively with the candidate and the rest of the Committee to develop the project through all of its phases in accordance with the approved prospectus.
- They will objectively evaluate the project and the candidate's leadership of it from its inception, through all of its development and execution, and at its final evaluation at the Site Visit.
- They will work with the candidate to do research, locate documents, recruit participants, design training models or curricula, disseminate information, construct or adapt evaluation instruments, interpret the project to the ministry

context, handle legal and logistical matters, etc., and prayerfully support the project.

- As needed, they will work with the candidate to secure financial resources for the project, and arrange appropriate accounting procedures for handling funds.
- They will assist the candidate in pulling together relevant documents and other project materials for the Site Visit.
- They will prepare for and attend the scheduled Site Visit, study the criteria for evaluation of the project, and offer a thorough critique and evaluation of the project with the faculty, candidate, and others present. Honesty and candor during this evaluation are a great help to the candidate and to Drew. Faculty do not expect that everything will have gone perfectly or smoothly; rather, faithfulness to the task as outlined in the prospectus, the overall quality of the project and its results, the learning gained, and the transformative changes which have taken place will be the main concern of the faculty present.

APPENDIX TWO

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROSPECTUS

Drew University  
The Theological School  
Craig A. Pender

Advisors: Dr. Donna L. Ciangio and Dr. Kevin Miller

The Title:

**“Developing A Community of Care Bereavement Ministry  
at New York Worship Center Church in Jamaica, New York”**

The Purpose:

The purpose of this project for the New York Worship Center Church is to develop a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry that will provide hospitality, pastoral care and spiritual formation to churched and unchurched adult survivors and their friends, helping them to experience a healthy grieving process.

The Problem:

The New York Worship Center does not have an established ministry that offers grief recovery for churched and unchurched adults who have experienced the loss of a relative or friend.

The Scope:

New York Worship Center Church, in collaboration with the J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, Inc., the leading funeral service provider in our community, will offer

churched and unchurched adults who have experienced the loss of a loved one or friend, a biblical and Christ-centered grief support group ministry.

Given the national success of GriefShare support groups, it is also the scope of this project to determine whether a Community of Care Bereavement Ministry offered as collaboration between a local church and funeral home can be an effective way to use GriefShare as the main resource.

The project will have the following components:

What:

New York Worship Center will become a registered group facilitator of GriefShare Seminars. GriefShare is one of several video-based curriculums developed by Church Initiative. Church Initiative ([www.churchinitiative.org](http://www.churchinitiative.org)) is a nondenominational, nonprofit ministry serving more than 17,000 churches worldwide. From its headquarters in Wake Forest, North Carolina, the ministry creates and publishes video-based curricula to help churches minister to people experiencing life crises.

GriefShare ([www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)) is designed to run in thirteen-week cycles and continue throughout the year, creating an ongoing, lay-led ministry and care environment. Each GriefShare session has three distinct elements:

1. Video seminar with experts:

Each week the GriefShare group will watch a video seminar featuring top experts on grief and recovery subjects. These videos are produced in an interesting television magazine format featuring expert interviews, real-life case studies, dramatic reenactments, and on-location video.

2. Support group discussion with focus:

After viewing the video, group members will spend time as a support group. Discussing what was presented in that week's video seminar and what is going on in their lives.

3. Personal study and reflection:

During the week group members will have the opportunity to use their workbooks for further personal study of the grieving process and to help sort out their emotions through journaling. The group will spend time discussing questions and comments from the workbook study.

**When:**

Although GriefShare is designed to be a 13-week program, the self-contained sessions allow people to join a group at any point. The Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) will determine which components of the program are most beneficial and if the program can be reduced to 4 to 8 weeks in order to make the project more manageable.

**Where:**

J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, Inc., 179-24 Linden Boulevard. Jamaica, New York 11434. This arrangement will establish the funeral home as the host and the church as the facilitator.

**Why:**

The Community of Care Bereavement Ministry project needs to develop because bereaved relatives and friends need the comfort and support it will provide in order to experience a healthy grieving process.

The Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) This committee will meet November 2015 for training on the GriefShare system and to determine how to effectively implement it into the project. Committee members will be divided into two groups. One group will function as facilitators/presenters of the GriefShare system. The other group will serve as greeters/hosts and be responsible for distributing course materials and serving refreshments.

The Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) will consist of the following persons: The Candidate; (1) Licensed Funeral Director as the official representative of the J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, Inc.; (1) Licensed Grief Counselor and (4) Lay persons from New York Worship Center Church.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Bereavement Ministry** - an outreach program for members of our church and community who are experiencing personal loss through death.

**Unchurched** - not belonging to or connected with a church.

**Pastoral Care** - the ministry of care and counseling provided by pastors, chaplains and other religious leaders to members of their church or congregation, or to anyone within community, with a focus on healing, reconciling, guiding and sustaining.

**Spiritual Formation** - an intentional Christian practice that has as its goal the development of spiritual maturity that leads to Christ-likeness.



Grieving Process – Elisabeth Keubler-Ross’ 5 Stages define the process a bereaved person may go through in order to resolve their grief. The 5 stages are: 1) Denial; 2) Anger; 3) Bargaining; 4) Depression and 5) Acceptance. Elements of Bowen’s family systems theory will also be discussed in order to help attendees better understand how their individual grief and suffering affects their family unit.

GriefShare – A non-denominational seminar and video-based grief support program ([www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)).

Lay Advisory Committee – The (LAC) will consist of seven individuals: The Candidate; (1) Licensed Funeral Director; (1) Licensed Grief Counselor and (4) Lay members from New York Worship Center Church. This committee will work together to develop and evaluate the project.

## METHODOLOGY

Through collaboration between New York Worship Center and the J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home a direct mailing list will be developed inviting recent clients of the funeral home to participate in a GriefShare support group. Given the fact the funeral home handles on average 50 services per month, the candidate will suggest that The Lay Advisory Committee develop a mailing inviting adults from families served by the funeral home at least 90 days prior to the start of the project.

Prior to the start of group sessions, training will be provided for (LAC) members who will be functioning as facilitators. GriefShare in the form of a leadership kit will provide training materials. During the 4-8 week group sessions, each session will open with prayer, followed by a 45-minute video that features real-life stories of individuals who experienced loss, along with interviews with counselors and others with experience in grief recovery.

After the group sessions, trained and licensed professionals along with members of New York Worship Center will be available for individual dialogue and personal prayer. Also, in addition to the material contained in the GriefShare program, The Advisory Committee will also discuss the potential benefit of including a social event at the culmination of final group session as a means for the participants of the cohort to maintain their newly formed friendships.

## EVALUATION

1. Devise questionnaires for the Advisory Committee Members to evaluate the project and the project leader

2. Hold an evaluation meeting with the Advisory Committee Members to discuss the process and contents of the project, summarize the evaluation and come up with recommendations.
3. Input from the participants in the project.
4. Self-evaluation of leadership and project.

## TIMELINE FOR PROJECT PLANNING PHASE

### September 2015

1. Finalize discussion and drafting of project topic and prospectus.
2. Finalize list of prospective Lay Advisory Committee Members
3. (LAC) and their prospective assignments and responsibilities for the project.
4. Develop training plan and schedule.
5. Continue research for bibliography.

### October 2015

1. Make revisions to and obtain Prospectus approval.
2. Register New York Worship Center Church with GriefShare as a support group host site and order leadership training kit.
3. Continue reflection on the scope and depth of the project.
4. Confirm Lay Advisory Committee Members (LAC).
5. Discuss the purpose, scope, rationale, methodology, timeline and evaluation options for the project with the (LAC).

### November 2015

1. Meet with (LAC) to confirm dates for the support group meetings, design invitations, discuss marketing strategy and determine registration options.
2. Mail invitations to client families served by the J. Foster Phillips Funeral home within the past 90 days of mailing date.
3. Using the GriefShare leadership kit, begin training facilitators.
4. Continue project research and begin writing rationale.

### December 2015

1. Continue training facilitators.
2. Confirm early registrants

## ACTION PHASE

### January 2016

1. Begin preparations for hosting the support group.
2. Finalize list of registrants and order needed supplies from GriefShare.

### February 2016

1. Begin project.
2. Support Group Dates TBD

### March 2016

1. Continue support group session
2. Support Group Dates TBD

## EVALUATING THE PROJECT

### April 2016

1. Review of evaluation forms submitted by support group attendees.
2. Post-project interviews with The Lay Advisory Committee

### May 2016

1. Site visit with Advisor and The Lay Advisory Committee.
2. Review of overall project.

## WRITING PHASE

June 2016	Begin to write
July 2016	Continue Writing Phase
August 2016	Continue Writing phase
September 15, 2016	Submit table of contents and chapter one to advisor
October 15, 2016	Submit bibliography and two chapters to advisor
November 15, 2016	Submit two chapters to advisor
December 15, 2016	Submit final to advisor
January 15, 2017	Submit Initial full draft to advisor
February 15, 2017	Submit paper to second reader after approval from advisor

March 15, 2017	Submit full final version to D. Min Office
April 2017	Exit Interview with Advisors Approval by Doctoral Ministry Panel
May 2017	Graduation

## APPENDIX THREE

February 15, 2016

Greetings,

As a part of our aftercare service we are pleased to invite you, your family members or perhaps a close friend to “GriefShare” a six-week bereavement support group. This bible-based support group will provide materials and discussion on a variety of topics designed to assist adult participants with the grieving process. GriefShare is being offered Saturday evenings beginning March 5<sup>th</sup> through April 9, 2016 from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

The Reverend Craig A. Pender of New York Worship Center Church will facilitate the support group. Registration is for adult participants only and is on a first-come, first-serve basis as seating is limited. To register today, please call 718-526-5656. Light refreshments will be provided.

All sessions will be held in the atrium at J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, Inc. Please see the enclosed brochure for more information.

Sincerely,

Neil Foster Phillips, LFD

Reverend Craig A. Pender, M.Div., LFD  
Operations Manager

## APPENDIX FOUR

### Weekly seminar topics

- Is This Normal?
- Challenges of Grief
- The Journey of Grief - Part One
- The Journey of Grief - Part Two
- Grief and Your Relationships
- Why?
- Guilt and Anger
- Complicating Factors
- Stuck
- Lessons of Grief - Part One
- Lessons of Grief - Part Two
- Heaven
- What Do I Live for Now?

### In their own words

Group members describe the GriefShare experience

"A safety net when my world was literally falling apart."

"The permission I needed to let grief happen."

"I saw my grief so much more clearly."

"I was able to see I was not alone."

"You find out that you are not crazy."

"A turning point in my life."

"I thought it might be depressing, but honestly it felt good to know I am not alone."

"I would be a mess if it weren't for GriefShare."

"I felt so safe and loved."

"It saved my life."

"Group members quickly became 'family.'"


"GriefShare has given me hope."

"The best thing I ever did for myself."

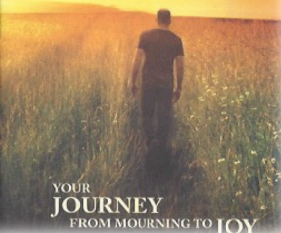
"This group is amazing. It fills my tank every week."

"I am a new person ready for the next step in my life!"

## GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP



Help and encouragement after the death of a spouse, child, family member, or friend



YOUR JOURNEY FROM MOURNING TO JOY

### When to begin

You are welcome to begin attending our GriefShare group at any point. Each session is "self-contained," so you do not have to attend in sequence. You will be able to pick up any sessions you missed in our next 13-week cycle.

[www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)

© MMXIV GriefShare. Not for reproduction.

## Support and encouragement for your grief journey

### The care you need. Information you can trust.

After the funeral, when the cards and flowers have stopped coming, most of the people around you return to their normal lives. But your grief continues and you feel alone.

Often, friends and family want to help you, but don't know how. That's the reason for GriefShare. Our group is led by caring people who have experienced grief and have successfully rebuilt their lives. We understand how you feel because we've been in the same place. We will walk with you on the long path through grief toward healing and hope for the future.

#### About GriefShare

GriefShare is a network of 12,000+ churches worldwide equipped to offer grief support groups. The program is nondenominational and features biblical concepts for healing from your grief. Learn more about GriefShare at [www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org).

#### What to expect

GriefShare is a support group that meets weekly. You'll find it to be a warm, caring environment and will come to see your group as an "oasis" on your long journey through grief. There are three key parts to your GriefShare experience:

- **Video seminar**  
Encouraging, information-packed videos featuring leading grief recovery experts
- **Support group**  
Small group discussion about the weekly video content
- **Workbook**  
Journaling and personal study exercises that reinforce the weekly session topics

### Our weekly schedule

**When:** Saturday Evenings  
March 5<sup>th</sup> through April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
3:00 - 5:00 p.m.




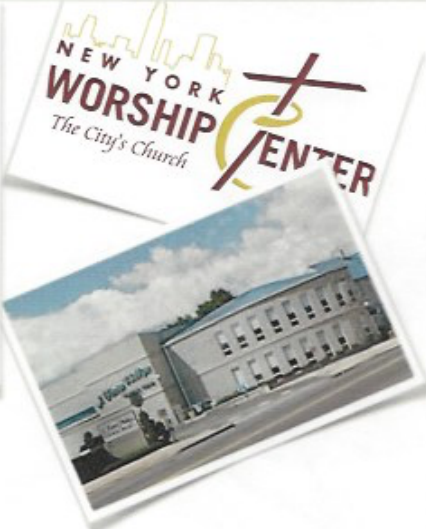

**Where:** The Atrium  
at  
J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, Inc.  
179-24 Linden Boulevard  
Jamaica, New York 11434

**To Register Please Call**  
718-526-5656

**\*Registration for Adults Only**  
Seating is Limited  
Please Call Today




## APPENDIX FIVE



New York Worship Center  
167-04 108th Ave., Annex Bldg.  
Jamaica, New York 11432

Worship: Sunday's 9:00 am

Morning Prayer & Inspiration  
Monday - Friday  
6:00 - 6:15 am  
Dial: 1-712-432-3066  
Code: 637722

### About The Facilitator

The Reverend Craig A. Pender is a licensed funeral director with over 20 years of experience in funeral service. In his role as the manager of operations at J. Foster Phillips Funeral Home, Inc., he continues to build upon the legacy of the 87 year old firm, under the leadership of Neil Foster Phillips, President & CEO.

As Senior Pastor of the New York Worship Center Church, Reverend Pender's commitment to his community naturally engenders him to care, comfort and compassionate leadership.

Rev. Pender believes that education is essential for personal growth and community service, he has obtained a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership; The Master of Divinity, from Drew Theological School, Madison, New Jersey where he was the 2014 recipient of the Henry L. Lambdin Prize for Excellence in Pastoral Leadership. He is currently pursuing the Doctor of Ministry Degree from Drew with a concentration in Congregational Growth and Community Development.

APPENDIX SIX



**REGISTRATION FORM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please print email address \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth (month/day) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency contact (name and phone number) \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about GriefShare? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please share a little information about the person you lost and when the loss occurred \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If you plan on bringing children to our childcare, please list their names, gender, ages, and present school grades.

\_\_\_\_\_

Registration fee: \$\_\_\_\_\_ includes workbook and other expenses during all weeks of sessions)

\_\_\_\_\_ Payment attached

\_\_\_\_\_ I'll bring it next week

\_\_\_\_\_ Please cover my registration from the scholarship fund



APPENDIX SEVEN



**GROUP MEMBER  
AGREEMENT**

**GROUP MEMBERS AGREE:**

1. To respect the other members and keep things said within the group confidential. Personal information is not to be used outside of the group. (Exception: if you are a danger to yourself or others.)
2. To allow time for everyone to comment and share how they are feeling. Instances of silence during discussion time will be viewed as “okay” because it allows everyone time to think before answering.
3. To commit to doing the healing work found in the participant workbooks From Morning to Joy exercises in My Weekly Grief Work.
4. That this is a biblically based in Christ-centered program and that grief-related topics will be looked at through the lens of the Bible.
5. That everyone is free to ask questions and to express feelings, thoughts, concerns, anger, fears, and successful milestones.
6. That everyone is at a different place on his or her grief/healing journey.
7. That facilitators have the right to remove any person from the group who has misrepresented him or herself (e.g., using the group to find a date, and group hopper, or a person who has never experienced a loved one’s death.)
8. That while attending GriefShare there is a “no dating” policy among members, in group members understand they will be cautioned against dating while grieving because the change of you emotional focused affects learning and growth recovery.
9. That they will make a commitment to their grief process and will attend every session in the 13week cycle (and may repeat the cycle one or two more times).
10. To allow facilitators to use comments made or insights discovered by the member (no name used) as helpful examples for others and struggling with grief issues
11. That if a member ever feels offended by what a facilitator or another participant has said or done, that he or she will commit to talking to that person with another person present and work through the offense. This is important and vital.
12. To acknowledge and understand that GriefShare facilitators are not college degreed counselors, psychiatrist, or psychologist but are lay people with a heart for Christ and for His people becoming whole and healed.

**“I AGREE THAT I WILL ABIDE BY THE GROUP AGREEMENT, I REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPECTING THESE GUIDELINE AT ALL TIMES.”**

**SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_**

**\* NOTE: TWO COPIES ARE SIGNED AND DATED, ONE FOR THE PARTICIPANT AND ONE FOR THE PRIMARY LEADER.**

APPENDIX EIGHT



**GROUP GUIDELINES ON  
CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATING**

**CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY**

Your primary goal while attending GriefShare is to heal from the trauma of your loss. Because we want you (and everyone else) to be comfortable and to feel free to discuss whatever is on your mind, we ask that you adhere to the following guidelines while attending this group:

- Never repeat anything discussed in the group. Disclosing confidential matters with others can cause a great deal of distress and many times even bring undo emotional, legal, or physical harm. If we hear that someone is talking outside the group, that person will no longer be welcome.
- Feel free to share your experiences, but refrain from giving advice, and limit sharing time to allow others the same opportunity to share.

**DATING POLICY**

- We do not allow dating within the group and strongly urge you to consider not dating at all during attendance of the GriefShare recovery program.
- This is a time for the healing in building emotional strength. If you are emotionally involved with someone of the opposite sex, your focus is not where it needs to be in this will affect your recovery.
- We encourage you to make friends with those of the same-sex and exchange contact information to support each other during this time.

**AGREEMENT**

I agree I will abide by the group guidelines and will not discuss anything shared in the group. I realize the importance of respect when it comes to the confidentiality of others and cannot willfully expect them to keep my comments to themselves if I choose to openly discuss personal information outside our group.

I also agree to not date anyone within my group and will consider not dating anyone while attending the GriefShare recovery program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX NINE



**LEADER AGREEMENT FORM**

GRIEF MINISTRY IS A SACRED TRUST FROM THE LORD AND A SERIOUS COMMITMENT ON YOUR PART.

As a member of the GriefShare ministry team, I agree with the Lord and my fellow ministry team to ...

- Commit to being an active, contributing member of the \_\_\_\_\_ GriefShare team and to pray regularly for the growth and success of the program, its leadership, and for those individuals who have turned to us for assistance through this ministry.
- Attend every session and every leadership meeting unless providentially hindered, at which point I will notify leadership immediately.
- Arrive at all functions on time.
- Maintaining an active personal spiritual life with daily time for prayer and Bible study.
- Being an active, growing member of my church.
- Live a morally pure lifestyle, modeling the concepts taught through our ministry.
- Not date people who are participants in my GriefShare group or who are participating in other GriefShare groups sponsored by the church.
- Maintain confidentiality within the group. What is said in the group stays in the group, unless you are debriefing with your leadership team members or unless there is someone in the group who has intent to harm him or herself or others: this would need to be addressed immediately (see "Sample Procedures for Suicide Intervention" in LeaderZone Library).

I COMMIT TO BEING ACCOINTABLE TO THE CHURCH LEADEERSHIP UNDER THESE GUIDLEINES AND WILL EARNESTLY SEEK GOD'S STRENGTH, LEADING, AND PROTECTION TO GUIDE ME AS I PARTICIPATE IN THIS MINISTRY.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX TEN



### SAMPLE GRIEF LETTER

H. Norman Wright shares this sample grief letter in his book *Recovering from Losses in Life*

Dear Friend (family, pastor, fellow workers ...),

Recently I have suffered a devastating loss. I am grieving and it will take months and even years to recover from this loss. I wanted to let you know that I will cry from time to time. I don't apologize for my tears since they are not a sign of weakness or lack of faith. They are God's gift to me to express the extent of my loss, and they are also a sign that I am recovering.

At times you may see me angry for no apparent reason. Sometimes I'm not sure why. All I know is that my emotions are intense because of my grief. If I don't always make sense to you, please be forgiving and patient with me. And if I repeat myself again and again, please accept this as normal.

More than anything else I need your understanding and your presence. You don't always have to know what to say, or even say anything, if you don't know how to respond. Your presence and a touch or hug lets me know you care. Please don't wait for me to call you since sometimes I am too tired or tearful to do so. If I tend to withdraw from you, please don't let me do that. I need you to reach out to me for several months.

Pray for me that I will come to see meaning in my loss someday and that I would know God's comfort and love. It does help to let me know that you are praying for me. If you have experienced a similar type of loss, please feel free to share it with me ...

This loss is so painful, and right now it feels like the worst thing that could ever happen to me. But I will survive and eventually recover ...

Thanks you for caring about me. Thank you for listening and praying. Your concern comforts me and is a gift for which I will always be thankful.

(Revell, 2006)

APPENDIX ELEVEN



**PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK FORM**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Note Do not include your name if you want your feedback to be anonymous*

1. What have you liked most about the GriefShare video seminars?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Has GriefShare had any impact on your life? If so, how?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How could we improve GriefShare the next time?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What was your discussion group experience like?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What was your experience with your support group facilitators?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Any suggestions for improving the group?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. My next steps:
  - I want to go through the GriefShare cycle again.
  - I'd like to find a place to serve within my church
  - I'd like to join a Bible study to continue growing in God's Word.
  - I'm interested in serving on the GriefShare leadership team.
  - I'm interested in establishing a GriefShare ministry in my church
  - I'm interested in learning more about church.
  - I'm interested in speaking with someone about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX TWELVE



**LEADER FEEDBACK FORM**

*Please complete this form to help us evaluate how to improve our GriefShare ministry*

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many sessions have you served in GriefShare?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What three things did we do well?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What three things do we need to focus more attention on?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What do you like best in serving as a leader during this six-week cycle?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What challenged you the most in serving as a leader during this six-week cycle?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How would you rate the impact GriefShare is having on the participants?  
\_\_\_ Very little      \_\_\_ Average      \_\_\_ A lot –very helpful      \_\_\_ Not certain
7. How can we be more effective in meeting the needs of our participants?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How many of the participants are now visiting (or have joined) our church?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How many participants prayed to received Christ or made a recommendation as a result of attending GriefShare? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX THIRTEEN



### **PRAYER: THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR JOURNEY**

The most important part of your journey is to have an ongoing personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ through prayer.

Maybe you are thinking, “But I don’t know how to pray.” The Psalms are full of prayers and provide you with a wonderful pattern for how to pour out your heart before God. The Psalmist may have eloquent words, but God doesn’t care about that, His desire is that you just talk to Him. Read Psalms 116:1-19 below, and then to consider using one of the three suggested ideas to write a prayer to God in a journal. No matter what your circumstances, always remember to keep talking to God.

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord; “O Lord, save me!”

The lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simple hearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed; therefore I said, “I am greatly afflicted.” And in my dismay I said, “All men are liars.” How can I repay the lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O lord, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord—in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord.  
(NIV)

Here are suggested ideas to help you write out a prayer in a journal:

1. Thanks God for His Presence. Ask Him to help you through this pain. Pour out your real feeling and emotions to God.
2. What are your fears and your worries? Ask God to give you courage to face them.
3. Ask God for renewed hope and thank Him for the fact that He understands suffering because Christ suffered too.

By Jan Lefever and Jodi Rule-Rouse

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## APPENDIX FOURTEEN

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Bereavement** – the experience of the death of a loved one or close friend.

**Bereavement Ministry** - an outreach program for members of our church and community who are experiencing personal loss through death.

**Complicated Grief** – prolonged, intense and debilitating grief

**Death** – the irrevocable cessation of life.

**Grief** - the normal human response to the death (loss) of a loved one.

**Grieving Process** – Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' 5 Stages define the process a bereaved person may go through in order to resolve their grief. The 5 stages are: 1) Denial; 2) Anger; 3) Bargaining; 4) Depression and 5) Acceptance. Elements of Bowen's family systems theory will also be discussed in order to help attendees better understand how their individual grief and suffering affects their family unit.

**GriefShare** – non-denominational seminar and video-based grief support program ([www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org)).

**Lay Advisory Committee** – the (LAC) will consist of seven individuals: The Candidate; (1) Licensed Funeral Director; (1) Licensed Grief Counselor and (4) Lay members from New York Worship Center Church. This committee will work together to develop and evaluate the project.

**Mourning** – the act and/or outward sign of grieving

**Pastoral Care** - the ministry of care and counseling provided by pastors, chaplains and other religious leaders to members of their church or congregation, or to anyone within community, with a focus on healing, reconciling, guiding and sustaining.

**Spiritual Formation** - an intentional Christian practice that has as its goal the development of spiritual maturity that leads to Christ-likeness.

**Unchurched** - not belonging to or connected with a church.



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