

Leading Through Grief and Loss

Our world is experiencing an inordinate amount of grief and loss during the pandemic. Loss of community as we know it; loss of employment; loss of certainty; loss of business-as-usual; and loss of life on an accelerated trajectory. Without a miracle, the spreading of COVID-19 will result in each of our communities experiencing hundreds of deaths over the next few months.

Reframing the Reality

More than ever, we need Christian leaders who are emotionally and physically prepared and thinking creatively to minister differently to those who are grieving. By having good support around you, you will be in a better position to reframe this difficult time and provide compassion, care and support through a season of tremendous grief and loss.

Look after Yourself

Your health and well-being are critical for you to minister effectively with others.

- Determine the life-giving rhythms that you need—spiritually, physically, socially and intellectually—for you to be at your best.
- Eat well and get good rest.
- Review and guard the boundaries that are essential for you to be committed to this for the long haul. Be sure to include some fun and enjoyment into your schedule.
- Have a few close companions who are praying for you and regularly checking in with you. Be honest about what you're thinking and how you're feeling as you deal with personal grief and loss, and as you carry the tragic stories of so many others.
- Pay attention to communication from health authorities and adhere to their best practices so you are not putting yourself or others at risk.

Imagine the Possibilities

Social distancing has changed everything about ministering to those who are isolated, sick and dying. In addition, the volume of need is increasing.

- Face this as a likely scenario for your context. If you're not already seeing the wave, begin to get prepared for what is coming.
- Counseling and visitation will only be possible through virtual connections for a season. Get administrative support to help you get set-up, oriented and coordinated with social platforms and communication.
- Identify and train up a network of care givers to support a higher number of people and to minister effectively with those who are isolated, sick, and dying; and with their families.
- If you are in a position of leading funerals and end-of-life services, develop a virtual system and approach to communicate, coordinate and help families and friends bring appropriate closure in these unusual times.

God Who Redeems All Things

You are positioned for such a time as this. Although it is difficult, do not be discouraged. Keep your eyes on Jesus so you won't grow weary and lose heart. God, who is able to do more than we can ask or imagine, is still working to draw the whole world to himself and he invites us to join with him in what he is doing in the midst of grief and loss. Be faithful at your post to bring the redemptive hope of Jesus to the world.

This article was written by Sharon Simmonds (director of programs, Arrow Leadership) in collaboration with Lynnita Weber (strategic consultant with international development and community disaster relief; executive director, St. Paul's Leaskdale).

You may be interested in a resource by Peter Roebbelen that encourages us to live to the fullest in the present, and to love the people around us as never before, *Mercy: Life in the Season of Dying* (2018).