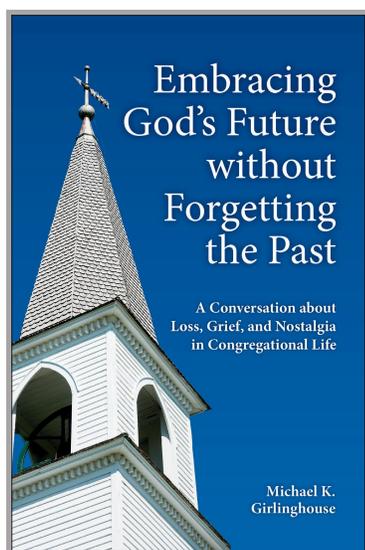


Loss, Grief and Nostalgia in Congregational Life



Church World Service
Caring in Crisis: Leader Briefs
March 15, 2022



Introduction:

A little about me

Why I wrote this book.



My Basic Premise:

LOSS always results in
GRIEF...

...and CHANGE
always results in
LOSS.



Change and Loss

“Few would disagree that we live in a period of profound social and cultural change. Cultural sociologist Ann Swidler refers to such times as ‘unsettled.’ By this she means that traditional ways of doing things typically no longer work and new strategies for action must be developed without any assurance they will work.”

David A. Roozen
American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving
Hartford Institute for Religion Research
Retrieved from www.faithcommunitiestoday.org



“New” Ways of Thinking about Grief and Loss

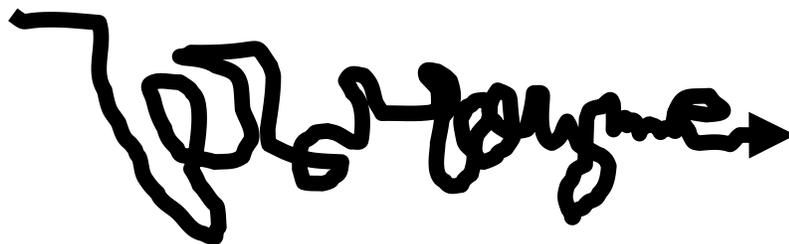


- Grief is a process that focuses on tasks, not “stages.”
- The purpose of Grief is not to sever emotional bonds with the deceased but to redefine our relationship with the deceased.

Grief is *not* like this:



Grief is more like this:



A Task-Based Model of Grief



William Worden

Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner, 4th ed., New York: Springer, 2009.

Task 1 – Accepting the Reality of the Loss

Task 2 – Process the Pain of the Grief

Task 3 – Adapting to the world without the deceased.

Task 4 – Find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life.

The Path Through Grief

- Because Grief is RELATIONAL all grief experiences are unique.
- Grief is a common human EXPERIENCE that includes emotional, physical, social, and spiritual dynamics.



Feelings Associated with Grief:

remorse, regret, relief, guilt, anger, shame, anxiety, loneliness, anguish, abandonment, fear, sadness, joy, yearning, depression, irritation, acceptance, confusion, etc. etc. etc...

Grief is a Physical response!

loss of appetite, headache, abdominal pain, weight in the chest, sighing, weakness, listlessness, insomnia, trouble concentrating, dreams, hallucinations, etc.

Social impact of Grief:

Social withdrawal, isolation, conflict, unrealistic expectations of others, inability to focus on daily tasks, over functioning, changes in roles and relationships, etc.

Spiritual impact of Grief:

Loss of meaning and a search for new meaning, questioning spiritual beliefs, strengthening of spiritual beliefs, anger at God, doubts, etc.

The Path Through Grief

- Because Grief is RELATIONAL all grief experiences are unique.
- Grief is a common human EXPERIENCE that includes emotional, physical, social, and spiritual dynamics.
- Grieving takes TIME.
- Grieving is HARD WORK.



Loss in Congregational Systems



- **Faith Communities are Complex Emotional Systems**
 - **System of Systems**
 - **Fluidity of Membership and Participation**

Loss in Congregational Systems



- **Faith Communities are Complex Emotional Systems**
- **Faith Communities have a Culture of Loss**
 - **Cohesion – Enmeshed, Flexible, Disengaged**
 - **Communication – Expressiveness**
 - **Structure, Roles, Relationships**
 - **Help-seeking Behaviors**
 - **Conflict**
 - **Loss history**

Loss in Congregational Systems



- **Faith Communities are Complex Emotional Systems**
- **Faith Communities have a Culture of Loss**
- **Local culture of loss**
 - **Community experiences and history**
 - **Local Demographics**

Yearning vs. Nostalgia

Yearning –

Yearning is a common grief response that is characterized by a desire to reclaim or recreate the remembered past which can trap us in the past if it is not resolved.

Nostalgia –

Nostalgia is a common human coping mechanism that draws strength from the memory of past experiences to help us adapt to the present and give us hope for the future.



Routledge, Clay, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource*, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016

Yearning



Yearning – Recreating the Past

“Trying to recreate the past is like reaching for a chocolate chip cookie at the potluck, biting into it, and finding out it is raisin.”

--ELCA Bishop



Yearning – Recreating the Past

1. The world has changed.
2. The remembered past never really existed.



Yearning – Trapped in the Past

Prolonged Grief Disorder

Can result from experiences of complicated grief.



Yearning – Trapped in the Past

Prolonged Grief Disorder

Persistent:

- Preoccupation with the past.
- Emotional numbness.
- Intense sorrow and emotional pain.
- Bitterness or anger.
- Difficulty accepting the loss.
- Maladaptive appraisals about oneself.



Yearning – Trapped in the Past

Prolonged Grief Disorder

Persistent:

- Difficulty trusting others.
- Feeling alone or detached.
- Feeling that life is empty or meaningless.
- Confusion about one's role or diminished sense of identity.
- Difficulty with positive reminiscence.
- Difficulty or reluctance to pursue interests or plan for the future.



Yearning – Getting Unstuck

- The only way through grief is to GRIEVE.
- Grief is best processed through NARRATIVE.
- NORMALIZE Grief.
- Promote SOCIAL engagement.
- Building MOTIVATION for change.
- Identify new ASPIRATIONS for making meaning.
- Alternate focus on LOSS and RESTORATION.



Nostalgia



Nostalgia – Coping Mechanism

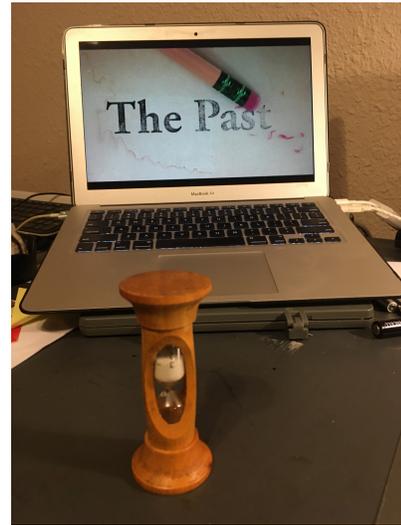
Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource
Routledge, Clay
New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016



Nostalgia – Coping Mechanism

Nostalgic memories help build:

- Social Connectedness
- Self-Awareness and Self-Esteem
- Meaning and Significance
- A Sense of Vitality



Nostalgia – Strength from the Past

Nostalgia:

- Contributes to Belonging
- Raises optimism
- Evokes Inspiration
- Boosts Creativity



“Nostalgic memories
keep the wolf of
insignificance from the
door.”

Wallace, in
Mr. Sammler's Planet (1970)
Saul Bellow



Embracing God's Future (Without forgetting the past.)

- See the past as a resource.
- Become a learning community
- Renewed energy for ministry
- Ready to be surprised by the presence and power of God.



EMBRACING GOD'S FUTURE

Continuity



Loss/Grief

New Creation

Innovation



Taking up
Life
Again



Remembering
Forward



Questions?
Comments?
Thoughts?