

**What is a congregation to do?  
Grief in family and congregational life**

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## **What is a congregation to do? Grief in family and congregational life**

**Helen Harris**

*Loss and grief and the need to mourn are experiences common to all families. Congregations are uniquely positioned to help congregants and members of the community with death and loss and grief. This article explores the professional literature available to congregations and pastors interested in increasing service and outreach to those who are bereaved.*

Congregations do an incredible job of responding to families at the time of a death. Church members bring food to the home and to the funeral meal. We attend the visitation and the funeral service and send sympathy cards offering thoughts and prayers. We visit the family in the days following the service. We are family to the families in the church experiencing crisis. Then, as families do, we get busy with our lives, things seem to return to normal, and the bereaved often face the ongoing challenges of mourning and grief with little attention or support. We wonder if we should bring up the name of the deceased. We know that we don't want to create additional pain. We wonder about our own questions and don't want to add to the questions of the bereaved. Days pass and it becomes more and more awkward to call or make a visit. There is in the American culture an expectation that grief support will be significant for days and even weeks after a loss. Places of employment provide up to three days of funeral leave. Then we find ourselves confused that the bereaved are still struggling while we have moved on.

We know from the literature that the entire first year after a death is one loss after another. The first birthday, the first anniversary, the holidays, the anniversary of the death all represent new losses when the bereaved experience them for the first time without a loved one. Continuing to be present and supportive through these difficult days is a real ministry to those adjusting to life without the deceased.

Congregational family members are in a particularly strong position to help survivors accomplish what William Worden identified as the four tasks of mourning.

(1) Congregations help survivors acknowledge the reality of the loss with the funeral and memorial opportunities. (2) Being present without judgment allows the bereaved to experience the pain of the loss. (3) Church services and ceremonies help mourners begin to adjust to an environment with the deceased. And (4) the work of the church helps survivors begin to withdraw emotional energy from the deceased and reinvest it in others. The beginning of this ministry is understanding the experience and believing that experiencing pain does not indicate a lack of faith. This article reviews resources designed to help with these tasks.

### ***A plethora of books on grief: Where do we start?***

It is not difficult to find books written about grief and loss. Many are written by those who have been widowed, those who have lost children, and those who have experienced other losses. Additionally, a number of psychologists, social workers, counselors, physicians and chaplains have written books on understanding and intervening with the bereaved. I have chosen a cross section of the books available,

paying particular attention to the newer nontraditional resources and several of those that have been helpful to the persons with whom I have worked. The selections include some “testimonial” books, some “teaching” books, and some workbooks for therapeutic interventions.

The theories developed around “stages of grief” find their roots in the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross with dying patients and their families. I heard Dr. Kubler-Ross say some years ago that she never intended to create a formula for dying or for grief. Her writings are not prescriptive but are informative and descriptive. Her stages of dying and grief model identifies common feelings experienced by those who are losing their health and lives and the significant others who love them. Those feelings do not occur necessarily in a particular order; nor are they linear in expression. The anticipatory grief and post-loss grief experiences vary for each person. It is not helpful to label someone’s responses as a “stage of grief” with the expectation that those responses will dissipate in a certain amount of time. Grief is a normal response to a pathological event. It does not feel normal, however, and it does not follow a prescribed time line.

Some authors describe stages of grief; others describe tasks of mourning; still others describe needs for reconciliation of grief. Although the words vary, the theme is the same. Grief is a response to loss that includes cognitive, emotional, physical, social and spiritual components. Bereavement is the experience of having lost. Mourning includes the rituals and responses we make to the feelings of grief to cope and move through the experience. In every author’s case, there is clear information that grieving is

a process without an identifiable end point. There is never a time when it is as though the loss had not occurred. In fact, the current literature clearly articulates that grieving is less about letting go and more about integrating the lost relationship and memories into the total fabric of our lives. Grieving varies from person to person and situation to situation. Albert Hsu's book on grief following a suicide provides unique biblical insights. Terry Martin and Kenneth Doka identify different patterns of grieving. Ashley Prend describes the opportunity to use the lifelong effects of loss and grief.

Hsu, Albert. (2002). *Grieving a suicide: a loved one's search for comfort, answers & hope*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. ISBN 0-8308-2318-2.

The most thorough, real, and engaging book in my experience on grief from a Christian perspective is Albert Hsu's *Grieving a Suicide: A Loved One's Search for Comfort, Answers and Hope*. Hsu writes in memory of his father, who committed suicide following a major stroke. He poignantly relates his own experience while addressing many of the tough questions about suicide and sin, and about where God is in the midst of incredible pain. Hsu uses biblical references effectively to tackle his own struggle. In one discussion, Hsu points out two Bible stories, the first at the beginning of the book of Luke and the second at the end of the book of Luke. The first is the story of Jesus as a child, staying behind after the Passover while his parents unknowingly returned to Nazareth. The second, at the end of Luke, is the story of two disciples on their way to Emmaus after Jesus' death who do not recognize him. Hsu tells us:

“The literary parallelism between the two stories is intentional. In the first Passover story, the pilgrims think Jesus is with them,

but he's not. In the second case, they think Jesus *isn't* with them but he really *is*. The pastoral lesson for us is that sometimes, when times are good, we get caught up in everyday life and don't notice if God is there or not. But at times of loss and tragedy, when we experience grief, we think God is absent. We think he's no longer there, he doesn't care for us, we're on our own. Our downcast eyes cannot see the God who walks beside us." (p. 122).

The list of resources in the appendix is particularly helpful. Congregational leaders would do well to be familiar with these resources. As much as we would like to believe that suicide isn't a choice that persons of faith make, persons of faith do sometimes struggle with clinical depression and may despair of life. Several years ago, our Baptist congregation struggled with knowing how to respond to the wife and children of a church member who committed suicide after being in services regularly for the previous year. I was called last year to help a local Episcopal congregation deal with the death by suicide of a prominent member and benefactor in the church. In both cases, one of the challenges for the congregation was guilt expressed by members for having missed the signs of the incredible despair felt by the congregant. Understanding these feelings is the beginning of being congregational family to the immediate survivors. Hsu concludes his powerful work with a scripture:

"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,  
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;  
I will turn the darkness into light before them  
And make the rough places smooth.  
These are the things I will do;  
I will not forsake them." (Isaiah 42:16).

This integration of questions and searching with the faith that there are answers even when we don't find them is the strength of Mr. Hsu's book.

Martin, Terry L & Doka, Kenneth, J. (2000). *Men don't cry...women do: transcending gender stereotypes of grief*. Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis. ISBN: 0-87630-995-3.

One of the fascinating new books about grief is Terry Martin and Kenneth Doka's work, *Men don't cry...women do*. Martin and Doka acknowledge the long held belief that there are gender influences on grief patterns. They assert that while gender influences grief, it does not determine grief response. Martin and Doka refer to Therese Rando's work on the 37 factors that influence the grief and mourning of any given person and then discuss two distinct grief patterns: intuitive and instrumental. They find that most grief literature is geared toward intuitive mourning which focuses on the need to work through one's grief by externalizing feelings. Intuitive grief is generally more prevalent among women. Instrumental mourning tends to be more behavioral and cognitive and is generally more prevalent among men. The authors acknowledge that few people fall entirely into one pattern or another and acknowledge a third pattern, blended mourning, which incorporates features of both.

They suggest that those helping the grieving pay attention to instrumental grieving as a legitimate pattern of mourning to avoid disenfranchising those who convert their energy into thinking and doing rather than feeling. In fact, they find that those whose grief pattern is instrumental may be aggrieved again by the judgment of others who have expectations that grief is expressed emotion. The authors look at theoretical frameworks supporting their approach and discuss at some length the influence of personality types on patterns of grief. They recommend adaptive mourning strategies for instrumental grievers. A few examples include: action that channels energy, action that memorializes

the deceased, solving problems associated with the loss, activity that helps the mourner return to normal routines. The authors also identify dissonant responses with a reminder to those helping the bereaved that most, if not all, theorists who write about grief and loss identify a period of initial disorganization commonly called shock and commonly characterized by denial and confusion. One important reference in Martin and Doka's book is the discussion of Therese Rando's work, *Treatment of Complicated Mourning*. Rando identifies factors that contribute to complicated mourning and approaches to working with those who require more intervention than the support of family, friends, and congregations.

Sanders, Catherine M. (1998). *How to survive the loss of a child*. Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing. ISBN: 0-7615-1289-6.

The best treatment of the grief of parents since Jackie Schiff's *The Bereaved Parent* is, in my estimation, Catherine Sander's *How to survive the loss of a child*. No loss is more unnatural or evokes more sympathy and recoil. The irony is that the death that most persons respond to most emotionally is also the death that is frightening and threatening. Congregational families involved with bereaved parents find themselves confronted the fact that the world isn't a safe place for children and with the many questions of God that follow the death of a child. Sanders describes the death of a child as "an impossible grief." (p. vii.). She acknowledges that the beginning of her journey in writing about the loss of a child began when her son, Jim, died in an accident. She moves from her experience to what she calls "five phases of bereavement" and examples of child death including miscarriage, stillbirth and abortion. Sanders draws from her



interviews and work with other bereaved parents. While the book is not written from the perspective of congregational support for grieving parents, Sanders uses language very familiar to persons of faith as she describes the importance of healing, forgiveness, and the return of love and joy. She further describes the spiritual challenges of feeling betrayed by God and angry with God and the importance of allowing the feelings and the protest. Finally, she refers to her previous work, *Surviving Grief and Learning to Live Again*, and the “need to outline a sixth phase of grief, that of spiritual growth.” (p. 206). I believe that congregational families are uniquely positioned to help with that spiritual growth when present, non judgmental, and loving.

### ***Resources for Children’s Grief***

The work of Alan Wolfelt on children’s grief provides a practical guide for providing supportive care to bereaved children. Books, audiotapes, and videotapes available through the Companion Press at The Center for Loss and Life Transition ( 3735 Broken Bow road, Fort Collins, Colorado 80526) include The Child’s Experience with Grief: The Caregiver’s Role, A Child’s View of Grief, and Helping Teens Cope with Grief, and *What Bereaved Children Want Adults to Know about Grief*.

Wolfelt, Alan D. (1996). *Healing the Bereaved Child: Grief Gardening, Growth through Grief and other touchstones for Caregivers*. Fort Collins, Colorado: Companion Press. ISBN: 1-879651-10-6.

Wolfelt’s *Healing the Bereaved Child* is a practical guide for caregivers interested

in supporting children dealing with a loss. It is written for lay and professional caregivers who view death as a normal part of life and grief as a natural process. Dr. Wolfelt's model eschews the medical model of grief as illness. Instead, he describes grief as an opportunity for growth and caregivers as meaningful people in a child's life who spend time with the child expressing the feelings that change over time. The book provides an outline of information about children's grief including children's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to loss. Wolfelt enumerates the six needs of mourning for bereaved children: (1) acknowledge the reality of the death; (2) move toward the pain of the loss while being nurtured physically, emotionally, and spiritually; (3) convert the relationship with the person who has died from one of presence to one of memory; (4) develop a new self-identity based on a life without the person who died; (5) relate the experience of the death to a context of meaning; and (6) experience a continued supportive adult presence in future years. Congregations are well positioned to meet these needs of mourning through the programming in the congregation and the natural helping systems in the church.

Wolfelt offers specific recommendations and techniques for meeting each of the needs through both individual contact and children's bereavement groups. He acknowledges the importance of religious and spiritual influences though he, like many others, does not articulate the particular strengths of the congregation in providing support for grieving children. He states: "We must ask ourselves what belief systems undergird and give meaning to the life of this child and family. Even though these beliefs may be different than my own, how can I understand and acknowledge them in the life of this child?" (p.

44). A particular benefit of congregational family helpers is the ability to speak the “faith language” of the child and discuss mutually held beliefs. Wolfelt’s book includes art, music and play therapy techniques that can be easily incorporated into the worship opportunities of the church. His analogy of gardening fits well the Christian concept of planting seeds, watering, and bearing fruit over time.

Each chapter includes assessment questions for the helper and resources for additional assistance. I have used this book with college students involved in youth ministry who have found the information and recommendations practical.

Webb, Nancy Boyd. Editor. Second Edition. (2002). *Helping Bereaved Children*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press. ISBN: 1-57230-632-7.

For pastors and social workers in congregations, Nancy Webb’s *Helping Bereaved Children: A Handbook for Practitioners* is a well written guide to clinical assessments and interventions with children who are bereaved. Dr. Webb covers interventions with children at different developmental levels and recommends multi-disciplinary intervention. A bonus is the bibliography of resources on children’s grief and on religious, cultural and ethnic practices related to death.

Fitzgerald, Helen. (2000). *The grieving teen: a guide for teenagers and their friends*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. ISBN: 0-684-86804-0.

*The Grieving Teen* is a wonderful paperback guide for teens who are experiencing the dying or death of someone important for them. Helen Fitzgerald writes directly to teens about the many possibilities in dealing with death and dying from hospital visits to

saying goodbye to the aftermath of grief. She states the questions and for each scenario offers a “What you can do” section with practical tips for the teen. In one example of what teens can do with difficult questions after a death, the author states:

“If you fear answering questions about members of your family spend some time thinking of different responses that you might want to have ready for different situations. They are times when you might want to say: ‘I have two sisters, but one has died,’ or you may want to say ‘I have one living sister’ and leave it at that. As long as you have rehearsed some responses to dreaded or expected questions, you won’t be caught off guard and uncomfortable. You might suggest that other family members do this as well.” (p. 76).

Tips for teens having trouble sleeping or eating after a death are equally practical and include a variety of options. Ms. Fitzgerald moves from issues “when life hangs in the balance” to when death comes, funerals, grief, feelings, resuming your life, the particularly tough situations like suicide, murder and AIDS, the future, secrets and their impact, and dealing with friends. This would be a wonderful read for a teen struggling with end of life and grief and a great resource for a church youth group in a community trying to support families experiencing losses. The author additionally provides other resources for teens who are grieving, including websites. One web site, <http://www.beliefnet.com>, includes “The Grieving Teen” page in alternate months with an opportunity for grieving teens to email questions.

### ***Workbooks***

One emerging trend in grief literature is the development of grief workbooks that take survivors through exercises designed to help externalize the grief experience and memorialize the deceased. These generally follow the author’s choice of theoretical

framework regarding loss and grief. The reader who is interested in using one of these workbooks or providing one should spend some time looking through it for congruence in the approach. The workbooks are intended to be written in over a period of time. Several examples include Caplan's Grief's Courageous Journey; Colgrove, Gloomfield and McWilliams' *Surviving, Healing & Growing: The Workbook*; and Grollman's *Time Remembered: A Journal for Survivors*. There are others for children and teens as well as for adults. I have included for purposes of this review one that is written specifically for daughters who have experienced the death of their mothers.

Hambrook, Diane, Eisenberg, Gail & Rosenthal, Herma. (1997). *The mother loss workbook: healing exercises for daughters*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. ISBN: 0-06-095222-9.

Hambrook, Eisenberg, and Rosenthal acknowledge the particular importance of a woman's relationship with her mother and the relationship between their life stories. The workbook includes stories of what the authors describe as "motherless daughters" to share common themes of loss of mother. The authors write in four sections following a chronology of remembering life with mother, remembering her time of dying, dealing with the changes without her, and looking to the future. The exercises are intended to be guides to the experiences. The reader should not feel bound by the order or content of the exercises. Rather the book should be used as a tool to facilitate the work. This workbook, like most, can be done privately by the survivor, or shared in one on one counseling or in a grief support group. Most of the common themes in grief work are addressed in the workbook; the importance of remembering the person, giving and

getting forgiveness, separating our identity from that of the deceased, and making sense of the questions. Much in this particular workbook addresses the complexity of family relationships and the challenge of resolving those when someone has died. The authors encourage the use of ritual to express both sorrow and joy and redefine relationships.

### ***Specific helps for clergy and congregations***

Alan Wolfelt has focused on making specific materials available to churches, family members, and funeral homes in providing beginning grief services to the bereaved. The beginning place of ministry to the grieving is the funeral ritual. Several of Wolfelt's resources are directed specifically at enhancing the grief ministry work through the funeral.

Wolfelt, Alan D. (1988). *Death and grief: A guide for clergy*. Levittown, PA: Taylor and Francis Group. ISBN: 0-915-202-76X.

Alan Wolfelt wrote *Death and Grief* specifically to address the particular abilities of the clergy to help others in time of crisis and loss. Wolfelt provides the clergy an overview of grief theory, specific recommendations regarding complicated mourning, and responds to questions of pastors about faith and the expression of faith. He includes a chapter on children and grief and the role of clergy in working with children and several chapters on care of caregivers.

Wolfelt, Alan. (2000). *Creating meaningful funeral ceremonies: A guide for families*.

Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press. ISBN: 1-879651-20-3.

*Creating meaningful funeral ceremonies* is a thorough guide for families for the planning for and living out of funeral ceremonies. This excellent resource for families should be read before the family has a need for it. However, since most people are not going to read about creating funerals before their loved one dies, it would make sense of ministers in congregations to be familiar with this material. The information is intended to empower families to individualize the funeral experience for the survivors. Wolfelt covers the details from making initial decisions, working with a funeral home, to each step of the funeral process. More importantly, he articulates options with pros and cons for each and encourages family members to explore with their pastor or clergy member their choices for memorializing the loved one who died. Wolfelt's recommendations are linked to current grief theory and he articulates specific interventions and choices for moving through the grief experience.

Wolfelt, Alan D. (1992). *Understanding grief: Helping yourself grieve*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge. ISBN: 1-55959-038-6.

Of the many books Alan Wolfelt has written about dying and grief and loss, *Understanding grief* is the one most specifically directed toward mourners immersed in their grief. He speaks directly to the bereaved as a professional helper providing information to guide their experiences. Wolfelt asserts the importance of mourning, the myths and challenges around grief, and the specific feelings and self care

interventions available to the bereaved. Wolfelt addresses the complications of grief and mourning and helps readers with self referral for assistance. Finally, Wolfelt turns in his audience from the bereaved to those helping the bereaved through support groups and through one on one caring contact. The material is practical. The reading is simple rather than complex. Wolfelt has additional resources available to mourners and to those who minister to them, including audio and video tapes, booklets, and pamphlets. One important example is the booklet: *How to Care for Yourself While You Care for the Dying and the Bereaved*. Dr. Wolfelt's publications can be ordered from: Companion Press, 3735 Broken Bow Road, Fort Collins, Colorado 80526. On line bookstore is available at [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com).

### ***Videotapes***

In an earlier article in this series, I wrote about my opinion that the professional videos on dying are not as well done, as compelling, or as educational as those done by the entertainment industry. I believe that to be true for videos on grief as well. There are numerous videos available. I have already referred the reader to the Living with Grief series produced by Hospice Foundation of America. There are others that cover the stages of grief and give both examples and instruction. I have not found them as helpful as the movies that address the grief response. They are too many to mention here but from *Steel Magnolias* to *A Grief Observed*, viewers are allowed in to the feelings and responses of fictional characters and have an opportunity to differentiate or relate with



those experiences. The effective use of these movies lies in the discussion that happens after the viewing.

### ***Transcending Loss***

One of the weaknesses of most of the grief and loss literature and the numerous theoretical frameworks espoused is the notion that the grief experience is time limited and something from which we recover. The truth is that grief is about responding to change over time. There is certainly no lack of faith in acknowledging that our lives are changed forever by the relationships given to us and by the ending of those relationships. Rather than “letting go” of those we love who have died, we can consider integrating the memories of that relationship into the overall picture of our lives. With time and expression, the impact of that change takes on less significance. However, the impact of the person in our lives remains significant. I have chosen to review last a book written by a social worker that recognizes the theme of the lifetime impact of grief and how to manage it.

Prend, Ashley Davis. (1997). *Transcending loss: Understanding the lifelong impact of grief and how to make it meaningful*. New York, NY: Berkley Books. ISBN: 0-425-15775-X.

Ashley Prend takes on the years after that initial period of grief that other books address. She describes her book as a book of hope and love. She eschews the notion that loss is only an issue of crisis management and focuses instead on the long term, in fact

lifetime, impact of loss. Prend makes the case for resiliency and meaning reminding us that:

we all get broken by life sooner or later because loss is the price we pay for living and loving. But experience shows that we can become stronger at the broken places and find the opportunity in crisis. (xxi).

Prend recognizes that the bereaved wonder when their pain will be over. She helps individuals understand that the pain changes over time and can be managed and transcended. She declares that many if not most people continue to experience the effects of major loss for the rest of their lives. She introduces the notion of “synthesis,” the lifelong process of integrating loss with the rest of one’s life and moves to “transcendence,” the notion that we can make meaning out of the loss for the rest of our lives. The author recognizes that everyone gets to choose whether or not they seek synthesis and transcendence. She has identified qualities she finds in those who choose synthesis and transcendence: Spirituality, Outreach, Attitude and Reinvestment and spends time on each of those qualities and methods for developing them. Prend reviews the complications for grief but continues to help the bereaved remain accountable for choices to transcend the loss. There is much hope and joy in this little book encouraging the bereaved and those who care about them to recognize that grief is a lifetime event that brings with it incredible opportunity for growth and for ministry to others. Significantly, most grief recovery books are written by authors who have experienced significant loss themselves and are passing along wisdom gained to others. This mirrors the scripture in II Corinthians:

“Blessed be the God and Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any

affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”  
(Second Corinthians 1:3,4; New American Standard Bible).

### ***Tying it all together***

The role of the congregational family is not specifically addressed in the literature. It is addressed, however, in the living of community life. We can take the information presented to lay persons, pastors, counselors, teachers, social workers and therapists and make sense of it in our interaction with those who are dying and grieving. The congregational community of a grieving family has a number of opportunities to make a difference:

1. Be present. Ways of being present at the time of crisis include being part of the rescue team, bringing meals, starting a prayer chain, caring for the well and surviving child, meeting financial needs for hospital and funeral costs, sitting in the emergency room and the intensive care waiting room. Keep being present a year after the death and ten and twenty years after the death.
2. Listen to the story as many times as the bereaved need to tell it. The key to being helpful is hearing the story every time as though it were the first. Those in crisis and those who have lost someone important to them have to find a way to make sense of the experience. Telling it to a good listener is the most effective intervention.

3. Be honest. Provide information that is accurate and simple and in small increments. It is not necessary to tell all truth at once. Persons in crisis need time to absorb the realities of death and loss.
3. Never take away hope. Persons in crisis deal with reality as they are ready. Being honest does not mean communicating hopelessness. Allow people to reframe their hope as they are ready. A mother once expressed hope that she would be healed, then that she wouldn't hurt, and finally that her children would be cared for after she was gone. She was never without hope. The content and focus of her hope changed over time, however.
4. Be available over time. The process of grief takes years. The entire first year after a loss is one loss after another. Mark your calendar and send a note or call on special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and the anniversary of the death. Remember that the bereaved will be thinking about when their child would have graduated from high school, will mourn the secondary losses of the grandchildren they will never have, and will continue to deal with the loss over time.
5. Don't box people into artificial stages or categories. Normalize the grief experience with language of feelings and permission to feel those feelings. Don't tell persons what they must do or must not do. Each person must find the expressions of grief that are helpful to them and those that are not.

6. Provide spiritual support by allowing persons to live the questions. God can handle expressions of anger or questions. Let the bereaved's belief system guide discussions about life after death, the sources of hope for the future. Be the presence of God when the bereaved cannot see or feel God.
7. Speak the name of the deceased. It is helpful to provide rituals of remembering and memorials that honor the deceased. A great fear of the bereaved is that their loved one will not be remembered. Ask how the bereaved can be remembered for years after the loss.
8. Remember that persons who are grieving are not locked in time. They age, grow, change, and enter new life stages as well. Allow the normative changes of life without judgment. A bereaved husband may, with time, marry again. A dying teenager once shared with me his prayer that his parents would have another child soon, not to replace him, but because they were such incredible parents. As the bereaved begin new stages of their lives, they will continue to remember the relationship that was lost.
9. Offer readings on grief to the bereaved, understanding that their ability to accept them and timing will vary from person to person.

10. Trust your own intuitive awareness. What you say is less important than that you are there. Take care of yourself so that you can care for others. Model self care.

In an era of families often stretched across great geographic distances, congregations are in a unique position to offer family to those who are isolated by grief or distance or both. The love and nurturing that is naturally part of the spiritual family experience are the foundational pieces of congregations reaching out to those who are grieving.

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