

# COVENANT

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## ANNUAL APPEAL 2020

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Thank you and may God's blessings be yours in abundance.

## Moving Forward with Faith

By Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D., C.Psych., R.Psych.



I know I am in good company when I say that I cannot wait to see 2020 in the rear-view mirror, recognizing painfully the hardships we are currently living will likely remain with us well into this coming year. The pandemic-related distress is tangible and has affected so many aspects of day-to-day life. All of us are experiencing grief and loss, and increasing fatigue is an inevitable by-product of our current situation.

I am deeply grateful that I am living through the present reality as a person of faith. I am rediscovering the gifts of strength and resilience that I draw from my faith in a renewed way. Psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik (2011) writes about this when he said, "The ground is resilient if, after a flood or a fire, it is able to provide life for new plants, new animals, starting another kind of life. It is not the same as before but renewed." In other words, the pain and loss we experience are real, but so is the hope for healing and newness of life. For us as followers of Jesus, our good and Compassionate Shepherd, the belief in God's transformative and redeeming love is a core aspect of our faith.



The season of autumn provides us with visible reminders of this transformative love. In nature, we observe with awe the changing of the foliage from green to vibrant oranges, yellows, and reds, allowing us a glimpse into creation's natural process of transformation and renewal. In the liturgical life of the Church, it is in autumn when we commemorate all faithful departed. The vivid cultural celebrations of All Souls, as seen here in a colorful Mexican altar for the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), allow us a glimpse into the ultimate transformation from death to eternal life.

The themes of faith, resilience, transformation, and renewal appear in the many online programs offered through Southdown's new **Community Wellness Services**. I am proud to say that we are now reaching out to all Catholics, whether Lay, Clergy, or Vowed Religious, because we are called to help one another during times of distress and uncertainty. Please allow us to be of assistance to you through our wide variety of educational webinars, psychotherapy groups, spirituality groups, and outpatient psychotherapy. Our trusted team of psychologists and spiritual directors is ready to serve you from a respectful Catholic perspective, with clinical expertise and a deep faith in the redeeming love of God. I invite you to review our services and to join us on a journey towards optimal wellness.

With resilient faith and prayerful solidarity,

**Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D., C.Psych., R.Psych.**  
President and Chief Psychologist

# Mourning Our Grief: A Process in Personal Growth

By Sr. Dorothy Heiderscheid, OSF, MSW, ACSW, RSW



The seasons have recently shifted on our planet. While the northern hemisphere is experiencing fall, the southern hemisphere is experiencing spring—the two seasons that call to mind grief and hope, loss and new life.

C. Mari Andrew stated that, “Seasons of loss, like the colder seasons, are the hardest ones to endure, even if you logically understand they won’t last forever.”<sup>1</sup> Spring will come but winter must first be endured.

The awareness of loss seems to be the primary focus of so many conversations these months. Religious communities have been addressing this as membership continues to decrease and life changes. The pandemic has heightened the emotions of what we no longer can take for granted. “For loss is our common denominator. None of us will escape it. None of us will outrun death. What do we do in the space between that is our lives? What is the quality and richness of our lives? How do we move through struggle and let community hold us when we have been laid low?”<sup>2</sup> William Bridges, a noted author on transition issues, believes most of us operate at a *transition deficit*, meaning we do not sufficiently grieve and mourn our losses as they occur. Sometimes life “gets in the way,” we need to “keep moving on” to the next agenda, or it may simply be not recognizing we have experienced a loss.

## What is Grief?

Grief is the container or the internal meaning we give to our loss. It is personal. It can be physical and tangible, such as relationship losses, role changes, material losses, and functional losses, systemic or institutional losses. It can also be symbolic and abstract, as in intra-psychic losses and ambiguous losses, as evidenced in so many of the pandemic losses we experience—loss of mobility or freedom to move about, personal independence, or lack of control, or uncertainty of safety, insecurity of time or health, cancelation of anticipated rituals or events, and maybe even betrayal of our bodies, our government, our church, or any authority. How we process these and other untold losses is a choice. We can smile on the outside and seethe on the inside, which may precipitate a depression, find some addictive behaviour to distance us, or bury it within our body, only to develop physical complaints as a result. A healthy choice is to express it and find creative ways to ritualize the loss.

All grief carries secondary losses: *loss of self*—identity, confidence, health, personality; *loss of security*—emotional, physical, financial, lifestyle; *loss of meaning*—goals and dreams, faith, will/desire to keep going, joy. And it is possible we will never get over our loss because it never goes away. We can, however, reconcile with the loss, allowing it to be a reminder we have given love and received love.

Grief is rarely dealt with in the present, nor is it orderly, but is rather part of a process for the future. The stages of grief as outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross were never intended to be sequential or linear; that is, they were identified as aides in a process.

## What is Mourning?

While grief is the container for the heavy emotions experienced in loss, mourning is the process of working through the loss, of moving the pain from within ourselves to the outside, to articulate or express that pain openly and honestly. This may be a simple task for some, while for others it can take enormous effort. We need to consider that mourning is personal and unique to each of us and something we must face to move forward appropriately.

Another implication of mourning to consider is that the process is developmental and changing, in relationship, circumstances, and experience, each of which has its own speed and pace to process. It is helpful to understand and accept that mourning is universal and a normal part of the life cycle, and most importantly, it affects all four levels of our lives—spiritual, psychological, social, physical.

You may wonder, why so much talk about mourning our losses? Doing so helps us to accept the reality, to allow us to feel the pain of the loss, to remember the person, the anticipated or real event or object that is gone, to develop a new sense of self in this new time and space, to open the door for new meaning and new life and loves, and to provide others an opportunity to show compassion, assist us, receive and witness our pain.

## Risks of Avoidance

What are the risks if we do not identify our losses and mourn? Have you ever had the experience of feeling emotional in a situation of loss and felt confused because your reaction is stronger than the event would suggest? It may mean you are compassionate and empathetic, but it can also be an indication that residual or stored grief has been triggered within you. This can be experienced in many circumstances, for example, at the funeral of an acquaintance, one might realize that the tears that flow are actually triggered in that moment by another past loss of a more personal relationship, such as a sibling or parent.

Sometimes this is referred to as *unfinished business* or *complicated grief*—grief work that remains for us to work through, then let go and move on. Perhaps it is a loss we have been aware of and consciously or unconsciously postponed, displaced, replaced, minimized, or somaticized. Hurts or resentments may fall into this category. Denial of the reality that the pandemic has radically altered our lives (and will for some time) can be another.

## The Process of Letting Go

We cannot begin anew until we have released what we hang on to or what has a hold on us. Consider the clenched fist. When it is grasped tightly, it holds grudges, resentments, losses, etc. In the closed position, the clenched fist cannot receive. If we open the fist, it will release what is held and allow the opportunity to receive what may be offered. The danger we often face is our internal messaging that might encourage keeping the loss secret because of embarrassment, shame, fear of judgement, or perhaps to avoid hearing someone say, "You shouldn't feel that way."

Why is letting go so challenging? It is the familiar, the comfortable, and the secure. And any loss reminds us of our own mortality and attachments. When we see the destruction of hurricanes, tornados, cyclones, typhoons, floods, fires, earthquakes, or tsunamis, or the snatching of a purse, a home invasion, the suffering and deaths due to the pandemic, we experience fear for ourselves in identifying our pain and suffering for those afflicted. We know that how well we resolve and mourn our losses is a predictor of our resilient ability.

## Healthy Ways of Coping with Loss

What can we do to move through this process in a healthy and productive manner? Where is God in the midst of all this loss? The first important step is to take each of the losses seriously. It is common to hear someone say, "I shouldn't complain. Others have it worse." This may be true, but it is also a way to diminish or avoid the reality of what the loss means to you as an individual. Give yourself permission to identify and express it. And be open to hear and receive someone else's expression of loss when it happens. Take the time you need to move through the pain of the loss. If that means taking time for quiet to journal, find ways to do so. Be kind and gentle with yourself. It is easy for us to place judgements on our feelings

when, during this time, it is important to identify and accept them for what they are and what those feelings teach us. Remember that God loves us and promises to be with us even in the midst of grief, loss, uncertainty, and fear. Taking our pain to God in our prayer and listening to our prayer images has the ability to comfort us, to allow new awareness and a spiritual awakening within us.

You could also utilize the skills you have developed over the years to cope with the stress. Exercise is always a priority, but each of us has a variety of methods in our tool kit that refreshes and soothes us. This may be journaling, yoga, mindfulness, painting, colouring, walking. Share your feelings and tell your story. It is helpful to have someone receive your pain and for you to willingly accept others' caring gestures and listening ears. It assists in making sense of the loss and will contribute to a reduction in self-destructive behaviours. Be aware of the need to control. It is an illusion that causes more stress for us rather than a sustained sense of comfort. Find ways to ritualize the loss. We are most creative, and during these times when our typical rituals are not possible, this trait will serve us well. The rituals we create have a way of prayerfully honouring the loss and marking the opportunity for something new to arise.

Above all, allow yourself to change and see the growth that the experience has opened for you. Mourning has a way of cleansing the space, opening us to new ways of being and new growth in how we engage the world. In doing so, we strengthen our ability to re-evaluate the priorities that are important to us, our relationships and our future circumstances. This is the resilience that comes from healthy mourning, the cleansing that sorrowful tears offer our very being when we allow them to flow freely. This is the new beginning we can grasp because we have taken the risk to let go. ■

## Did you know . . .

**Southdown Community Wellness Services** is now open! Our new online services are designed to help you navigate these new and challenging times, and offer an exciting variety of interactive psychoeducation, spirituality and psychotherapy groups, all viewed from the comfort of your home.

### Our premiere webinar series is **Our Faith: A Key to Sustained Mental Health in Times of Crisis**

We invite you to join us for this two-part series to explore how our faith can indeed be key to sustained mental health. Both webinars will include time for questions and answers.

**November 14 and 21, 2020  
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm ET**

Presenter:

**Rev. Stephan Kappler,  
Psy.D., C.Psych., R.Psych.**

President and Chief Psychologist  
of The Southdown Institute.

For more information about our  
**Community Wellness Services**  
and to register, please visit:  
[www.southdown.on.ca](http://www.southdown.on.ca)

## Online Psychotherapy

The Southdown Institute is now offering online psychotherapy in English, French and Spanish to all members of the Catholic Church.

Please call  
**905-727-4214**  
for further information.

1 Andrew, C. Mari (2018). Am I There Yet? The Loop-de-loop, Zigzagging Journey to Adulthood. Clarkson Potter/Publishers, p. 23.

2 Alexander, Elizabeth (2016). The Light at the End of the World: A Memoir. Grand Central Publishing., p. 177.



## Welcome Fr. Francois Diouf, OSB, Ph.D.

We welcomed Fr. Francois Diouf, OSB, Ph.D., to Southdown in October 2020 as a member of our clinical team. He has served as a Benedictine monk and priest for the past eleven years. Francois ministered for several years with the novitiate formation team and accompanied novices and junior monks in three areas: human development, theology, and monastic spirituality. As a doctoral student in psychology, Francois' area of interest is the importance of cultural factors in clinical work. His approach to psychotherapy is based on the recognition and understanding of the cultural uniqueness of each individual. He utilizes an integrative approach of Existential-Humanistic Therapy and Psychodynamic Therapy. Francois offers psychotherapy in his native French, in addition to English.

## Who Knew Teletherapy is More Valuable Today?

By Rev. Innocent Okozi, Ph.D.



When we stop and reflect, it can be amazing to realize how much impact digital technology, with its Internet connectivity and vast social media networks, has exerted on our world, to such a degree that many people cannot imagine life without it. The virtual world has become a deeply woven part of the fabric of our lives. It has the power to bring even strangers together in support of a cause, as well as alienate friends and family members who may differ on some concern. Sometimes, it can feel like some sectors of the human family or organizational systems are playing catch-up with the rapid growth or progress of the virtual world.

Since the early days of connectivity and use of personal devices, we have been caught between moving with the rapid changes in technology, society and social behaviour or choosing to stay with the "old" ways of doing things in a non-digital world. For example, some newspaper readers prefer to hold the actual newsprint in their hands, smell the ink and paper, and leisurely flip through the pages, devouring the news of the day or completing their favourite puzzles. Others prefer the instantaneous delivery of receiving the news, at any moment from around the world, when scrolling through their news feed on their personal device.

As we are all well aware, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived and forever changed the known world as new realities set in. Social distancing, self-quarantine or isolation, the use of new virtual or digital platforms became part of our everyday reality, language and communication. Can you imagine what would have happened during the pandemic if there was no Internet connectivity, no social media, no meeting platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams or other alternatives? How would people have coped with the emotional and mental health distress emanating from the impact of this pandemic? While many in the mental health field were not fully prepared for this new reality, they quickly adapted to the option of teletherapy

as a significant means of continuing to provide services to current and new clients. The question still arises for both the practitioner and client: Is it safe to do teletherapy? This is a common question. However, any caution that may be felt by either the practitioner or the client can be resolved by ensuring that the online platform is secure and reliable, that the privacy of the client and therapist are assured, and that the therapist adheres to the legal and ethical requirements governing their teletherapy practice, so that a good outcome and therapy experience is provided to the client.

Teletherapy is beneficial in so many ways. It provides clients with more prospects for participation in individual and/or group therapy. One of the advantages of teletherapy is that the client does not have to travel to the therapist's physical office space, saving the travel time and expense. It also allows the client to receive therapy while staying in their familiar environment and it improves access for clients who live in rural settings. It provides both client and therapist with more flexibility in scheduling, since there is no physical office to open and close on a daily basis, and cuts down on wait times, since a client signs in at the time of the virtual appointment. It also affords clients the opportunity to experience a safe, therapeutic environment as they deal with their distress, as well as facilitates their healthy coping mechanisms in spite of possible distractions. Teletherapy helps remove barriers, so that more people receive the necessary support and help they need, especially during these challenging and unprecedented times.

Clearly, teletherapy has grown in popularity since the pandemic began and is, for many clients, an effective means of receiving mental health services. Some experts believe that in a post-pandemic world, teletherapy will continue to be developed and offered as a treatment option in addition to traditional in-person therapy. ■

**Covenant** is produced and published by The Southdown Institute. Its purpose is to inform and educate the readership about clinical issues that surface in our work and to invite integration of the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.

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