



## **Caring Hearts Area Seventh-day Adventist Churches Berrien Springs, Michigan**

The Caring Hearts team is composed of a small group of widows/widowers who have been through the experience themselves. The team meets monthly to report on the activities each member has done to walk alongside the persons assigned to them, plan future activities, as well as spend time praying for each widow/widower under their care during the first difficult year of grieving. The leader keeps supplies (cards, books, music CDs, etc.) which have been purchased with the \$100 contributed annually by each of the churches served. The goal is to provide not only comfort and presence but to eventually encourage those served to find a way to minister to someone else.

### **Monthly Activities**

1. Send a sympathy card when the death occurs.
2. Introduce ourselves (leadership team) by sharing our own stories of grief (no more than one page each), including positive experiences of comfort.
3. Phone them for a short chat and offer prayer – every few weeks in the beginning.
4. Send an email with quotations from EGW on grief interspersed with appropriate music.
5. Take them a special dish of food after a month or so when food isn't coming in anymore.
6. Show up to clean the house, wash the car, or do yard work in their early stages of grief.
7. Send a list of helpful books on grief plus some article reprints.
8. Drop off a loaf of homemade bread/garden produce/home-canned or baked items along with a short note of comfort - in person so that they can meet the team leader assigned to them.
9. Make them aware of Grief Recovery programs in the area and alert the leaders of these programs about the recently bereaved spouse so that they can invite them to their next session.
10. Offer them a journal and ways to journal about their spouse or journey of grief.
11. Give them a list of resource people to help with practical needs (plumbing, electrical, mechanic, learning to cook/bake, etc.) during the first year.

12. Call them to see how they are doing and to have them share about their spouse as a person. This way they will understand that someone is interested in hearing their story and knowing about the deceased. End the visit with prayer.
13. Give them Mike Tucker's book, "From Tears to Joy."
14. Invite them to join a small group, prayer or Bible study group, or our group.
15. Introduce them to the idea of helping others, going on a mission trip, or becoming part of some ministry.
16. Give them a sacred music CD.
17. Offer Larry Yeagley's little book "Life After Loss."
18. Invite them for a walk in a park.
19. Invite them for an outing or to eat out together.
20. Send the Spring letter with a packet of Forget-Me-Not seeds.
21. Invite them to a Sabbath meal that the bereavement team makes and a viewing of "Tell the World."
22. Send a holiday card and letter, maybe organize a get-together in December.
23. Give them the book "Dare to Ask for More" on prayer.
24. On the anniversary of the first year of grief, give a bouquet and have prayer with the women and take the men out to eat and pray with them.

### **A Ministry of Hope**

In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen suggests that it is through our woundedness that we can become a source of life for others. He writes,

*When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope. . . . A Christian community is therefore a healing community, not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision. (p.100)*

Those who engage in this ministry are often those who have felt and still feel the pain of losing someone who was their soulmate. That pain is not to be denied. However, through that experience, a new vision, a new strength, does emerge. The Apostle Paul provides an important reminder,

*And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. – Romans 5:6. NLT.*

Nouwen ends his book with this challenge,

*Thus ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated a new creation. (p.102)*