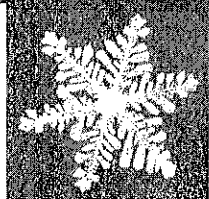


Single Parent Networker

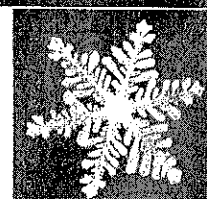
Ascension, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit,
Corpus Christi, St. Anne, St. Mary, St. Joseph,
Christ the King, and Spirit of Life

Volume 24 Issue 1

January 2015



Loneliness & Divorce



I feel so alone." One of the many reasons divorce stinks is the crushing loneliness that so many of us experience when we go through it. It sneaks up on you. You think you're okay. You think you're going to make it. Then you hear a song that was important to the two of you, or you see a couple holding hands, or you hear a dumb joke about divorce on TV. And loneliness descends on you like a cloud of nothingness. You can hardly breathe. You are paralyzed. Then you get angry with yourself.

For Jim, the nights were the worst. "I just lie there, and it's like somebody's piling dirt on my coffin. I can't wait for daytime so I can get up again. I'm exhausted, but at least I'm not alone in the dark."

Ellen felt most alone when she was with other people (which is not at all uncommon, by the way). "I was standing in a group of people at work and I realized everybody there but me had a stable somebody. I felt so alone. I felt like a reject. Why am I not good enough to hold on to a man?"

Show me somebody who's gone through divorce without feeling deep aching loneliness and I'll show you somebody who never felt love. It doesn't matter if you're male or female. If you're the leaver or the left. If you've committed adultery or been pristine in your faithfulness.

You're going to feel loneliness, and it's going to hurt.

So how do you cope? First, you need to acknowledge that you're lonely. You can probably survive loneliness without acknowledging it, but it will take longer and hurt more. So why beat yourself up for no good reason. Go ahead and admit it to yourself: "I'm lonely. I feel alone."

Once you acknowledge that you feel loneliness, I think there are three basic strategies you can use in dealing with it. None of these is any better than the others, and none of them is exclusive -- that is, you may choose to deal with loneliness by using some combination of two of these, or even using all three. Remember, you're in control.

Wait It Out

It may seem impossible now, but time really does heal the wounds of divorce. Plan on somewhere around three years. That doesn't mean you won't start the healing process immediately, and it doesn't mean you'll have forgotten all about your former spouse three years after separation. But in rough terms, most of the healing work for a spouse who's gone through a typical divorce is complete within about three years.

It is a totally legitimate strategy to simply endure the loneliness you feel. It really won't kill you unless you decide to kill yourself. You can just decide to live with it, knowing as you do that it won't last forever.

Benjamin came to see me four years after his separation, because his wife wanted to increase child support. He really didn't mind paying more; his small business was doing better, and he understood that the child support guidelines called for an increase. He was pleasant, businesslike, and task-focused. We figured his child support quickly, and I asked him how he was handling the divorce. "Oh, I'm in good shape now," he said. "It was rough there for a while, but you know it really is true what they say: time does heal all wounds."

I didn't need to remind Benjamin of what a basket case he was during his divorce. He remembered.

Or maybe he didn't. Maybe time not only helps us heal from the pain of divorce; maybe it also helps us forget just how miserable we were when we were in the middle of the crud. Maybe we truly don't remember just how bad it was. I don't know. Benjamin was doing so well that I didn't want to ask, so I didn't.

One caution: there are some of us for whom time is NOT the answer. Fallana in Atlanta told me that she was still lonely and unhappy four years after her divorce. Here's some of what she said: If ONE more person tells me that "love will find me when I least expect it" or that "if I were single, I'd be after you in a heartbeat," I'll slug that poor individual. And that punch will be fueled by all the anger and

resentment of the past four years. I honestly feel as if life is just passing me by. I go to work, and I come home. Nobody seems to want my love, and I have nothing but love to give. I get no support whatsoever from anyone. . . .

I HAVE been through years of therapy, by the way. It really didn't help. I was STILL alone when I left the session. Is this living?

Thank you for reading this. Please realize that things do NOT necessarily get better for everyone after three years.

Fortunately, most of us are not Fallana, but some of us are. That's why the next two strategies are so important.

Fight It

You can take loneliness on directly and resolve that it's not going to beat you. My favorite is Priscilla, who told me "I just decided to grab my loneliness, and I stuffed it in a bathtub full'o'water and held it there 'til it croaked." Colorful. May not be my style, but it got my attention.

You may choose something a little more subtle. If you're working to fight your loneliness, your main task is to move beyond yourself. Transfer your focus from yourself to others. You're already way ahead of me, aren't you?

Get some help. Counseling is always helpful in dealing with loneliness. A therapist can help you analyze what causes you to be lonely, and the more you understand it the less threatening it is. Counseling also works because of the simple truth that shared pain is half the pain, shared joy is twice the joy.

Help other people. Volunteer your time at a homeless shelter. They're nearly always hungry for people, and you'll quickly realize that things could be worse.

Visit your aunt in the nursing home. She'll be glad to see you, and you'll immediately see what a difference you can make.

There are any number of other places where your hands, your feet, and your heart can make a difference.

Global Volunteer Network -

connecting people with developing communities in need

Finally, I cannot overstate the support you can offer -- and receive -- at Helping Each Other -- the DivorceInfo discussion web. I'm proud of the tenderness and compassion that's developed at *Helping Each Other*. You can make a positive difference there too.

Embrace It

Let me first point out that this whole concept of embracing loneliness has a faith component. If you've spent time on DivorceInfo, you probably already know that my faith is important to me. You probably know as well, however, that I will not impose it on you. If you're prepared to forge ahead, welcome.

Precious little about divorce is good. But the chance to embrace loneliness can be among the sweetest discoveries of this whole cruddy process. That's why I list it as one of the good things about divorce. Divorce is an opportunity to explore and develop new relationships, including the relationship you have with yourself and the relationship you have with God. Sit quietly focus your thoughts on God. Simply ask, "Are you with me, God? Can I be with you, God?" This is not about praying for anything; it's just about being with.

God comes to us when we are desperate for help and at our wit's end. God also comes to us when we are quiet, patient, and attentive.

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"Promise me you'll always remember that you're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

- Christopher Robins to Winnie the Pooh



Parenting Pointers

- As our children move out of the home and into young adulthood, our style of parenting changes. Although they will always be our sons and daughters, there comes a time when we are no longer responsible for their relationship with God or morals. All we can do is hold them in prayer, let go, and let God.
- "Dear God, You don't have to worry about me. I always look both ways." (Dean, age 7) Looking both ways is not just a good traffic practice. Help your child see both sides of an argument or a controversial issue. It's a life skill that will help them get along with others who think differently from them.
- Are you a techno-peasant? If your child knows a lot more about the internet than you do, it's time to upgrade your knowledge. Not only is it an opportunity to learn from the younger generation, it's important for you to know enough to protect them from the dangers of the internet.
- Although the best strategy for dealing with the TV is often to turn it off, parents can also use TV to teach. Watch a program with your child and talk back to the TV. "Hmmm, that commercial sure is trying to trick us?" Or, "I can't believe that kid just back-talked to his mom. What do you think the parent should do?"

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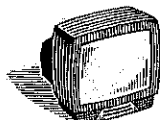
Family Activities for Winter



Go to the library. Explore what the library has to offer other than books. Check out the computer section, look for DVD, CD books on tape, and games that could be checked out.



Get out a deck of playing cards and learn a new card game.



Limit TV viewing time over the course of a week. Ask everyone to list their favorite program. This would also be a good time to talk about alternate activities the family can do together.



Find an easy cookie recipe that everyone can help with. Practice about how to correctly measure different ingredients and the importance of clean hands when baking.



Sit down as a family and decide on some New Year resolutions. Things you can do together that will strengthen the bond with one another. Help each family member to suggest one resolution. Don't forget spiritual resolutions.



Feast of the Epiphany
Tuesday, January 6

The GOLDEN RULE—

Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you

Kids can be cruel but frequently their remarks or actions are unintentional. Help your children be sensitive to other's feelings and needs.

- ◆ Kids are intensely curious when they see anyone who is different from themselves. Seize the opportunity to increase their awareness, acceptance and tolerance. When presented with the situation you may be tempted to tell your children not to stare and not offer an explanation to satisfy their curiosity. Take your children aside and remind them quietly and privately not to stare. If possible, leave the area temporarily so that you can answer their many questions, giving you the opportunity to share your views about treating all with respect. If you can't leave the area, find time when you are alone to answer their questions.
- ◆ Help your children to realize that impulsive, thoughtless actions and words can hurt others. Kindness is rarely, if ever, regretted.
- ◆ Show your children what it feels like to be left out of an event like a best friend's or classmate's party or sleepover. You might ask them to close their eyes and imagine all their friends watching a movie, playing flashlight hide and seek, or telling stories in the dark. Ask them how they would feel if they were not invited.
- ◆ Help your children learn there are things they can do when they know there is someone being tormented or ignored at school or sports activities. Teach them to be accepting and friendly to others who are different and to lead the way for their friends to do the same.
- ◆ Help them to see below the surface of other students behavior. For example, ask them to think about why someone might put someone down and problem solve what they would do if that happened to them or they saw it happening to someone else.



Mother Teresa Quotes on Life

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."

"Live simple so others may simply live."

"A life not lived for others is not a life."

"When you don't have anything, then you have everything."

"Reach high, for stars lie hidden in our soul. Dream deep, for every dream precedes the goal."

"Pain and suffering have come into your life, but remember pain, sorrow, suffering are but the kiss of Jesus - a sign that you have come so close to Him that He can kiss you."

"Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness in your face, eyes and in your smile."

The New Year's holiday marks the beginning of another year of life together for families. It can easily be lost to football games and parties. This year, gather family together for prayers and promises to strengthen the family bond and deepen family faith. Here are some suggestions.

NEW YEAR'S PROMISES

On this first day of 2015, the _____ family gathers here, with faith in God and in on another to make the following promises:

- ☒ To make family time important each day or each week (make a date on the calendar, if necessary)
- ☒ To pray daily for one another
- ☒ To speak with respect to each other (no name calling, excessive teasing, etc.)
- ☒ To compliment each other on strengths, talents and good works
- ☒ To play together as often as possible
- ☒ To eat one meal or snack together every day (giving thanks for food and family)
- ☒ To share family talents and resources with the poor, sick or strangers
- ☒ To take part in the larger church in a way that strengthens our faith
- ☒ To create or pass on family traditions
- ☒ To recognize God's hand in ordinary daily activities
- ☒ To forgive each other readily with conflicts arise
- ☒ To remind ourselves of these promises frequently during the year



Beginning Experience:

Separated, Divorced, Widow
Tara at 701-426-8303

Level I—Charity Lutheran

Level II—Faith Lutheran

Level III—Good Shepherd

Each level is 10 weeks. All levels run concurrently. See website below.

Children's Beginning Experience:

Susan at 1-701-258-3152

Free Preschool for 3&4 year olds for eligible families; contact BECEP at 701-323-4400 for school year.

Caring for Children Program—health coverage to uninsured children. 1-800-342-4718. www.ndcaring.org

Single File Newsletter

For information

www.bismarcksinglefile.com

Parish Information:

Cathedral—222-2259

St. Anne—223-1549

Ascension—223-3606

St. Mary- 223-5562

Corpus Christi—255-4600

Spirit of Life-663-1660

Christ the King -663-8842

St. Joseph -663-9562

Office of Family Ministry—Diocese of Bismarck—

Joyce McDowall 701-204-7209

Toll Free 1-877-405-7435

www.bismarckdiocese.com

jmcdowall@bismarckdiocese.com

If you would like your name removed from the mailing list, please call your parish coordinator

Parents Forever-Education for Families in divorce Transition, call NDSU Parent Resource Center, 667-3342 or 667-3340

WEBSITES THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST:

- www.celebratesimply.com
- www.bereavementmag.com
- www.beginningexperienceofwesternnorthdakota.org
- www.vibrantfaithathome.org
- www.usccb.org

- www.fambooks.com/moms.htm
- www.singleparents.about.com
- www.bridgetobenefits.org