**Superintendents and pastors supporting families through the grieving process**

As a pastor or superintendent in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be facing or will face situations of multiple deaths among the members of your congregations and of pastors because of the virus, which affects people regardless of age or social position.

During this current crisis, many of the rituals which would help persons dealing with grief to recover are not being allowed as before. It is important to know that there are several stages of the grieving process. The following describes some of these stages.

Stages in the grieving process can last for a single moment or for several months. The first of these stages is **denial** or not accepting the loss. This is followed by other stages such as **anger**, sometimes anger towards God, as persons blame Him for the death. Pastors need to take this into consideration and should not chide someone for being angry because it is a normal part of grief, but should encourage them that God knows what is happening and that He is not mad at them.

Another stage is **guilt**, where thoughts such as, “Why didn’t I take care of him more” or “Why didn’t I pay attention to the signs” are common. Guilt hinders the normal recovery process and negatively affects the individual but it is normal to feel this way and it will soon pass. Pastors need to be sensitive to all of these feelings and encourage persons by pointing out that what they are feeling is normal and it will all pass with time.

Pastors and leaders with members of their congregation who have died must take time to express solidarity with the family. If it is a member of the congregation who has passed away, it is very important to call the person by name and remember and honor him/her as a member of the church. This can be done through social media, for example, and it helps the persons who are grieving with their recovery. When naming the individual, begin with phrases like “We are sorry for the loss of brother or sister” (give the name of the person). “We remember him/her as a good man or woman of God,” “may God strengthen his wife” (mention her name and the names of  their children). This will help family members feel that the church supports them in this situation.

If a pastor has died, the superintendent’s presence with the family is very important. He must show a willingness to help with the funeral and to assist the family members as well. He can also have a virtual service honoring the pastor and highlighting his work.

The superintendent must resume the ministry of the church as soon as possible, appointing an interim pastor. He must also meet with the church board, pick up on plans that were made and help the board in their time of grief; this will give the church a sense of security. They must always be encouraged to move forward.

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