

New Beginnings: It's OK to grieve

By Marie McGoey
staff writer

The young, aspiring clergyman was in his seminary training when his wife died. The Rev. Robert Welkert recalls how devastated he was following his 28-year-old wife's unexpected death. Two ministers attempted to help the young seminarian. One missed the mark when he preached a funeral sermon on the resurrection — timely, but not particularly consoling. The other sat in silence with the grieving husband. He knew there wasn't much he could say to the young husband and friend who had lost his wife.

Welkert struggled alone — working out his grief almost instinctively. An internship assignment placed him near his parents in a small town near Rochester, N.Y. There, he walked in the woods a lot, going back to roots. One of the ways he unconsciously worked out his frustrations was by helping friends build a house.

"I POUNDED NAILS this long," he said, describing construction nails about four inches long. "I didn't realize it at the time, but the physical exertion helped relieve the frustration I was feeling."

"All the time, I had an inkling that I needed something, but I didn't know what," he said.

Eventually, the young Episcopal minister came to the Detroit area. Assignments as chaplain at Detroit's Mt. Carmel Mercy Hospital and as pastoral consultant/lecturer at the University of Michigan Medical School's Department of Family Practice led to the creation of a support group he called "New Beginnings."

"New Beginnings" stemmed from some data he collected while serving as hospital chaplain. He also read and consulted with others who during these years were studying the results of unresolved grief.

One astonishing fact was that those who resolved their grief in a support group required 49 percent less doctor's care in the period following their loss than those who hadn't received this kind of support.

SOMETHING ELSE he learned as hospital chaplain was that 81 percent of the patients he visited had lost some-

thing significant before entering the illness. At Mt. Carmel, it was 91 percent. The higher figure, he feels, could be because some of the patients were emergency-room cases.

"The premise I arrived at in establishing New Beginnings is that by helping people to grieve openly, we can help to keep them physically healthy."

In the 17 years that have passed since his wife's death, Welkert has started seven support programs for persons who, like himself, have experienced difficult grief.

The first "New Beginnings" groups was organized in Garden City with the help of funeral director John Santile. The idea of the support group crystallized for Welkert while he was pastor to a small congregation near Metro Airport.

"I had worked closely with Santile on several occasions and knew he was open to new ideas and I approached him," Welkert recalls. Since then groups have been formed in Plymouth, Ann Arbor, Chelsea, Flat Rock, Schwartz Creek and Lansing. Five others are in the formative stage.

"We meet in churches," he explained with a smile, "because it's free space and it's important to see life going on — the choir practicing, kids running up and down the hallways. We need a lot of reminders."

But the group has no religious connection, he said. Participation is open to all, regardless of religious affiliation — or how long since the loss occurred. There are no fees for the six-week basic course which meets weekly and which will then lead on to an on-going support group.

The course presents the process of grief and means for healthy recovery. The first session outlines this process of recovery from grief. The second session deals with the importance of storytelling and remembering in the grieving process. A third session is taught by Chelsea physician Dr. James Pegg, who outlines the physical effects of grief.

THE FOURTH SESSION addresses the ways grief can lead to negative or



Rev. Robert Welkert
storytelling important

positive results, and the resources of faith and community which give participants identity how their values have changed since the loss of a loved one. The sixth session prepares participants to build an ongoing support network.

The program, Welkert explained, combines a number of medical, psychological and spiritual resources in such a

way as to lead to recovery and the rediscovery of the wholeness of life. "We are strong advocates of meditation, instead of medication," he added. Welkert says that many people do not allow themselves to express their loss fully.

"They feel they should be over it, or they think they are crazy when they still grieve years later."

"The why story-telling and recalling memories is an important part of getting well. When people share their stories, they find they are not crazy. They learn that others have experienced the same thing. It's very useful."

THE FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT group is mostly conversational, Welkert said. "It lets the people take the ball. We give them the chance to grieve, protest and the power to become well."

Welkert also said that he has discovered another interesting but unexplainable phenomenon and that is that people often go through a re-grieving process every five years.

"If you don't grieve overtly, then you'll grieve covertly," he said, "and if you're grieving two other or three things — like a job loss or having to move — that can be a killer."

For further information on the group, call St. Matthew's at 422-6033. The church is at 30900 Six Mile, Livonia, between Merriman and Middlebelt roads.

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CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 23, 1984

Mayor Pro Tem Dolan opened the regular meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council on April 23, 1984 at 7:30 P.M. Members present: Alkateeb, Anzlovor, Dolan, Dudley, Soronen and Wolf. Absent: Williams. Others present: City Manager Savage, City Clerk Cairns, Assistant City Manager Costick and City Attorney Ebban.

Mayor proclaimed the week of April 23-29, 1984 as National Consumers Week and the week of April 29-May 6, 1984 as the Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

Council enacted Zoning Map Amendment C83-318 (ZR 4-1-84) to rezone 63 acres of land south of Northwestern Highway, between Highway and Clairview from RA-4 to B-3 in Section 2.

Council enacted Zoning Map Amendment C83-317 (ZR PC 3-1-84) to rezone 16 acres of land south of Northwestern Highway, between Highway and Clairview from RA-4 to B-3 in Section 2.

Council enacted Zoning Map Amendment C83-319 (ZR 4-1-84) to rezone 39.86 acres on south side of Twelve Hills, west of Drake Road in Section 17 from RA-1 to OS-1A.

Council enacted Zoning Map Amendment C83-320 (ZR 6-1-84) to rezone 9.6883 acres on north side of Grand River, west of Drake Road (addition to Muirwood Apartments) from RP-2 to R-1C.

Council enacted Zoning Map Amendment C83-331 (ZR 1-1-84) to rezone 18' parcel on west side of Orchard Lake Road, south of 13 Mile in Section 10 from P-1 to B-3.

Council enacted Zoning Map Amendment C83-332 (ZR 8-1-84) to rezone lots 33 and 34 of Superior's Plot of Woodcrest Farms Subdivision from RA-4A to OS-3.

Request from Traffic Improvement Association for Association membership was referred to staff for consideration at budget time.

Council recognized Women of North Farmington as nonprofit organization which has been in existence more than 15 years.

Resolution was adopted authorizing purchase order to Econo Equipment Company for procurement and installation of gasoline pump and fuel dispensing control system costing \$8,483.

Council on May 18, 1984 for consideration of issuance of the final liquor license pursuant to applicable in the City.

Council approved the addition of Alycekey and Bridgeman Street in the 1984 Debt Control Program for asphalt emission application and Nitro/Flux to be included for collection cabinet application program.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 P.M.

A. JANETTE DOLAN, Mayor Pro Tem
FLOYD A. CAIRNS, City Clerk

Public April 23, 1984

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