

# Group helps grieving parents

By MARGARET MILLER

First Sunday is an organization for parents who have known the desolation of the death of a son or daughter. With regular talk meetings and simple liturgical services, it helps them face their grief, understand their feelings of loneliness and helplessness, and grapple with the problems that may result. But when it comes to helping those who live with death to keep life going on, First Sunday can't go it alone, its leaders say.

**HOSPITAL PERSONNEL**, from surgeons to aides, should be sensitive to the needs of the dying person and his relatives, said the Rev. Russ Kohler, a priest at St. Aloysius Catholic

Church in Detroit and one of the founders of the group. So should clergymen and the friends of the stricken family, he said. And then the priest and several bereaved parents went on to point out that the community as a whole needs to understand that great loss should not mean isolation. "What matters most are the little kindnesses," Rev. Kohler said. "Just being there is important."

**FIRST SUNDAY**, a panel of parents and clergymen was formed two years ago and now has two groups meeting: the newer in Mercy College of Detroit, 4200 W. Outer Drive, at 8:30 p.m. the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month.

"These people break the pattern of isolation by coming together," Rev. Kohler said. "They deal with grief and share grief's problems, like what do you do when a surviving child starts taking on the personality of the dead one. "But I have challenged this group to stay together, to go after the professional people whose work takes them into the most direct contact with those sustaining great loss."

**ANOTHER FACET** of the need for understanding was explained by James Reynolds, a Detroit who helped found First Sunday after he and his wife, Mary Ellen, lost their small daughter in an automobile accident. "My wife and I reacted differently to Tracy's death," Reynolds said. "I had my work, but she was at home surrounded all day by all the visual reminders of our daughter. And it didn't help that we have six other children—they're all individuals. Those of First Sunday have found, Reynolds went on, that "often the wife needs to talk about the lost child but the husband, not feeling the same need, doesn't want her to go to meet-

ings because he says she'll just get all emotional again." So for those unable to be a part of this organization, he added, there is a great need for more understanding on the part of the public.

**JIM AND MARY ELLEN Reynolds**, whose daughter was hurt in a Monday Thursday accident as she attended a Seder, joined with a number of other parents in telling of their experiences with professional people in the time of their great crises.

"Tracy had been improving," Mrs. Reynolds said, "and then she was worse, and the head nurse who told me about it was so matter-of-fact I could not believe it. I asked how she could be saying it that way and she said she was a trained professional."

Then there was Brian Zale, whose son was a crib death victim. He said he and his wife were treated well because his father is a police officer and "he was the first one we called." "But we read of a couple jailed after their baby died that way," he added. "They were held several months until a coroner insisted on exhuming the body and doing the autopsy again."

**MARY GESCH**, who lost one child and has watched her daughter, Deborah, through four years of operations to remove tumors, had stories that told both sides of the coin in the matter of the medical profession's attitude.

Her doctor, she felt, had been less than candid with her about Deborah's condition throughout the illness. "I don't not question what he said," she stated. "He went to school all those years." But several operations later, she added, "I told him I'd lost one and he'd have to level with me. He has, but it's too late."

But Mrs. Gesch also related a positive experience, she said she told the head nurse at the hospital where Deborah was being treated she was planning to bring in her daughter's pet dog to cheer her up.

"She told me she couldn't hear me, and when we got up to the floor with the dog you should have seen the nurses scatter. There wasn't even one on the floor to see us."

Then she added: "There are loving people on that hospital staff. I've seen a couple crying because they love Deborah, and there's nothing wrong with that."

**TWO OTHER MOTHERS** on the panel were Kathy Watson and Rosemary Broering. Mrs. Watson said that after her 19-year-old son died of cardiac arrest while jogging, she took the other children in the family in for a cardiac check-up.

"Our youngest is a worry wart," she said, "and he showed it. Then the doctor said—in his hearing—that he really needed a psychiatrist. "I wanted to punch him I really did."

Mrs. Broering told of having to go to court to get the results of an autopsy performed after her nine-year-old son died, also of cardiac arrest.

The doctor would not let me see the results," she said, "and that was a hell I would not put anyone through. I finally got the results, and it has given me some peace of mind."

**REV. KOHLER** and the Rev. James Myers, also a First Sunday leader and chaplain at Children's Hospital, had some words for clergymen who deal with families visited by death.

"There comes a time when a priest should keep his mouth shut and just be there," Rev. Kohler said. "We certainly should not be like the priest who suggested that a mother hadn't prayed enough."

"And often mentioning 'a little angel in heaven' is the wrong thing to say. The mother would far rather have a little devil in her arms."

Rev. Myers said hospital personnel should remember they are dealing with people, not cases, and help families understand the machinery of hospital care.

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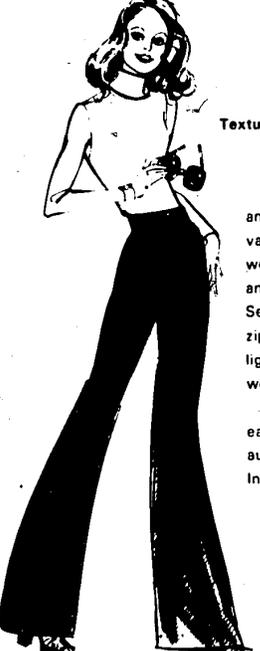
**Entries sought for beef cook-off**  
Will another Michigan resident succeed Howard Camden of West Bloomfield as winner of the National Beef Cook-off?  
Entrants are now being sought for this year's Michigan Beef Cook-off, a preliminary to the national contest. The Michigan Beef Industry Commission is sponsoring the state cook-off in Lansing. The Michigan finalist, chosen from seven semi-finalists, will be sent to the national cook-off in Denver, Colo.  
Main contest rules include: each recipe must contain a minimum of two and maximum of six pounds of beef; the recipe must be specific and can contain any beef dish using chuck, round or rump; the recipe must state the number of servings and cost per serving.  
All entrants should send their recipe to the Michigan Beef Industry Commission, 805 Stoddard Building, Lansing, 48933. Entries must be postmarked no later than Aug. 11.

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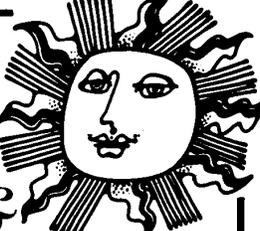
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