“For the Lord does not reject forever; though he brings grief, he takes pity, according to the abundance of his mercy; he does not willingly afflict or bring grief to human beings.”

Lam 3:31-33
Retreat being planned for those suffering with chronic illness

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Father Gerald Burns empathizes with individuals suffering from chronic pain. As someone who survived a tormenting 18-month bout with polymyalgia rheumatica, an autoimmune disease that causes inflammation throughout the entire body, Father Burns understands what it’s like to live in pain, to the point where leaning over and picking up a piece of paper from the floor can be excruciating.

Because of his own experience, Father Burns developed sensitivity to those in similar circumstances. But it wasn’t until he heard through vicar general Father Tom Ranzino about a retreat being offered in another area of the country for individuals suffering with chronic conditions or terminal illness that he saw an opportunity to get involved.

Father Burns said that Father Ranzino mentioned the retreat in August during one of their monthly clergy support group meetings. Father Ranzino had learned of the retreat when attending a funeral for a clergy friend in Indiana.

“When I heard about it, instantly there was a draw to it,” said Father Burns, who was diagnosed with polymyalgia rheumatica in 2012 after experiencing several months of increasing pain and numerous consultations with his personal trainer and physician.

“I was sensitive to the fact of what it’s like to have a disease that limits you,” added Father Burns, who today remains active and does Pilates, stretching and other forms of exercise, always aware of the possibility of the disease returning. “And I wasn’t used to being limited in any way. So that’s why I was drawn to it.”

As an avid reader of renowned Catholic author Father Thomas Merton, Father Burns’ anticipation heightened when he learned a retreat was going to be held this past October in Gethsemani, Kentucky, where in 1941 Father Merton entered the monastic community of the Abbey of Gethsemani at Trappist.

Accompanied by Father Donald Blanchard, Father Burns, who retired in 2011, attended the retreat, which is limited to 15 people. He said the retreat was emotionally stirring, with many people sharing their own personal stories regarding their various conditions.

He recalled in the opening session, even before the opening prayer, a gentlemen with terminal cancer shared that after receiving his initial diagnosis he was angry with everyone, but most of all God. But after coming across a horrific car accident, Father Burns said the man realized the fragility of life and how death can be so sudden.

“Right then and there he began to say (his illness) is not a great curse; it’s really a gift,” said Father Burns, adding that the gentlemen went on to say he had the chance, which so many others do not, to put his life in order and to make peace with God.

“You could feel the emotion in the room,” he added.

Upon leaving, Father Burns immediately began researching the feasibility of hosting a similar retreat in Baton Rouge. The first one is tentatively scheduled at the Bishop Tracy Center in the spring of 2017.

After searching several retreat centers, Father Burns concluded the best location was in the heart of Baton Rouge, at the Tracy Center, which he said is a “wonderful facility, everything you need for a great retreat.”

One challenge is converting five bathrooms to be handicap accessible at the cost of $10,000 per bathroom, but he said an individual has committed to providing the necessary funding.

He already has several volunteers committed for what will be a 25-person hospitality team, as well as a nurse and a commitment from Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center for a physician should an emergency arise.

Similar to Kentucky, the first retreat will be limited to 15 people, with each person being interviewed by Father Burns or someone else, and a nurse to determine each person’s medical condition.

“There are a lot of other conditions that people have that are not visible,” he said.

The retreat, which will be held from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon, will include two conferences on Friday night, three on Saturday, and one Sunday, daily Mass, morning and evening prayer and free time where those attending will be able to be on their own with suggested prayer.

SEE RETREAT PAGE 3B
Columnist offers insight on navigating life after death of spouse

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

Coping with the death of a spouse is a new journey, or pilgrimage, for many and Bill Dodds, a longtime Catholic News Service columnist, knows all about the bumps and detours along the way.

For years, he wrote columns, and books on family life, with his wife, Monica, who died in 2013.

After her death he began sharing his grief with readers about a new family experience: being a widower after a marriage of 38 years.

Initially, he said he didn’t want to write about his grief because he knew too little about it. It was still unchartered territory.

As he put it just months after her death: “In some ways it’s like years since my wife, Monica, died in January. In other ways, it’s only yesterday. And that timeline can shift at any moment, with no apparent regularity or rhythm.”

He described navigating those first months without his spouse as “making my way through unfamiliar – sometimes foreign – surroundings. Now I write the checks for the monthly bills. Now, in the evening, the house is very quiet.”

Dodds wrote that he had been helped by others whom he described as “new pilgrims like me. Others are guides who have been on this path for a long time and remember their first few weeks, months, years. All of us have a similar story to tell but each story is unique.”

In those initial months, he needed help of family and friends and “the grace of God through the sacraments and through his presence in others.”

But each day, he said, he took small steps, even though he admitted the steps often led to a “winding, circling, confusing path.”

Even before his wife died, when she was in the final stage of uterine cancer, Dodds said people were asking him if he planned to write a book about widowhood and grief. At first, he dismissed this idea but eventually he decided to write a book on this subject for those who are personally going through it but as a tool to help family members and friends of those who lost a spouse. He intended the book to provide a glimpse to what those early days, months and years of grief can be like.

He expressed these ideas through a fictional novel called “Mildred Nudge: A Widow’s Tale,” published on the second anniversary of Monica’s death.

Dodds said he was gratified to hear people tell him the book gave them a deeper appreciation of what a parent or grandparent, friend or family member was going through or that it gave them newfound sympathy and understanding.

He also said those comments gave him a window into understanding how little he knows about some hardships people suffer such as the death of a child, marriage ending in divorce, job loss, drug addiction, chronic illness or pain.

“I want to stay ‘blissfully ignorant,’ but I also want to be better at sympathizing and offering support,” he wrote in a CNS column.

That insight, he said, ties in directly to a recurring theme in Pope Francis’ message urging Christians to walk alongside one another.

He said the pope is pleasing with people to: “Look around, become more aware of others who are hurting. Find ways to walk with them and talk with them. Simply, and not so simply, be with them in times of sorrow.”
Lay ministry formed to help complete burial rite

By Christina Gray
Catholic News Service

Sometimes when Catholic remains arrived at Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma, Calif., for burial without an accompanying member of clergy — or anyone at all — the cemetery’s longtime director would grab her own prayer book and offer the prayers of committal at the burial site.

“I brought the urn to the grave and said the committal prayers myself, along with one of our gravediggers,” said Monica Williams, who oversees all six San Francisco archdiocesan Catholic cemeteries. She was describing the recent burial of an indigent man with no family except a brother too ill to travel to the cemetery.

Sadly, she said, remains arriving at the cemetery without family members, friends or clergy to attend the committal — the third and final part of the rite of Christian burial — have increased over the years. The rite includes the vigil, funeral and burial.

“I was heartbroken to think that there were people being buried in our own cemeteries without the prayers of the church being said and without another Christian there as they were laid to rest,” said Laura Bertone, director for the archdiocese, along with one of our clergy members, friends or relatives to attend the committal, she said.

In the spring of 2015, 28 deacons and laypeople from San Francisco church parishes took part in a daylong training at Holy Cross Cemetery led by Mercy Sister Toni Lynn Gallagher, the ministry of consolation coordinator for the archdiocese, along with Bertone and Williams. The training prepares laypeople to officiate at burials when a group arrives without a member of clergy or when unaccompanied remains are delivered to the cemetery.

Cemeteries have been impacted by a number of different factors, Williams explained, including the difficulty some parish priests have fitting travel to and from the archdiocese’s cemeteries into their pastoral duties.

But inactive Catholics separated from their faith communities and a general lack of understanding about Catholic burial rites are major factors, she said. Sometimes families choose to conclude funeral services at a church or funeral home and do not or cannot come to the cemetery for burial. Other times the remains are shipped from out of the area where no local friends or family reside. And some people die without family or friends or parish communities and their remains are sent to the cemetery by local agencies.

There are many possible scenarios, said Williams.

“The deceased may have moved out of the area and no longer belong to a local parish church for any number of reasons, but have a preselected spot at the cemetery,” she said. “They may have become alienated from the sons, but still want to be interred at the cemetery where their family is placed.”

At the committal ministry training, participants discussed what to say (and not say) to those in mourning. They also shared their own personal stories of grief and loss. Williams gave participants a tour of the cemetery and a lesson in its terminology and the day concluded with instruction on the actual rites, including the structure of the prayers and how to preside at a committal.

She said that church needs to do a better job of educating people about the richness of Catholic traditions and the values of its rites, and she hopes the new ministry can help in this way.

“A Christian burial can be a tremendous moment of evangelization, in some cases an introduction of our faith for visitors,” Williams said. “In other cases, it’s a reminder to those who have drifted away from the church of the ministry we offer and the great hope of our faith.”

A Home Team with a Valuable History

The city’s oldest, continuously owned family business is here because of a timeless tradition of providing value for families. At Rabenhorst, we have responded to over four generations of changing customs, traditions and beliefs. Whether the year was 1866, 1932 or 2016.

Today, our modern, on-site crematory offers dignity and privacy throughout the entire process. Options include pre-arrangement plans for any family, personalized services and other modern conveniences.

As the pace of life gets faster, our care, concern and commitment to excellence only get stronger. That family tradition is the real value of a Rabenhorst service.

150 Years 1866-2016
RABENHORST FUNERAL HOMES & CREMATORY
Where families remember
825 Government St. • 383-6831 | 11000 Florida Blvd. • 272-9950 | rabenhorst.com
Through story of his own loss, Anglican priest helps others heal

By Nancy Wiehe
Catholic News Service

The Rev. Michael Lapsley knows a lot about loss and redemption.

The Anglican priest and missionary to South Africa was critically wounded by a letter bomb while opening his mail in Zimbabwe in 1990. The blast severed both his hands. He lost an eye, his eardrums were shattered and shrapnel was embedded in his chest.

In the trauma he said he felt God’s presence. And with support, he began his journey of healing.

“For the first four months, I was as helpless as a newborn baby. I could do nothing for myself,” he recalled. “But the prayer, the love, the support from people across the world helped me to make my bombing redemptive ... to bring life out of death, good out of evil.

“My own story was acknowledged, revered, recognized by people across the world. And I realized if I was filled with hatred and bitterness and desire for revenge, that I would be a victim forever.”

The priest said he was attacked because of his dedication to a fully integrated South Africa, where he had been a university chaplain. He had been a university chaplain.

“Whether a war has been a totally unjust war, or a justified war, war damages human beings,”

Rev. Michael Lapsley

He also came to realize that everyone had a story to tell.

“Everyone carried stuff,” he said, “because of the journey the nation had traveled, no matter what side we were on.”

To help people with their suffering, he created “safe and sacred spaces” where people could begin to deal with hurts by sharing their stories with others who had first-hand understanding of the circumstances.

He called the process the “healing of memories.” The aim was to discover and celebrate what is life giving and put aside what is destructive.

Since forming the Institute for Healing of Memories, Rev. Lapsley’s work has gained worldwide attention.

In 2012 Orbis Books published his memoir, “Redeeming the Past: My Journey From Freedom Fighter to Healer.”

“Pain unites human beings,” the priest said in the forward of his book.

“In my work as a healer, many people say they can trust me because I know pain,” he wrote. “In the end, though, what matters most is whether we are able to transform pain into a life-giving force.”

In the U.S., Healing of Memories workshops are held for veterans of war in at least five states: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Minnesota and New York. Several churches are also involved in the program.

The Franciscan Renewal Center, located in the Phoenix area, offers space and resources to host the workshops. Veterans come twice a year to attend them and the center has secured funding for the program so that veterans can attend for free.

“Whether a war has been a totally unjust war, or a justified war, war damages human beings,” Rev. Lapsley said. “And the fact that people get ill because of what they’ve been part of is not a sign that they’re crazy. It’s a sign of the fullness of their humanity.”

For additional information on the Institute for Healing of Memories in North America, visit healing-memories.org.
Why we pray for the dead

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

Praying for the dead might not make sense to nonbelievers but for Catholics it is part and parcel of the faith tradition, rooted in Old Testament readings and supported by the Catechism and the church’s funeral liturgy.

“Our faith teaches us to pray for the dead,” said Bishop Edward K. Braxton of Belleville, Illinois, in a 2015 All Saints’ Day reflection, stressing that although people hope that those who die are with God and the angels and saints, it is not necessarily a guarantee.

“Scripture teaches that all of the dead shall be raised. However, only the just are destined for the kingdom of God,” the bishop wrote.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, the clearest Bible reference about prayers for the dead is from the Second Book of Maccabees. When soldiers were preparing the bodies of their slain comrades for burial they discovered they were wearing amulets taken from a pagan temple which violated the law of Deuteronomy

...praying that God would forgive the sin these men had committed.

Around the bedside of the person who has died, prayers for mourners, prayers at death, prayers for the dead begin at the moment of death, often when family members are gathered around the bedside of the person who has died.

The prayers in the funeral liturgy express hope that God will free the person who has died from any burden of sin and prepare a place for him or her in heaven.

“The funeral rite is a prayer for the dead, designated by the church as the liturgy of Christian burial,” wrote Bishop Braxton in his reflection.

He noted that many parishes ‘“regularly disregard” the emphasis of this liturgy by printing funeral programs which say: “the Mass of the Resurrection: A Celebration of Life,” even though the person has obviously not yet been raised from the dead.”

According to the Catechism, most Catholics who don’t merit hell still need purification before entering heaven and pass through a state when they die that the church describes as purgatory.

In a question and answer page on Busted Halo, a Paulist-run website at bustedhalo.com, Father Joe Scott CSP said praying for the dead has “further origins in our belief in the communion of saints.”

The priest, an associate pastor at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community in Los Angeles, added that living members of this communion can “assist each other in faith by prayers and other forms of spiritual support.”

“Christians who have died continue to be members of the communion of saints,” he wrote. “We believe that we can assist them by our prayers, and they can assist us by theirs.”

The final peace for a life well-lived.

In 1921, Roselawn Memorial Park’s goal was that their design plan reflect an atmosphere that would only grow more peaceful and beautiful with time.

Roselawn’s Perpetual Care plan has assured that this tradition, beauty and historical character will be preserved, well into the future.

Today, Roselawn provides at-need assistance and advice, pre-planning financing, Family Plot discounts, a mausoleum, columbarian, and other disposition options.

Call us during regular working hours and an understanding consultant will answer all of your questions.

ROSELAWN MEMORIAL PARK
4045 North Street | 225-344-0186 | RoselawnBatonRouge.com

Praying for the dead is an important component of the Catholic tradition, rooted in the Old Testament and supported by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Prayers for the dead begin at the moment of death, often when family members are gathered around the bedside of the person who has died.

Of course these prayers continue in the funeral liturgy, which is the “central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased,” according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ overview of Catholic funeral rites: usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/overview-of-catholic-funeral-rites.cfm.

The funeral liturgy, the website points out, is “an act of worship, and not merely an expression of grief.”

...and supported by the Catechism and the church’s funeral liturgy.

It is a time when the church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased “to give praise and thanks to God for Christ’s victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God’s tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery,” it adds.

The prayers in the funeral liturgy express hope that God will free the person who has died from any burden of sin and prepare a place for him or her in heaven.

“The funeral rite is a prayer for the dead, designated by the church as the liturgy of Christian burial,” wrote Bishop Braxton in his reflection.

He noted that many parishes “regularly disregard” the emphasis of this liturgy by printing funeral programs which say: “the Mass of the Resurrection: A Celebration of Life,’ even though the person has obviously not yet been raised from the dead.”

According to the Catechism, most Catholics who don’t merit hell still need purification before entering heaven and pass through a state when they die that the church describes as purgatory.

In a question and answer page on Busted Halo, a Paulist-run website at bustedhalo.com, Father Joe Scott CSP said praying for the dead has “further origins in our belief in the communion of saints.”

The priest, an associate pastor at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community in Los Angeles, added that living members of this communion can “assist each other in faith by prayers and other forms of spiritual support.”

“Christians who have died continue to be members of the communion of saints,” he wrote. “We believe that we can assist them by our prayers, and they can assist us by theirs.”
In genealogy research Catholic cemeteries can provide some help

By Mike Nelson
Catholic News Service

As interest in genealogical research increases, some Catholics have found that their relatives’ final earthly addresses can be helpful, even valuable resources.

“Catholic cemeteries represent a living archive of our faith community,” said Richard Peterson, director of Associated Catholic Cemeteries in the Archdiocese of Seattle, and treasurer of the Catholic Cemetery Conference.

“We’re fortunate to have these resting places for those who built our faith communities,” he said.

“It offers a valuable link to those of us who serve the church today, and so it makes sense that people want to know more about their past. And assisting people in their genealogical research is part of the mission and ministry of Catholic cemetery staff.”

But he and other cemetery officials acknowledged that this increased interest in family history research has required diocesan offices and individual Catholic cemeteries to institute policies designed to assist the inquiring researchers, but also to protect historic records and limited resources.

Moreover, those seeking information on Grandma Jones or Great Uncle Pete should be advised that the process may not be as rapid as they would hope, nor will it likely yield much more information than the date of burial and gravesite location.

“Cemetery records were never set up with the expectation that they would also provide extensive data for genealogical research,” the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Catholic Cemeteries Office points out on its website.

Thus, while some burial records may contain additional sacramental information, perhaps even a newspaper obituary attached, those are exceptions.

“If we can locate the site, we can provide a copy of the original burial record,” said Luanne Baron, records office manager for the Catholic Cemeteries Association of Boston, which oversees 25 cemeteries in the archdiocese. “That record would include the name of the deceased, date of burial, the exact gravesite number and location, and possibly other information – like the date of death, or the person’s age at the time of death.”

For those who inquire, Catholic Cemeteries of Boston provides the deceased’s gravesite location at no charge. For additional information, a nominal fee is requested with the proviso that it will be returned if a search is unsuccessful.

But that sort of research takes staff time, Baron said, “and genealogical research is not our first priority.” Nor are all burial or entombment records recorded in a central database; in the case of “older lots,” or burial locations, “chances are they won’t be in our database,” Baron said.

Like most diocesan cemetery offices, Boston’s requests that inquiries on burial and death records be made in writing, and it discourages “walk in” visits from people wanting to comb through records on their own.

“We can’t take the chance for our records, especially those older records which aren’t in our electronic database, to be lost, misplaced or taken by people wanting them for their personal family archives,” Baron said.

In addition to diocesan Catholic cemeteries offices, many larger or older dioceses have older parishes with their own cemeteries. The first parish of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles – San Gabriel Mission, founded by St. Junipero Serra in 1771 – has (like many California missions) an on-site cemetery, with burials dating to the early 1800s.

“And we do get quite a few requests for family history information,” said Al Sanchez, parish business manager, who oversees cemetery operations. “But we’re at the mercy of those who recorded the information, especially in those early times. Some records will show next of kin; others will show the parents’ names, or who provided the information on the deceased; and others, hardly anything.”

But the policies of San Gabriel Mission Cemetery are very much the same as diocesan cemetery offices around the U.S. Requests for information must be made by email or in writing, and records are not available for the public to walk in and peruse. “Most of those records are very fragile and irreplaceable,” Sanchez said.

There also are privacy concerns, said Peterson of Seattle. “You need to strike the balance between offering information that is a matter of public record and respecting the privacy of a family,” he said. “So we are careful with what we provide.”

He and other cemetery officials find it remarkable that, on occasion, someone will request information on “my grandfather,” but not know their grandfather’s name. Or they will ask about someone with a common name.

“We have 436 Murphys in our cemeteries, including 33 Mary Murphys,” he said with a smile. “So it helps to give us the most precise information you can to help us in our research.”
St. Joseph hospice is the only provider in Louisiana offering a new model that gives you more treatment options.

The St. Joseph Palliative Care Choices Model helps you manage pain and other symptoms at the same time you undergo treatment for your disease.

It’s the first time Medicare is covering both.

Under the model, you also get help with:

- Managing treatments and appointments
- Coordinating information among your doctors
- Getting treatment in your own home
- Receiving extra support so you can focus on feeling better

There are no copays or deductibles for St. Joseph Palliative Care Choices Model.

If you or a loved one is on Medicare and suffering with cancer, heart failure, COPD or HIV/AIDS, contact St. Joseph Hospice.

(225) 769-4810
StJosephHospice.com