

Catholic Cemeteries names bereavement director

By Joe Pisani

Dean Gestal, director of Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport, has announced a bereavement initiative that will provide support to the families and friends of the almost 2000 people who are interred in the diocesan cemeteries each year.

It will be organized by Carolyn Killian, who was recently named director of bereavement for Catholic Cemeteries. Killian ran the bereavement program of *The Parish of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes* in Greenwich and has trained facilitators in other parishes who can lead the nationally recognized New Day bereavement support group in which participants are guided through the grieving process.

"With Carolyn's guidance, we will integrate the New Day program into the training that our family advisors receive," Gestal said. "We look forward to collaborating with the deaneries and parishes as this program is rolled out. We also hope to partner with funeral homes in the diocese by extending them support and assistance."

"I am thrilled to have this opportunity," Killian said. "Our mission is to serve God by serving others. Dean hired me to meet the unmet needs in the diocese to offer bereavement services. We have a program that is award winning and road-tested. It's just a matter of rolling it out."

As a member of the Parish Partners Ministry of St. Catherine parish, Killian organized a bereavement training initiative several years ago based on the New Day program, along with pastor Father William F. Platt and Jeannemarie Baker, who began Parish Partners.

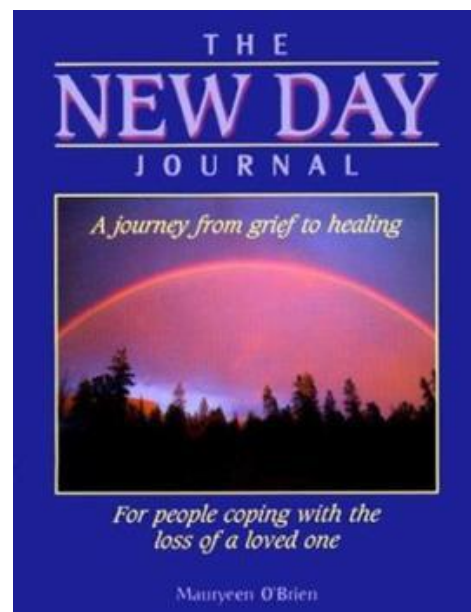
New Day is a faith-based program, written by Sister Mauryeen O'Brien, O.P., a Dominican Sister of Hope who for many years ran bereavement support groups for the Archdiocese of Hartford.

The small-group program, which typically involves eight people, uses prayer, reflection, journaling and sharing. The group meets for 90 minutes once a week for nine weeks and is led by two co-facilitators, who are trained volunteers.

"The grief that people face is the hardest thing they have ever faced," Killian said. "It is overwhelming and exhausting."

In addition to overseeing the program, Killian did personal outreach on behalf of St. Catherine's to parishioners who were grieving over a loss. Recently, she organized a training program for volunteers to facilitate New Day in their parishes. She will leverage that group of 14 facilitators from five parishes to staff existing programs and eventually launch new ones throughout the diocese.

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Her primary goal as director of bereavement for Catholic Cemeteries is to provide support for grieving families by creating an infrastructure that will train facilitators to run small-group support programs.

Killian says the necessary characteristics that facilitators must have are compassion, empathy, the ability to listen quietly and to understand that their primary role is not to give advice, but to listen. She said that those who are grieving are in so much pain they can often tell the same story numerous times...and that is part of the healing process.

She compared it to the Risen Christ's encounter with two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. He listened to his grieving friends and let them talk about the pain they were suffering over his crucifixion.

"We have to do the same thing when we walk with people over a death," she said. "They have to realize they are not alone. They have to walk through their grief. They have to realize 'I am not the only one who is angry, mad or guilty.' And also, that it is God who inspires other people to show up to help them. . . We are just walking with people and listening to them the way Christ did."