

Correspondence

Loss, grief and healing: accompaniment in time of COVID-19

ABSTRACT

This paper is a response to the recent correspondence published in this journal where the author rightly stated that need to redirect one's perception on the different realities of life such as death. This paper discusses the difficulties associated with loss, grief and healing in the time of COVID-19 pandemic. This paper further adds the importance of accompaniment to people experiencing the complicated grief process. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the way one overcome grief where the bereaved are required to grieve without the support of usual social, cultural and religious rituals.

Keywords accompaniment, COVID-19, death, grief, healing, loss

The COVID-19 death toll has already reached one million. The rapid spread of the virus and the severity of mortality rate of the disease has been a major challenge on how to deal with a complicated grief. There is a need to provide solutions for public health on how to support the mourning and grief of those who are experiencing loss of loved ones due to COVID-19. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a surge of death anxiety and grief. This topic, however, is neglected in public health discourse, which has been widely acknowledged throughout literature in philosophy, theology, anthropology and psychology.¹

This paper is a response to the recent correspondence published in this journal where the author rightly stated that 'one may find it difficult to hurdle such situation and move on without first redirecting one's perception on the different realities of life'.² This paper discusses the difficulties associated with loss, grief and healing in the time of COVID-19 pandemic. This paper further adds the importance of accompaniment to people experiencing the complicated grief process. Due to prohibition on visiting hospitals, as well as grieving in morgues, thereby many people are experiencing the 'complicated grief' process.³ The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the way people overcome grief where the bereaved are required to grieve without the support of usual social, cultural and religious rituals.

Recent studies show that bereaved people might have a 'heightened risk to develop grief problems'.⁴ Moreover, there is a need on how to accompany family members, loved ones

and caregivers. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the loss and the feelings of grief and its future implications to the bereaved. Accompaniment is a common practice in spiritual direction and in the pastoral life of churches. However, how can one demonstrate accompaniment if one cannot be physically present to one another due to lockdown and quarantine measures? As such, there are creative means and ways to accompany the dying, the bereaved and the patient. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, as hospitals limit visitors to reduce the spread of infection, medical front liners may augment the loss and grief of families who cannot visit their loved one through medical accompaniment. Of course, medical accompaniment may be an additional burden to an already burdened medical front liner. Thus, the use of technology is highly recommended, including telehealth consultations, together with virtual meetings with the bereaved reduces infections and risks for COVID-19. As such, 'accompanying in dying, also by telephone and video call, can teach us to live because it claims values that can easily be relegated in daily life, values evoked more by feeling than by reason, values that claim relationship and accompaniment'.⁵

Indeed, there are creative ways on how to deal with grief in this unprecedented situation. Accompaniment presents that there is much one can and must do to help the bereaved people. Although people may seem physically distant from one another, one can still work creatively to overcome the loss and grief caused by the pandemic. As such 'the joys and hopes,

the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts'.^{5,6} Let us continue, then, to accompany one another in time of COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Acknowledgement

No funding was received for this paper.

References

- 1 Thomas DA. Death and renewal. *Am Anthropol* 2019;**121**:7–10.
- 2 Cordero DA. In loving memory of 'us': facing grief during the time of COVID-19 through redirecting perception of life's realities. *J Public Health (Oxf)* 2021. doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdab015
- 3 Corpuz JCG. Beyond death and afterlife: the complicated process of grief in the time of COVID-19. *J Public Health (Oxf)* 2021. doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdaa247
- 4 van Ee E, Lenferink LIM, Eidhof MB, Boelen PA. Samen rouwen: over sociale steun aan nabestaanden gedurende de COVID-19-pandemie [mourning together: on social support for bereaved people during the COVID-19 pandemic]. *Tijdschr Psychiatr* 2021;
- 5 Bermejo JC. Acompañamiento en el duelo durante la pandemia de COVID-19. *Front Psychol* 2020. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.583233
- 6 Second Vatican Council. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes*. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (6 February 2021, date last accessed).

Jeff Clyde G. Corpuz
Department of Theology and Religious Education, De La
Salle University, Manila 1004, Philippines

Address correspondence to Jeff Clyde G. Corpuz,
E-mail: jeff.corpuz@dlsu.edu.ph.

doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdab041