Welcome to the Chaplain’s Corner newsletter. If you have a joy or concern you’d like to share with our staff, send an e-mail or give us a call at Ext. 8348. We only share concerns with the campus community, via newsletter or e-mail, with permission. You can view previous and current issues of our newsletter (in PDF format), on the Spiritual Life page of the Lynchburg College website—www.lynchburg.edu/spirituallife.

Rituals, Not Remedies

“Once a Hornet, always a Hornet.” Our LC Hornet family grieves deeply this week with the reality that two of our best and brightest are no longer with us. Brogan Franklin ’13 and Chelsea Meager ’14 both died in the past week as the result of unrelated car accidents. It is a painful and difficult time in the life of our community. Unfortunately we have been down this road before and mourned the untimely and tragic deaths of other students with other stories.

As a chaplain I often have the privilege of being involved a bit more directly and personally with those most affected by death. Yet I still find myself often at a loss with what to say and how best to respond. I’ve been to countless workshops on grief and I have read many books and articles on death, dying, and loss. However, sharing in the intimate and vulnerable moments of those who are grieving is still difficult.

As I’ve reflected on the most recent deaths of Brogan and Chelsea, and as I’ve seen the response of their families and friends, I have found that rituals are helpful and remedies are not. By rituals, I’m referring to symbolic ways of expressing grief and remembrance. By remedies, I’m referring primarily to well-meaning but often unhelpful responses intended to try and make sense of that which is ultimately a mystery. “God must have needed them more than we did. They are in a better place. It must have been their time.” More helpful than such remedy responses are simply expressions of solidarity and support: “I am so sorry for your loss... You and your loved one will be in my thoughts and prayers... My favorite memory of your loved one is...” Or perhaps most helpful of all is to simply say nothing, just be with the person, offering your loving presence in quiet comfort.

Rituals as a means of expressing grief can also be helpful. In the entrance to Snidow Chapel we now have a “prayer wall” with several different ways of expressing spiritual thoughts and longings from magnetic poetry tiles to chalkboard drawings. At Brogan’s memorial service several people spontaneously wrote messages and reflections. Whenever the chapel is open, all are invited and encouraged to visit the wall and share your own remembrances.

At our annual candlelight Service of Remembrance, surviving loved ones lit candles and named loved ones while listening to moving harp and violin music. Many lingered after the service concluded, mesmerized by the glow of the flames in the midst of the darkened chapel. Another way to remember those who have died on our campus is to dedicate one of the red chairs in the entrance to Snidow Chapel. It was a very caring and creative young man deeply devoted to the students he taught. I can remember Brogan by caring more deeply about the students I am blessed to know and to never take our time and pace.

As each of us confronts our own losses, I pray that we will find rituals of comfort and communities of support to accompany us lovingly and compassionately through our journeys of grief, now and in the days and weeks ahead.

By Anne Gibbons
Associate Chaplain and Director of the Bonner Leader Program

Regularly Scheduled Meetings

For a list of our regularly scheduled meetings during the academic year, go to the Spiritual Life webpage and click on “Spiritual Organizations on Campus.”

Campus Worship Opportunities

Sunday

• Quaker Meeting—10:30 a.m. at the Center for Spiritual Life.
• InFaith [IF]—Campus Protestant Worship, 3 p.m. in Sydnor Performance Hall.
• Roman Catholic Mass—4:30 p.m. in Snidow Chapel.

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