



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: Ministry to Widows-Widowers

In 2018, there were 3.47 million widowed men and 11.41 million widowed women living in the United States.

(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/242030/marital-status-of-the-us-population-by-sex/>)

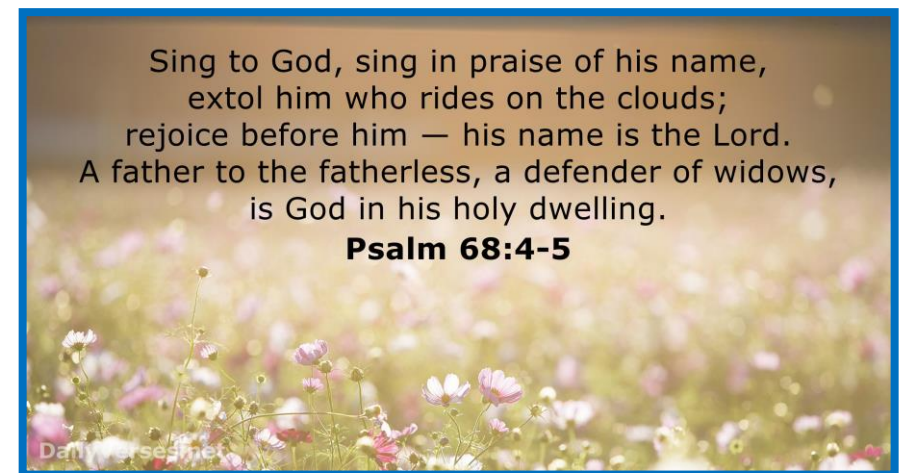
Did you know

- 800,000 people are widowed each year?
700,000 of those are women?
- Most widows live in poverty (Over 115 million worldwide)?
- For the past thirty or more years the rate of poverty among elderly widows is consistently three to four times higher than elderly married women?
- “Death of a spouse” is listed as the #1 stressor on the Holmes Stress Chart and is considered one of life’s most devastating events?
- 60% of those who lose a spouse or significant other will experience a serious illness within 12 months?
- The average age of widowhood is 55, and 75 percent of women will be widowed by age 56?
- Most widow(er)s lose 75% of their support base when their spouse dies?
- It really is possible to die of a broken heart? Widow(er)s have a 30% elevated risk of death in the first 6 months after their spouses died.
- Almost half the women over 65 years of age in the US are widows and about 7:10 of these women live alone?

<http://peaceloveandgrief.com/?tag=widow-statistics>



Since 2014, May 3 has been observed as National Widow's Day in the United States. (International Widows Day is a United Nations ratified day of action to address the "poverty and injustice faced by millions of widows and their dependents in many countries." The day takes place throughout the world annually on June 23.)



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As many parishes throughout the world, St. Francis de Sales Parish, Salisbury, MD has been cognizant of the needs of the widows and widowers in their area.

Several years ago a young widow in the parish was instrumental in beginning a group that met for a pot-luck dinner once a month after the Saturday evening liturgy. At the time, there were a number of young parishioners (50-60) who were widowed.

Michele K. Harris, pastoral minister at the parish, arranged for a speaker each month on topics that were suggested by the group. The group then moved into more of a facilitated conversation with materials that they or Michele found.

This group also suggested a blessing at Mass for the widows and widowers of the parish. That blessing has continued throughout the years. The people who participate consist of many circumstances: those who are newly widowed, those who have lived a long time without their spouse.

The invitation appears in the church bulletin for several weeks, with different titles each week.



Have You Lost a Spouse? Widows and Widowers

There will be a special blessing during our 5:30 p.m. Mass on Saturday, July 20th in the St. Francis de Sales Church for all men and women who have mourned the loss of a spouse. If your loss is recent or a long time ago, we would like to bless you for strength and courage as you live with your separation and loss.

Blessing after Communion

Presider: I invite those who are widows or widowers to stand for a special blessing. All others can be seated.

(Pause)

Presider: Let us pray for these women and men who seek our support as they live each day without their loved one.

(Extend hands in prayer.)

Presider: God of love, you made the sacrament of matrimony a sign of the bond between Christ and the Church.

Grant peace and mercy to these men and women who have been witnesses of your grace and love to their family and friends by their participation in the covenant of marriage.

As they turn to you for courage and compassion, strengthen their faith and lighten their loss.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Invito a aquellos que han perdido al cónyuge para permanecer de pie para una bendición especial, y todos los demás que por favor se sentaran.

Oremos por estos hombres y mujeres que buscan nuestro apoyo como viven cada día con la pérdida de su ser querido.

Dios de amor, Has hecho el Sacramento del matrimonio un signo de la unión entre Cristo y la iglesia.

Conceder la paz y la misericordia a estos hombres y mujeres que han sido testigos de su gracia y amor a su familia y amigos por su participación en el Pacto del matrimonio.

Que convierte a usted de la valentía y compasión, fortalecer su fe y aligerar su pérdida.

Le pedimos esto a través de Cristo nuestro Señor, Amén.

Some Helpful Articles for Reflection and Action

- [Widow Wednesday](#)
- [National Widows Day](#)
- [National Widows Day 2017](#)
- [National Widows Day](#)
- [6 Things About Loss That This Widow Wishes You Knew](#)

GEMS Wonderings

- What are the ways your parish supports widows and widowers on the anniversary of their spouse's death, throughout the year?
- How do you listen to the needs of widows and widowers in your parish?
- Are you aware of the resources and supports through various organizations in your area for the widowed (funeral homes, retreat centers, hospice, libraries, etc.)? How do you communicate these to your parishioners?
- What other life situations – transition times – are your parishioners experiencing? How do you respond?



Janet Schaeffler, OP
www.janetschaeffler.com
jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org

Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
 - https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_journal_special_issue.pdf