

## **A Resource for Those Who Are Grieving - A Review**

By Phil Brown, Synod Executive, Synod of Lakes and Prairies

### ***Healing After Loss - Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief***

By Martha Whitmore Hickman

Shortly after Lynn's death last May, a colleague sent me a copy of a meditation guide, *Healing After Loss*. Immediately, I discovered I was connecting with its reflections and challenges. I phoned my friend to thank him, to inquire how he came upon it, and to relate to him how much meaning I was gleaning, even after only a few days of reading.

He had received a copy at the time of his brother's sudden death. He found it so meaningful, he began to distribute copies to others who had become survivors and along their way on the journey of grieving. Now, I have begun to hand out copies as well.

For Lynn and me, and our family, the ever more aggressive cancer she had battled signaled well in advance the painful outcome that lay ahead. At least we had and took the opportunity for significant conversations while we could, as she did with other family members. We were blessed by the way we dealt with that part of the journey and I learned that grief can begin long before death occurs. At the same time, it continues for a lifetime I'm told by others whose experience precedes mine. The way we face the journey does make a difference in the way we feel the pain, experience the loss and, ultimately, the way we are able to begin to discover new life as we continue to celebrate the unique love we shared with our loved one now gone.

*Healing After Loss* continues to help me in several ways:

- Many of the daily thoughts describe various windows along the grief journey; such as, times of guilt; times of anger; times of deep sadness; times of celebration for so many special memories and, many more. What Hickman does is to expose the fullness of the journey with each window and offer 'permission' to be where I am. For example, a quote from Mark Twain on January 2 (my colleague's favorite), "*The mind has a dumb sense of vast loss—that is all. It will take mind and memory months and possibly years to gather the details and thus learn and know the whole extent of the loss.*" It was my natural tendency to want to grasp my full loss as quickly as possible.
- Several meditations remind me of the importance of being present to the moment. That may be routine for many people. It is not for me. I tend to think ahead ... to think 'out there' about what's next. That suits my work just fine and my racquetball. It doesn't work for grieving.
- Another valuable learning from Whitman is that she can shape questions that have been fuzzy or missing from my own stirrings. For example, a critical question she put forth in one meditation: "*Who am I now that my loved one is gone?*" She doesn't suggest there's a quick response to that question. Instead, it's a question to live with and gather the information along the way. For me, to be able to hold up questions to live with has sharpened the intentionality of my grieving.

I have learned that the journey of grieving is very unique to each individual. This awareness has helped me experience more fully my own journey, as well as to support and encourage others along their particular way.

An additional benefit for me is the fact that our sons and other family members also use this daily meditation guide. We have found it to be a source of our frequent conversations. I encourage you to take a look at the book for yourself or another who may benefit from an additional resource during a painful time in our lives, for which we can have little training or preparation.