

***Being able to befriend our
dying can change the
way we
live***



Befriending Death

Catholic Health Alliance of Canada
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Health Care Trends and Transformation

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BEFRIENDING



DEATH

*Henri Nouwen and a
Spirituality of Dying*

Michelle O'Rourke



Befriending Death*

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2009

**All Henri Nouwen quotes used in
this presentation are found in
this book*

(book includes a listing of original sources)

by

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Our culture

- Anti-Aging
- Death denying

Health Care System

- Often sees dying as a failure of acute care medicine instead of a normal, 'healthy' stage of life.



Items to Ponder....

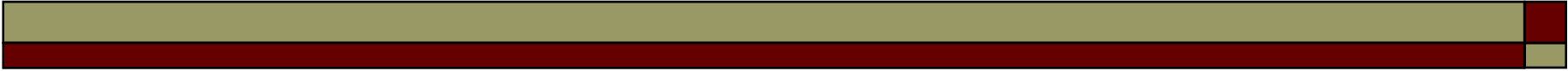
- 20% of the population at end-of-life die using intensive care services.
(expected to double by 2030)



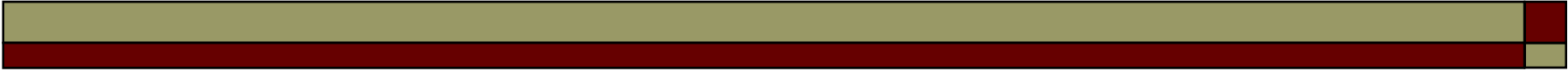
Illness trajectories

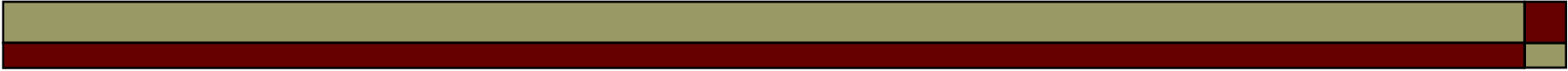
Work of Dr. Scott Murray, palliative care in UK

- End-of-Life Illness trajectories:
 - 40-45% - organ failure
 - 25% - cancer
 - 25% - dementia, frailty and decline

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- Dementia, frailty and decline – support often in long term care

 - Of 25% who die of cancer, only 10% generally receive palliative care services

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- ❑ NO specific system in place for organ failure trajectory even though 40-45% die this way.
 - ❑ Meaningful end-of-life care needed for them
 - ❑ Perhaps an opportunity to explore realistic, honest advance care planning with them for next exacerbation of their illness as they leave ICU
 - ❑ Augmented capacity to care for the dying in other settings and expanding services for this



As a health care system, we need to develop appropriate systems for people with chronic disease to access; to have necessary and realistic discussions of expectations and goals of care.

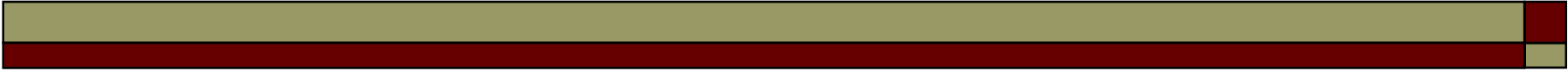
This is what dying looks like for chronic illness.



More points to ponder....

Everyone is born – everyone dies....

- Our OB and perinatal/neonatal/pediatric systems are very extensive compared to end-of-life care
- More patients die in ICU than in palliative care units

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- Appropriate use of supportive care and palliative care resources EARLY in hospitalization

 - LHSC – CCOT (Critical Care Outreach Team) – goes out to assess patients on wards and can decrease admissions to ICU of actively dying people.



“It’s always too early to bring in palliative care... until it is too late.”

Judith Nelson MD

Mt. Sinai, NY NY



Catholic Health Care Providers

- Have much to offer the conversation which has to take place in our society today about how we care especially for the aging and the dying (who are really the living!).
- Can help patients and their families recognize this part of their life's journey as something to be embraced and celebrated.

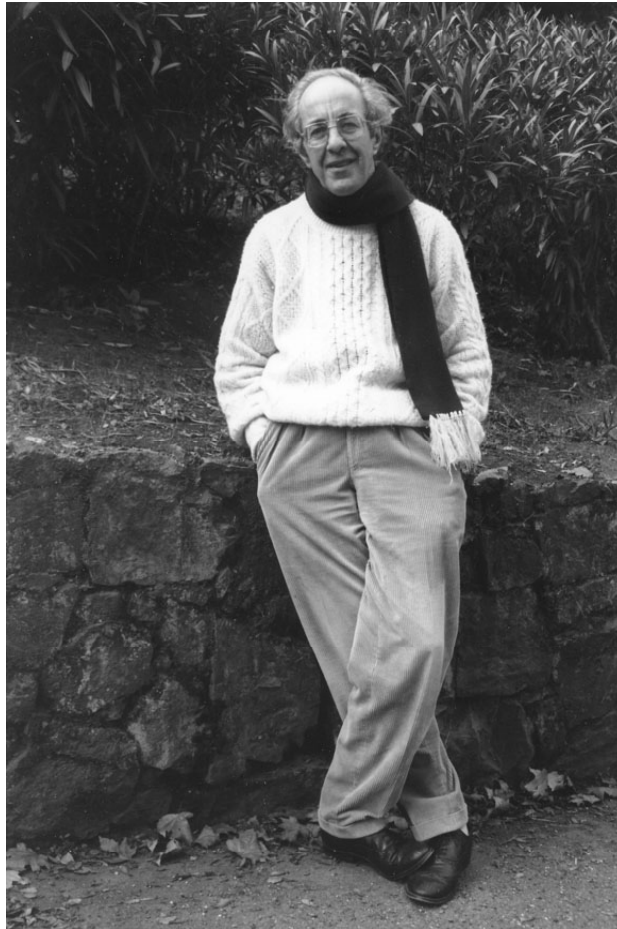


The need for our culture to befriend death

“Dying is the most general human event, something we all have to do. But do we do it well? Is our death more than an unavoidable fate that we simply wish would not be? Can it somehow become an act of fulfillment, perhaps more human than any other human act?”

Henri Nouwen

“My hope is that the description of God’s love in *my* life will give you the freedom and courage to discover – and maybe also describe – God’s love in *yours*.” *from ‘Here and Now’*



Henri Nouwen 1932-1996



Henri Nouwen

- A Dutch priest and psychologist
- Taught at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard
- One of the most well read and well loved writers in spirituality and ministry for many Christian denominations through the 70's, 80's and 90's
- Lived from 1986 to 1996 as Pastor of L'Arche Daybreak in Richmond Hill Ontario, continuing to write and teach
- Died suddenly in 1996 at age 64
- Entire collection of his published and unpublished works found at the Henri Nouwen Archives and Research Collection at the University of Toronto Kelly Library



Henri wrote more than 40 books during his lifetime including

- The Inner Voice of Love
- The Return of the Prodigal Son
- The Wounded Healer
- Compassion
- In Memoriam
- A Letter of Consolation
- Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring



Befriending Death

- Where the term comes from
 - Work of Carl Jung

- Why it's important

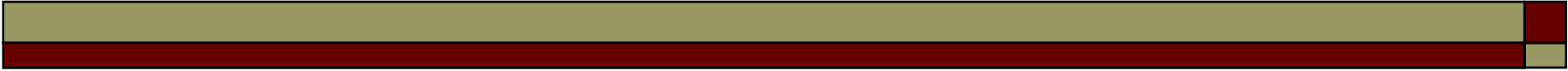
“It is important to be prepared for death, very important; but if we start thinking about it only when we are terminally ill, our reflections will not give us the support we need.”



Befriending Death

1. *Claiming Our Identity – Our Belovedness*

*‘You are my son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.’
(Mark 1:10-11) ... As “the Beloved” he is being sent into the
world so that through him all people will discover and claim
their own belovedness.*



You were the beloved before you were born and you will be the beloved after you die. That's the truth of your identity.... You belong to God from eternity to eternity. Life is just an interruption of eternity, just a little opportunity for a few years to say, "I love you, too."

*from 'Befriending Death' address to
the National Catholic AIDS Network, Chicago, July 1995*



Befriending Death

2. *Knowing our belovedness through prayer*

If we do not pray..... “we are constantly tempted to let ourselves be disconnected from the source of our lives.”



Befriending Death

3. *Understanding our life as mission*

“If you believe that you are beloved before you are born, you can suddenly realize that life is a mission. You are sent here for just a little bit, for 20, 30, 40, 50 years. It doesn’t matter. You are sent into this world to make your brothers and sisters know that they are as beloved as you are.... sent to be people of reconciliation. ...to claim that every human being belongs to that same heart that beats from eternity to eternity.

*from ‘Befriending Death’ address to the
National Catholic AIDS Network, Chicago, July 1995*



Befriending Death

4. *Believing that our lives bear fruit*

‘Fruitfulness’ as opposed to ‘success’

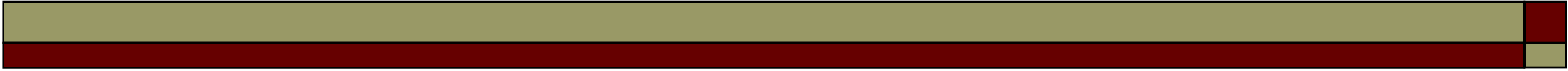
Our living and our dying form a legacy for those who come after us. This legacy or *fruitfulness* is seldom realized until long after we have gone.



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- *‘Still, I am telling you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Spirit will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you...’ (John 16:7)*

 - *“Doesn’t ‘dying for others’ mean dying so that others can continue to live, strengthened by the Spirit of our love?”*

Henri Nouwen



“To befriend death, we must claim that we are children of God, sisters and brothers of all people, and parents of generations yet to come. In so doing, we liberate our death from its absurdity and make it a gateway to a new life.”



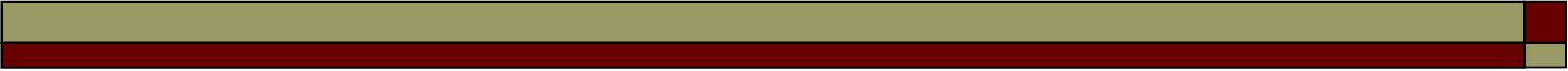
Dying Well

“Is death such an absolute end of all our thoughts and actions that we simply cannot face it? Or is it possible to befriend our dying gradually and live open to it, trusting that we have nothing to fear? Is it possible to prepare for our death with the same attentiveness that our parents had in preparing for our birth? Can we wait for our death as for a friend who wants to welcome us home?”

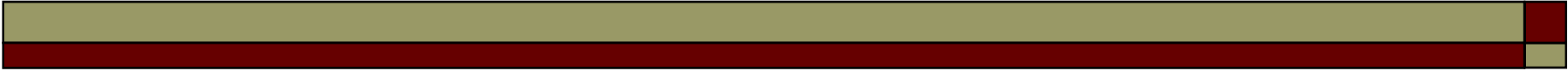


Caring Well

“Befriending our own death and helping others to befriend theirs are inseparable. In the realm of the Spirit of God, living and caring are one... caring is the privilege of every person and is at the heart of being human.”



“Care is something other than cure. Cure means ‘change’. A doctor, a lawyer, a minister, a social worker – they all want to use their professional skills to bring about changes in people’s lives. They get paid for whatever kind of cure they can bring about. But cure, desirable as it may be, can easily become violent, manipulative, and even destructive if it does not grow out of care....”



...Care is being with, crying out with, suffering with, feeling with. Care is compassion. It is claiming the truth that the other person is my brother or sister, human, mortal, vulnerable, like I am.

When care is our first concern, cure can be received as a gift. Often we are not able to cure, but we are always able to care. To care is to be human.”



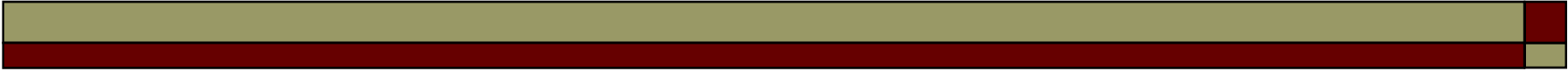
Caring Well

1. The gift of presence
2. The gift of truth
3. The ministry of healing
4. Caring as a community
5. Care for the grieving
6. Sustaining the caregiver



Caregiver burnout

- Burnout is giving without receiving.
- To be a good caregiver is to be really present.
- Important not to be alone as a caregiver, and to be aware of limits.
- Have to be able to realize when they need a time out and not feel guilty about it.
- Important to be cared for yourself – who holds you?
- Trust that when you leave your presence will continue.
- Most difficult thing is to be ‘present’ but only half there – be present but not want to be. This leads to resentment.



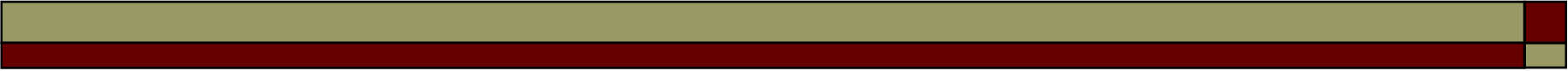
“Ultimately, we have just one moral duty:
to reclaim large areas of peace in
ourselves,
more and more peace
and to reflect it towards others.
And the more peace there is in us,
the more peace there will also be
in our troubled world.”

Etty Hillesum



Conclusion

“The resurrection does not solve our problems about dying and death. It is not the happy ending to our life’s struggle, nor is it the big surprise that God has kept in store for us. No, the resurrection is the expression of God’s faithfulness to Jesus and to all God’s children....”



... The resurrection doesn't answer any of our curious questions about life after death, such as, How will it be? How will it look? But it does reveal to us that, indeed, love is stronger than death. After that revelation, we must remain silent, leave the whys, wheres, hows, and whens behind, and simply trust."

Henri Nouwen



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