



The Second Week of Easter 2007

Dear Children of God in the Diocese of Connecticut,

Twice before I have written this letter along with a listing of resources to assist congregations and families. The first was after September 11, 2001 and again as the United States entered the War in Iraq. As a parent who has a son in college, the events of Monday, April 16th have especially touched me as it has any parent who sends a child off to school. Whenever such tragic events occur it is natural to ask, “Why?” In recent years we have recognized the vulnerability of our lives and how our country participates within the world community. We are especially concerned for those we love. In today’s world, our families and children are much more aware of events taking place in our communities, nation and the world – more than any other generation before. Communication can be instantaneous through the Internet and 24 – 7 news broadcasts. We are often inundated with sensory overload, and our children need our help to filter out the harmful overexposure that can so easily happen. How can we support our children in their questions, concerns, and awareness of the violence and uncertainty that permeates our world?

Be available for conversation with your children. Provide a safe and quiet space for them to talk and express their concerns. Important faith values that are understood by children include the personal and protective love of God. Stories of Jesus’ love for others and His parables of care are especially helpful. Allow children to offer their own prayers and reflections through art, song, story, and poem. Older children can look for other Scripture stories and prayers from the Book of Common Prayer that can offer thoughts of God’s power and love. Action can be taken by writing letters and Prayers of the People for community worship. Light a special “peace” candle each evening for family devotions or meal times. Speak of the Light of Christ and how God’s love will never go away.

No matter the events or circumstances, it is important to remember the One who leads us all, the One who calls us to live and respect the dignity of every human being. The Good Shepherd leads us to safe pastures but will continue to walk with us in the dark places. We will not be alone. As we continue to celebrate the resurrection, there will be times of sorrow and times of joy. As we recently walked with Jesus in Jerusalem to His passion with our children, we can lift up the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the midst of our uncertainty and fear. We can proclaim, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (I Peter 1:3)

Holy God, we are powerless in so many ways. Help those whom we cannot reach. Bring comfort to those who seem beyond consoling. Give us courage to hold fast to our vision of union and peace, the vision of building inclusive community. Show us the courage to trust and to release ourselves to your unfailing love. Amen.

Blessings,

Sharon

Sharon Ely Pearson

Children’s Ministries & Christian Education

Resources for Talking with Children Following Tragic Events

Davis, Katie. *Scared Stiff* (Harcourt, 2000). A girl learns to cope with everyday fears. This book is not about "violence/tolerance" per se, but rather one of the resulting emotions. Ages 4-up.

Demi. *Gandhi* (Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2001). An inspiring picture book about the tireless crusader for peace through nonviolence. Ages 7-10.

Harris, Robie. *Goodbye Mousie* (Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2001). The story of a little boy who wakes up to discover that his pet mouse has died. After expressing anger and disbelief, the boy learns that sadness and memories are part of saying goodbye. Ages 4-8.

Holmes, Margaret M. *A Terrible Thing Happened* (Magination Press, 2000). A bibliotherapy-style look at the symptoms that can plague children who've witnessed something traumatic and how such children might work through/communicate about them. A springboard for discussion. Ages 4-up.

Howe, James, editor. *The Color of Absence: 12 Stories about Loss and Hope* (Atheneum, 2001). A collection of short stories for teens. Contributors include Avi, C. B. Christiansen, James Howe, Angela Johnson, Annette Curtis Klause, Chris Lynch, Norma Fox Mazer, Walter Dean Myers, Naomi Shihab Nye, Michael J. Rosen, Roderick Townley, Virginia Euwer Wolff, and Jacqueline Woodson. Ages 12-up.

Viorst, Judith. *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (Atheneum, 1999). A young boy copes with the death of his cat, Barney. Ages 4-8.

Your role as a parent

- ✦ *Offer reassurance and help your child feel secure.* When children are exposed to violent or traumatic events - even through the news or media - they need to hear that "scary" things are not likely to happen to them. Let them know that school and home are safe places to be, and that incidents like the September 11 tragedies are rare. Your child may need to be in more physical contact with you or rely on favorite stuffed toys or blankets.
- ✦ *Be a role model.* Children pick up clues from adults, especially when they have difficulty knowing what to do with their own emotions like anger or fear. Showing composure can provide a great sense of security to a child. Make sure comments or actions at home model how you would like your child to behave. Be especially aware of conversations with other adults in cars, on the phone, or in other places where your child may overhear you.
- ✦ *Limit exposure to TV and other media.* This is especially important for younger children, for whom the violence in the media can be particularly frightening. If you have an older school-age child, you may want to watch the news together and talk about what you're seeing.
- ✦ *Acknowledge your child's feelings.* Instead of saying, "Don't feel sad," you might say, "It seems like you feel sad. I feel that way, too." Reassure your child that what is happening is scary and confusing, and validate your child's many feelings.
- ✦ *If possible, spend more time with your child.* Younger children often react to stressful or fearful situations by being more clingy or needy than usual.
- ✦ *Maintain routines.* Trying to maintain normal family routines and schedules can be

comforting to a child.

- ✦ *Increase quiet time.* Add quiet time for the family in the evenings or make reading and quiet time before bed longer.
- ✦ *Watch for changes in your child's behavior.* Your child may be more aggressive in school, wake up frequently in the middle of the night, be more clingy at home, or cry more often. These are all signs that your child is experiencing stress. Your child may need extra reassurance and support from you.
- ✦ *Monitor your child's activities and play.* Your child may begin to act out much of what he is absorbing from other sources.
- ✦ *If your child seems to be having trouble coping, seek professional help.* Ask your pediatrician, school guidance counselor, clergy person, or employee assistance program (EAP) for names of counselors who specialize in working with young children in your area.

Internet Resources

- ✦ *When Someone Dies* – <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/somedie.html> and
- ✦ *Being Afraid* <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/afraid.html> a site for children from the KidsHealth arena of The Nemours Foundation Center for Children's Health Media:
- ✦ *The Family Pledge of Non-Violence* - <http://www.ipj-ppj.org/pledge.html>
- ✦ *Talking to Kids About School Violence* - http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/school_violence_tips.html from the Child Study Center at New York University
- ✦ *Talking with kids about the News* – ten tips on how to watch television with your children and talk about the events seen involving violence in the world. <http://www.talkingwithkids.org/television/twk-news.html>
- ✦ *PBS Parents Guide to Talking with Kids about the News* – Strategies for Talking, Listening and Caring by learning how to answering children's challenging questions by seeing the world through their eyes at <http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/>
- ✦ *Parenting for Tolerance* <http://www.tolerance.org/parents/index.jsp> offers resources and ideas for parents and teachers to instill a sense of tolerance and justice in children and youth
- ✦ *The Bank Street College of Education Library* has numerous links and educational resources for helping children cope with fear, terrorism, violence and war, including lesson plans, children's books and activism ideas. <http://streetcat.bnkst.edu/html/resources.html>
- ✦ *Helping Children Cope with Violence* – <http://www.naeyc.org/ece/1998/01.asp> from the National Association for the Education of Young Children
- ✦ *Crisis Communication Guide & Toolkit* – <http://www.nea.org/crisis/index.html> to help communities face a crisis and move toward hope, healing and renewal