

# Comfort for the Grieving Heart

St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

484-526-2499

April 2026

## Spring Cleaning the Heart

Sorting Through Belongings After a Loss

Cleaning out a loved one's home or sorting through their belongings is not simply a practical task. It is emotional, spiritual, and deeply personal. Some find it refreshing, others may find it utterly devastating, and many find it a little bit of both. Either way, it is often one of the most tangible ways we encounter the reality of our loss.

Spring has a way of shining light into corners we have not visited in months. Windows are opened. Closets get aired out. We feel an urge to tidy, refresh, and begin again. For those who are grieving, however, "spring cleaning" can feel very different. It may mean walking into a home that is too quiet. Opening drawers that still hold a favorite sweater. Deciding what to do with a lifetime of belongings that feel far more sacred than ordinary things.

There is no single "right" timeline for this work. Some families need to move quickly due to housing needs or financial pressures. Others leave everything untouched for months or even years. All these responses are normal and valid. Grief moves at its own pace and in its own way within everyone.

For some, the home feels like a sanctuary. For others, it feels overwhelming — a reminder of hospital equipment, difficult final days, or conversations that will never be finished. You may find that one room feels manageable while another feels impossible. You may discover that certain objects bring comfort while others bring a wave of tears you did not expect.

As you sort through all the tangible things, you may also find yourself sorting through some complex emotions. It is common to feel guilty for giving something away. It is okay to feel anger at having to do this work or being left with a mess after a person's death. It is normal to feel fear that letting go of belongings means letting go of the person. It's not wrong for feeling a sense of relief when a space is cleared or an object finds a new home. It is not unusual to laugh at a memory one moment and cry the next. Remember, grief is rarely tidy.

Different losses also shape this experience differently. Sorting through a spouse's closet may feel like touching a shared life. Packing up a parent's kitchen can stir childhood memories. Clearing a child's room may feel profoundly sacred and heartbreaking. Even losses of siblings, grandparents, or dear friends carry their own unique weight. The relationship shapes the meaning of every object.

Spring often invites us to think about renewal. But renewal in grief does not mean erasing what was. It means learning how to carry love forward in a new way. As you sort through belongings, you may begin to notice that what truly matters is not the quantity of items kept, but the stories attached to them. Sometimes a single recipe card, tool, or sweatshirt holds more meaning than boxes of stored things.

**You are not required to keep everything to honor someone's life. And you are not required to part with anything before you are ready.** Spring cleaning in grief is not about erasing the past. It is about gently tending to it. It is about honoring what was, making space for what is, and trusting that even in sorrow, new seasons will come.

For more information about the services offered by the St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program or if you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, please contact us at 484-526-2499. Newsletters are also available electronically by calling our office or online at [www.sluhn.org](http://www.sluhn.org) (search - grief)

## Practical Tips for “Spring Cleaning”

If you are approaching the task of cleaning out a loved one’s home or sorting through their belongings, here are some gentle reminders and guidelines that many find helpful:

- 1. Give yourself permission to go slowly.** You do not have to complete everything in one weekend. Set small, manageable goals — one drawer, one shelf, one hour at a time.
- 2. Ask for support.** Invite a trusted friend or family member to sit with you. They do not have to make decisions; their presence alone can steady you. If family dynamics are complex, consider setting clear times and roles in advance.
- 3. Sort into simple categories.** Keep, Donate, Offer to Family/Friends, Unsure. The “Unsure” box can be revisited later when emotions are less intense.
- 4. Take photos of meaningful spaces or items.** Sometimes a photograph preserves the memory without requiring you to keep the object itself.
- 5. Choose a few intentional keepsakes.** Rather than saving everything, consider selecting a small number of items that truly represent your loved one — something that reflects their personality, values, or shared memories.
- 6. Create a memory ritual.** Play their favorite music while you sort. Light a candle. Share stories aloud. Pause to acknowledge the significance of what you are doing.
- 7. Care for your body.** Sorting can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Drink water. Take breaks. Step outside for fresh air.
- 8. Release guilt.** Donating items so they can be used and appreciated by others can be a meaningful way to extend your loved one’s legacy.
- 9. Consider professional help if needed.** Clean-out services or professional organizers can provide practical and emotional support.
- 10. Remember: love does not live in objects.** The belongings are symbols. The relationship, the memories, and the love remain part of you and cannot be “swept away”.



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## Our Monthly Support Groups

Our bereavement support groups are facilitated by one of our grief counselors. We provide a safe and collaborative space to process your grief journey . For more information, call us at 484-526-2499.



### Bethlehem Area Support Groups

Wesley United Methodist Church, 2540 Center St., Bethlehem 18017 **10-11:30am: 4/3, 5/1**

NEW Location: Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 323 Nazareth pike, Bethlehem 18020 **6:30-8pm: 4/14, 5/12**

### Brodheadsville Area Support Group

Western Pocono Comm. Library, 131 Pilgrim Way, Brodheadsville 18322 **1-2:30pm: 4/15, 5/13**

### Carbon/Schuylkill Area Support Group

St. Luke's Lehighton Campus, 211 N. 12th Street, Lehighton PA 18235 **1-2:30pm: 4/8, 5/6**

### Sellersville Area Support Group

Zwingli UCC Church, 350 Wile Ave, Souderton PA 18964 **1-2:30pm: 4/13, 5/11**

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## Good Grief Workshops

These virtual 90-minute workshops are offered monthly to provide you with a better understanding of what grief is. This workshop is informational, interactive, and a good starting point towards entering our in-person support groups. Sign -up is recommended for those 4-6 weeks out from their loss. For more information, call 484-526-2499.

**Join us** from 1-2:30pm: April 23, May 7

**Join us** from 6-7:30pm: April 8, May 20

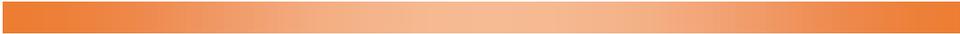
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## St. Luke's Senior Meals

St. Luke's University Health Network provides healthy, affordable meals for seniors (65 or older). It's a great opportunity for a great meal at a great price (under \$5 for an entrée, salad, side, veggie, dessert and drink) and enjoy meeting new people. **ALL ARE OFFERED WEEKDAYS ONLY.**

- **Anderson, Carbon, Upper Bucks & Warren Campuses – DINNER 4pm-6pm**
- **Geisinger/St. Luke's—DINNER 4:30pm-6pm**
- **Miner's Campus— LUNCH 11:15am –1:30pm; DINNER 4:15pm-6pm**
- **Monroe Campus—LUNCH 11am-2pm; DINNER 4pm-6pm**





## Other Places to Find Support

We encourage you to call the number on the back of your insurance card to find resources paid by your individual insurance plan. Find an individual therapist at [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com)

### Community Bereavement Resources

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**Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center** offers bereavement support for LGBT people who have experienced loss. Visit [bradburysullivancenter.org](http://bradburysullivancenter.org) or email at [reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org](mailto:reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org).

**Cancer Support Community of the Greater Lehigh Valley** provides professional programs of emotional support and education. Visit [cancersupportglv.org](http://cancersupportglv.org).

**The Compassionate Friends** offers ongoing support for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling. Visit [thecompassionatefriends.org](http://thecompassionatefriends.org). Enter your zip code to locate the local chapter and contact person near you.

**Doylestown Hospital Hospice** offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit [doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement](http://doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement) or call 215-345-2079.

**Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions** is currently being offered virtually by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Visit [givinggriefavoic.com](http://givinggriefavoic.com) or call 610-730-1992. Be sure to indicate if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

**GRASP (Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing)** currently offers two virtual evening meetings per month, plus an afternoon meeting at the Oasis Center. Call 484-788-9440.

**Grief Share** is a faith-based support group offered throughout the Lehigh Valley. Visit [griefshare.org](http://griefshare.org) and enter your zip code to find the contact person and program near you.

**Lehigh Valley Health Network** offers many groups and services for adults and children between the ages of 6-17. Call 610-402-7481. For information about program offerings in the Pocono area, call 272-762-3826 or email [Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org](mailto:Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org).

**OASIS Community Center** offers a variety of support groups to those grieving a loss due to substance-related causes. Therapist-led meetings are held in-person and virtually for bereaved parents and young adults (siblings, partners, friends, etc.). Visit [oasisbethlehem.org](http://oasisbethlehem.org), call 484-747-6825 or email at [rhonda@oasisbethlehem.org](mailto:rhonda@oasisbethlehem.org).

**Suicide Loss.** The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, and education about suicide. Visit [afsp.org](http://afsp.org) and enter your zip code to find the chapter/contact person near you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

### Support Information in New Jersey

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**Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice** offers support to those who are grieving the death of a loved one. For more information, call 973-948-2283 or visit [karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement](http://karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement).



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