



Companions on a Journey
GRIEF SUPPORT

ABOUT COMPANIONS ON A JOURNEY

We call ourselves Companions on a Journey Grief Support (COJ), because that is what we are. Each of us has endured the death of someone we've loved very dearly. Our crosses in life have been heavy, yet it has been through our faith in God that we have found each other.

On August 24, 1993, my husband, Vince, died at the age of 39 after a 10 year battle with cancer. It was our son Tony's first day of freshman year at Moeller High School. Being widowed at the age of 37, I was to left raise our three children. My heart ached to the very core of my being- feelings of immense pain flowed from my heart hearing my children's cries. To this day, remembering their cries can bring me to tears. I felt lost, alone, confused and frightened. As I reflect on that time in my life, I am amazed at how God has turned my sorrow into joy.

As I began my journey, the scripture verse that came to me was Matthew 7:7 (NAB), "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you." I asked Jesus to be my partner in life. I found myself seeking His advice throughout my day, filling my alone moments with His presence. In doing so, God gave me the vision of one day having a bereavement center that would provide ongoing support to bereaved children, teens, and adults.

Several years later, I met and married Tom Kanoza, a widower with two young boys. Together, we became the real life "Brady Bunch." I knew from the moment I met Tom that he would be the male counterpart to God's vision.

Until one experiences the death of a loved one, a person cannot truly understand our grief world. It's as though we have entered into a different existence from the one we once knew.

It is our vision to one day have a bereavement center we can call home, where individuals and families can come at any stage in their grief and find hope, strength, healing and love. For now, we must be patient as our Center is carried by totes and located at many sites throughout the city. COJ is grateful to and for each of our volunteers, sponsors, and everyone who provides us with a location to meet. Together we are truly making a difference.

When we share the stories of our lives with others, we not only connect with each other but we reconnect with our loved ones who have died. In doing so, we realize our loved ones will always be part of our lives, for someone so loved will never be forgotten. It is through our experiences that we truly learn the meaning of life. It is an education in life that no degree in the world can teach!

We illuminate God's love to everyone we serve. "Love one another as I have loved you," John 13: 34 (NAB).

God Bless You,
Sheila Munafo-Kanoza
Founder and Executive Director

(Over)

COJ's Time Line

- 1997 - Companions on a Journey (COJ) began as a ministry at St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish offering one support group to address all forms of grief.
- 2000 to present - COJ Teens in Grief, an ongoing grief support program, was created by Patricia Buckley and Sheila Munaf-Kanoza. They meet with Moeller High School students wherever they are at on their grief journey and continue to meet with them through their graduation. This Program has expanded to serve 25 schools with 32 groups in schools throughout the Greater Cincinnati area, Northern Kentucky Dayton area.
- 2000 - COJ provided its first crisis response at Moeller High School following the death of a teacher.
- 2003 - COJ began a bereaved parents group.
- 2005 - COJ Board of Directors was formed: Sheila Munaf-Kanoza, Linda Sullivan, Margaret Kast, Tom Kanoza, Russ Pennavaria, and Stephen Sullivan.
- 2007 - COJ incorporated and became a 501(c) 3 organization.
- 2007 - COJ Teen's Post-vention of Suicide program began; expanded to include support for adults.
- 2009-2012 - Linda Sullivan served as COJ's co-executive director.
- 2009 - COJ published its first *Seasons of Grief* newsletter. COJ's Social Outreach Groups began; Lunch Bunch, Dinner Group, Bereaved Mother's Book Club, and Travel Group.
- 2010 - COJ adopted Mending Hearts, a Program for Grieving Children, Teens and their Families from the John Engel Christian Counseling Center.
- 2010 to present - COJ has become the largest faith-based bereavement services organization in the region offering bereavement support services free of charge to the bereaved with no boundaries of race, color, or creed.
- 2012 - Ann Marie Kahwaty Bogan, LISW, ACSW, became our child development & crisis response co-leader.
- 2012 - John Dorger, M. Ed., a retired school psychologist, joined our team working with our Mending Hearts and Crisis Response Programs.
- 2011 to 2013 - COJ has assisted over 4000 individuals through our crisis response, grief support, educational programs, and our *Seasons in Grief* newsletter.
- 2013 - Implementation of our Children and Teens in Grief Program servicing schools, K through 12
- 2014 - COJ recognized National and Internationally Recognized in the Alive Maranist Magazine, Facing Life Head On and Guide to Feeling Good Cable Shows to help in the prevention and post vention to suicide. COJ expanded our ongoing school support program to include other losses within the schools.
- 2015 - COJ has assisted the bereaved for the past 19 year and assisted schools for 15 years with our Children and Teens ongoing Grief Support Program. Our work has been shared internationally.

Companions on a Journey's mission is to provide ongoing support and life balance for the bereaved in families, schools, businesses, and organizations, with faith, hope, and love: one child, one teen, one adult, one family at a time.

Companions on a Journey Grief Support
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COJ is a faith-based social service organization which provides bereavement support and educational services for children, teens, and adults. COJ does not provide any counseling or related services which require a license under Chapter 4757 of the Ohio Revised Code. COJ is a section 501(c)(3) organization.