

PastorCare

West Michigan

Shepherding the Shepherds & Sheep

September 2019

Experiencing Pastoral Care While Grieving Losses

Pastors must never underestimate the significance and lasting impact of providing pastoral care when families are grieving losses in their lives. The timing is usually inconvenient. It almost always comes as an interruption in your schedule. It usually requires more time than you think you have available. However, your presence in the midst of a family who is grieving a significant loss will never be forgotten. Your absence may always be remembered as an unmet need in their lives.

Yes. I am a little old fashioned when it comes to the importance of pastoral care in the life and ministry of the local church. I have heard it said in many churches that pastoral care happens best through their small group ministry. I understand and believe in the value and significance of believers ministering to one another in the Body of Christ. But I am one of those pastors who God entrusted with a shepherd's heart and He taught me the importance of being with the sheep He entrusted to my care while they are grieving losses in their lives.



Mike and Andrea Lawlor made arrangements to fly Sue and me to Long Island for the weekend of August 2-4, 2019 so I could officiate at their daughter Olivia's wedding to Robert Kohler on Saturday evening. Sue and I had such a wonderful time there and experienced so much love and joy from these dear friends and their families and friends.



It was such an honor to become friends with Robert Kohler, the Groom. He is a fine young man who is faithfully serving our country as a Marine.

I overheard one of the guests ask Mike Lawlor about our relationship and why they wanted me to officiate at Olivia's wedding. Mike replied, "When our daughter Sarah was born with many health complications, Pastor John was with us in the hospital." Mike's brief statement testified to the significance and lasting value of pastoral care and being present with people in their times of crisis and loss.

God blessed Mike and Andrea with three more daughters. Olivia is in the middle and she is the first to be married. Robert and Olivia became friends in kindergarten. Because their last names were so close alphabetically, they were always teamed up together in school. I think it is so cool that two best friends from kindergarten are now united in marriage. To God be the glory!



Mike and Andrea were so excited and so thankful. After the wedding Mike said to me, "We have two more daughters, please stay available for their weddings." I said, "That would be a great honor and blessing for me."

On Sunday morning, Sue and I were delighted to worship at New Life Community Church where we served for twenty-three years. It was wonderful to see our friends again and to meet some new friends. Pastor Scott Rees welcomed us so warmly and honored us with very kind and affirming words to have the privilege of seeing some of the fruits of our ministry. Pastor Scott invited me to join him in serving communion and he asked me to give the closing benediction. It was wonderful!

I shared with a few friends after the service about the significance of the commemorative garden on the front lawn of the church. It was a long time ago and most people don't know or remember the story of Sarah Lawlor. It's hard to fully comprehend the depth of Mike and Andrea's grief with the death of their first child. I am forever grateful that I was able to be with them and walk with them through it.



New Life Community Church, Sayville, Long Island New York, August 4, 2019

Pat and Karl Boysen, (Andrea's parents), designed and created this beautiful memorial garden in front of the church in memory of Sarah Lawlor, as a lasting testimony to the godness and faithfulness of God during our times of intense grief and sorrow.

I am so glad I followed the Holy Spirit's prompting to take a few photos after church, rather than relying on the photos I have taken in years past. I had no idea about the bad news I would receive the next day.

Almost everyone who knows me, is aware of my deep love for photography. I love capturing people in the art of being themselves! I love taking candid photos of family and friends. I love taking photos of nature and wildlife. I love taking photos of family and friends at sporting events, family gatherings, birthday parties, weddings, worship services, and so on. I have had so much fun over the years blessing people with photos I have taken of them and their loved ones.



For the past several years I have stored all of my digital photos on an external hard drive. I had all of the digital photos neatly arranged and stored in hundreds of file categories.

Over the past nine months we have lived in six temporary housing locations. I moved my external hard drive in my back pack too many times.

Near the end of June, my external hard drive became un-responsive. I couldn't access any of my photos.

When our son Matt was home for the 4th of July weekend, I asked him to see if he could fix the problem. When he was not able to fix it, I began to research the best company to recover the data for me. I sent my external hard drive to File Savers Data Recovery. Their tag line is: We treat your data as if it were our own.

On Monday, August 5, 2019 at 2:14PM I received a phone call from John Powell at File Savers Data Recovery. He said, "I have news for you, but it's not good. We thoroughly examined your external hard drive in our clean room. There was too much damage to the heads on the hard drive. It's unrecoverable."

My response was, "Wow! That's not what I was hoping to hear. Thank you for trying everything you could. I have to look at it like my house burned down and I lost all my photos. I have to start over now."

Now I will answer the question you are probably asking. NO. I DID NOT HAVE IT BACKED UP ON ANOTHER DEVICE OR IN THE CLOUD. I was always too busy and never got around to it. I often learn the hard way. Once again I'm in the position to encourage people to learn from my very painful mistakes!

Three terabytes (hundreds of thousands) of digital photos taken over more than two decades are completely gone with no way to recover them. All of our family and extended family photos. All of the photos that tell the story of PastorCare West Michigan. All of the photos I have taken for other people and other ministries. Almost every day, I think about other photos I have lost. I know that I have not yet realized the full impact of this loss. I have been so busy coaching and encouraging pastors and being the project manager for house rebuilding project, that I haven't really had the time and space to grieve this significant loss in my life. I know that I have not taken the time to grieve and deal with the deep emotional impact of this loss.

It grieves me to know I lost all of the original photos I took during our discovery of the horrendous mouse infestation in the house we purchased last August. I lost the photos of the demolition work we had to do in the finished basement and the kitchen, and the professional cleaning and sterilization of our entire house and all of our contents by Cousino Restoration Medical Services from Perrysburg, OH. Fortunately, I put many photos into a Word document that shares the story of our Perfect Storm.



Mike Stevens and Kelly Kelly Streichert, Division Manager, Cousino Restoration Medical Services

Forrest coached us through the whole process with incredible compassion and amazing wisdom. When all of the other professionals and well intended friends were trying to convince us that we didn't need to extend our demolition work into our kitchen, Forrest was the one who told me to listen to Jim Strobridge, our Building Hygenist. Jim and Forrest were the only two people who told us we had to tear out all of our kitchen cabinets. They were right! We uncovered large mouse nests under every one of the base kitchen cabinets. We also removed the entire kitchen ceiling to know for sure there was no evidence of mouse infestation in the attic insulation.

Several months ago, Forrest shared with us that he was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Sue and I wanted to go visit him, but he was often quite sick and not up to having visitors. We stayed in touch by email and text messages.

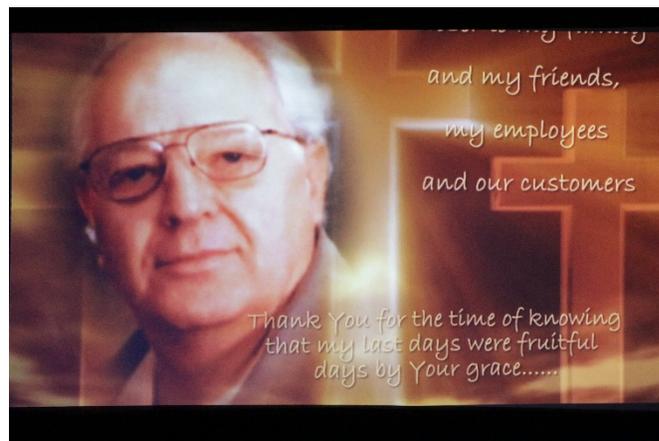
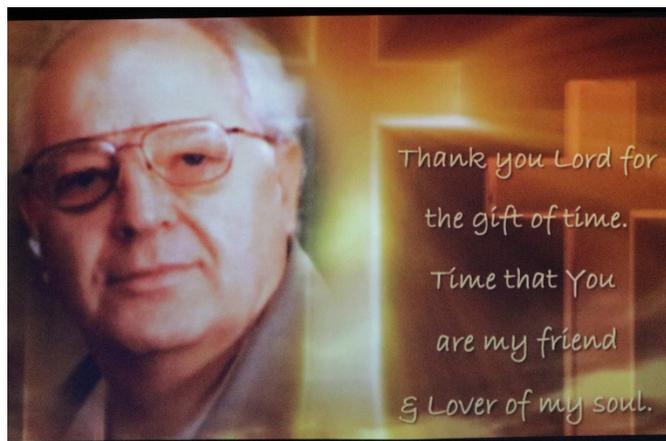
On Wednesday evening, August 28, I received a text message from Mike Stevens with Forrest Cousino's obituary attached. Forrest D. Cousino, 77, of Perrysburg, OH passed away peacefully Monday, August 26, 2019 at his home surrounded in love by his family.

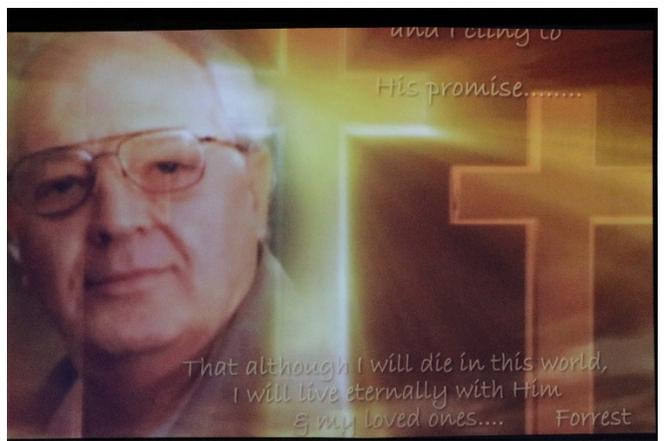
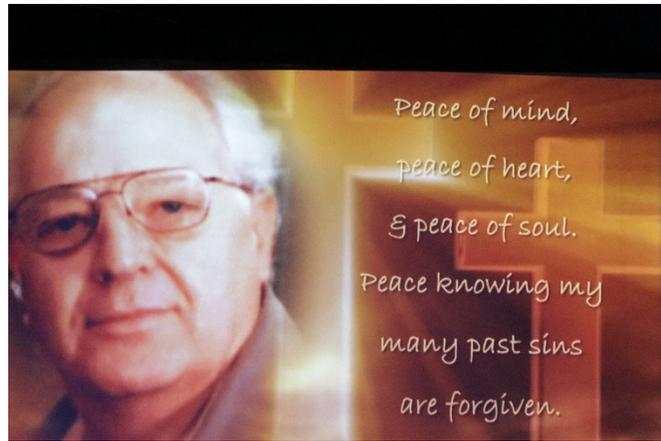
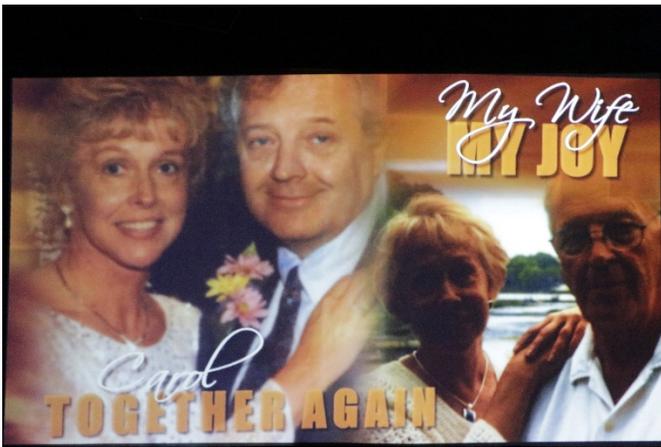
Mike's text message read: *I am sorry to inform you but my mentor, friend, boss and Father figure to me has passed away.*

I wrote him back: *Dear Mike. I am so sorry. Forrest was an amazing man who greatly blessed us with his compassion, expertise, and generosity. We communicated a few weeks ago. We regret that we were not able to visit him. We are so sorry for your loss. I see the service is Friday at 10:30. Sue and I will be there to pay our respects and honor our friend.*



Forrest Cousino was dearly loved by his family, his friends, his company, and his church family.
Chad Gilligan, Lead Pastor, Calvary Church Toledo, Maumee, OH





Attending the service honoring the life of Forrest Cousino was a powerful reminder to live our lives at peace with God and at peace with others. Sue and I renewed our commitment to make every effort to help as many people as possible, in every way we can, as often as possible, with God's guidance and the resources he has entrusted to our care and stewardship.

Please click the link to our **GoFundMe** page to see the updates with photos on our house and PastorCare West Michigan office rebuilding project. There is still time for you to help us reach our goal. <https://www.gofundme.com/healing-for-my-wife-and-rebuilding-our-house>

Thank you for your prayers and your financial support. Please make checks payable to: PastorCare West Michigan 8056 Burlingame Ave. SW Bryon Center, MI 49315. You may also contribute through PayPal on our website www.pastorcarewm.org (Rebuilt by Matt Smith)



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Pastor John and Sue enjoying an evening with their family at Lake Michigan August 2019. Photo by Sarah Seaberg, Crowned Creative Studio, www.crownedcreativestudio.com

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