

Thanatology Café

Where the conversation is about death.

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Where The Conversation Is About Death

Thanatology Café Comes to RCS

It has been said that we live in a culture of denial. Denial is one of the most common defense mechanisms that we all use, pretending that an uncomfortable thing did not happen; denial is avoiding a stressful truth. We deny illness, aging, just about anything we don't like to admit is reality. For most things we deny we have a pill or a cream, or some other treatment like a facelift. But we deny some things for which there is no quick fix; one of those things is death and dying.

In our contemporary culture we avoid talking about death because it's the ultimate out-of-our-control situation. When it does happen, modern Americans generally try to make it go away as quickly as possible and in as tidy a manner as possible; the funeral industry has myriad ways and products to help us do that. When we die, our families usually are faced with the final arrangements and there are always funeral directors who are ready and willing to take on the burden of disposing of the remains. And *Oh!* how many possibilities there are!

But the plain fact of the matter is that we can run but we can't hide. Whether it's our own death or the death of someone close to us we have no choices when the Grim Reaper is staring us in the face.

So, what do we do when there's really no escape from the reality that we or someone close to us is going to die sooner or later? Despair and high anxiety are not the answer simply because we can't survive in a catatonic state worrying about the great transition we call death. So what are the options, you might well ask?

Well, a local interfaith chaplain/thanatologist, Harold Vadney, has come up with an alternative to denial and high anxiety when faced with an existential crisis. It's called Thanatology Café.

Thanatology can be defined as the study of death, dying, grieving, mourning, and the coping mechanisms we resort to. It's much more complicated than that, of course, but for convenience's sake let's just say that Thanatology Café is a place where people can join in a conversation about death and dying in a safe, non-judgmental environment. It's a venue where participants can talk about their personal experiences, their reflections about death, how they cope or don't cope with a death, share their suffering in their experience of death. It's also a place where a lot of learning will be going on ranging from traditions and superstitions about death and the dead to modern death practices and procedures to services available in the event of death. Talking

about what we fear or attempt to deny is an excellent way to quell the anxiety we experience when thinking about an uncomfortable or unpleasant subject.

Thanatology Café will also be a place where bereaved persons can share their suffering with compassionate others. In this way, we hope that their grief will be easier to bear and their healing will be swifter, once they know that there is a place to go where the listening is done with the heart. In effect, Thanatology Café is a bereavement ministry, even though it is not associated with any religion or faith community.

While Thanatology Café is strictly non-denominational and interfaith, and preaching or religious proselytizing is prohibited, there is a space for spirituality, a very important component of the confrontation with illness, dying and death.

As the programs mature and participants make their interests known either during the conversations or by direct request, there will be something for everyone, tours of local historical cemeteries, and even visits to funeral homes for tours and QA sessions.

The Thanatology Café program will naturally be of particular interest to senior citizen programs, churches, social organizations, even fire, rescue and police departments. Anyone with an interest in death or who works in situations where death is ever-present can benefit from the Thanatology Café programs.

Thanatology Café will be totally nonprofit but will gratefully accept donations to help cover expenses such as publicity and refreshments. Being totally independent of commercial and denominational interests, presenters and hosts will not be allowed to offer their services or attempt to persuade participants to make a particular decision or to choose a particular course of action. Strict ethical principals will apply to the group leaders, called facilitators, and the organizer has opted to apply the Code of Ethics of the Association for Death Education and Counseling, the certifying organization for professional thanatologists.

Thanatology Café will launch its inaugural session on Saturday, April 9, 2016, from 2-4 p.m at the RCS Community Library located at 95 Main Street, Ravena, New York (phone (518) 756-2053 / email: info@rcscommunitylibrary.org). Of course, everyone is welcome and refreshments will be provided.

The organizers will be distributing flyers to local churches and social organizations and to businesses who will be asked to post the flyers in a visible location so that the general public can become aware of the opportunity offered by Thanatology Café. Information will also be posted on the Thanatology Café blog (<https://thanatologycafe.wordpress.com>), on the Thanatology Café Facebook page, and on Twitter @thanatologycafe.

The organizers do ask that interested persons sign-up at the RCS Community Library or R.S.V.P. that they expect to attend the April 9 session. R.S.V.P.s can be made at thanatologycafe@gmail.com.

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For further information please contact Rev. Chaplain Harold W. Vadney M.Div., at (518) 810-2700 or email at pastoral.care.harold@gmail.com.

Please also visit the Thanatology Café blog site at <https://thanatologycafe.wordpress.com>. Thanatology Café is a service mark of Harold W. Vadney M.Div.; all rights reserved.