

The Founders of New Hope Center for Grief Support



Pictured (left to right): Betty Baird, Cathy Clough, John Baird

A message from Cathy Clough

In February, 1983, my husband Don was diagnosed with lung cancer and died 4 months later, one day after our 10th wedding anniversary. Our 3 sons were 16, 9 and 5 at the time. Dealing with my grief was secondary to trying to help my children understand that their dad's death was permanent and we needed to learn to live without him. At that time there were very few grief support groups for adults and none for children, but I knew I couldn't help them if I didn't help myself. I found a grief support group at a local church but it didn't work out when I discovered I was the only person under 70 in attendance. The 2nd group was facilitated by a psychologist who said she knew what we were going through since she had been divorced. That was the end of my grief group experience. Instead, I read grief books and was introduced to 2 other young widows by the hospice nurse who had helped us. I learned that sharing my grief with others who had a similar experience was the thing that helped me the most.

About 2 years after my husband's death, that same hospice nurse asked me if I would be interested in helping the families she had served after the death of their loved ones. She felt strongly that the work of hospice wasn't completed after the death of the patient. I researched other hospices to see what they did and developed a follow-up plan and an 8 week series and

invited all of the family members to attend. The first group was small....maybe 8 widows. I'll never forget the looks on their faces at that 8th session. They couldn't believe it was ending and wanted to continue. Since I needed to start a new group, I agreed to meet with them on a monthly basis. The same thing happened when each group ended. I only had so many nights in a week so I decided to meet with all of the "graduates" at the same time. The group grew so large that I had to divide them into smaller groups and the logical division was to divide them according to where they were on their grief journey.....early or at the moving on stage. Soon it was obvious what I knew from my own grief experience.....that younger widowed men and women had different needs than the older ones, so we divided them even further and eventually began a program for children. It wasn't long before it became obvious that I needed to offer ongoing groups for those who had lost a child, a parent, etc. This was the beginning of age & loss specific support groups.

Various circumstances caused me to make the decision to leave the hospice after 14 years. I wasn't sure what I was going to do next & began to pray for direction. I began to formulate in my mind what a Christian based grief support group could look like but didn't have the money or the business experience to make it a reality. It became clear to me that it was God's will for me to move forward with my vision when He sent John Baird to me one day to talk about hospice. I met with him and his wife Betty and shared my vision & my dream. Unbeknownst to me, they were looking for a meaningful Christian focused ministry to support. With their initial financial support & John's business expertise, we founded New Hope Center for Grief Support in January, 2000. We decided that our mission would be to offer Christian based grief support by providing age & loss specific support to all who needed it at no cost. It was a huge step of faith, but God confirmed to me that New Hope was His plan, not mine, by sending the people to volunteer to help us provide our services, the funding to support them and the men and women & children who needed them. Being open to God and His leading through the years since New Hope's inception continues to help us stay focused on what is important and has seen us through some difficult times. The connections I made at New Hope continue to bless me & I am so glad I responded to God's leading so many years ago and allowed Him to use me to be a blessing to others.

Cathy Clough
January 2018

The Beginning of New Hope Center for Grief Support As remembered by Betty and John Baird

New Hope was founded by Cathy Clough, and Betty and John Baird --- her official “birth date” was January 1, 2000. As we look back, it’s quite evident that God was leading us toward founding this wonderful ministry.

Before the Beginning

Shortly after John’s retirement from Ford, we began to pray for guidance about how we could be used by God in a positive way. Within a few months, we experienced two tragic losses due to death. The daughter of close friends of ours was killed in an auto accident at age 21. She was like family to our kids and us. Shortly thereafter, our next door neighbor died unexpectedly. We had built our homes side-by-side 30 years earlier and raised our kids at the same time. We saw grief and grieved with our friends and neighbors. (Later, both families attended a New Hope Workshop.)

Meanwhile, John had joined Ward Church staff and was considering the possibility of expanding Ward’s ministry into a church-owned hospice. The investigation led us through Paul Clough, a Ward staff member, to his wife, Cathy, who was a director at Arbor Hospice for about 14 years. The “church-owned-hospice” idea wasn’t viable but, most importantly, we got to know Cathy much better and learned of her dream of having a faith based, grief specific, grief support ministry.

Beginning of the Beginning

As work at Ward was concluding, we had conversations about working together in the future --- most probably in a Christian ministry. God’s leading on our journey was becoming more evident. We met with Cathy several times to learn more about her dream. All three of us agreed that we would make a good team, and so decided to “take the plunge.” Cathy had a great curriculum --- ready to go. We also agreed that this would be a grief *support* ministry --- not grief *counseling*, which required licensing that we weren’t prepared to tackle. Our first task was to select a name. We brain-stormed a list and selected “New Hope Center for Grief Support.”

We set about the work of developing legally-required By-laws, incorporating New Hope as a Michigan Corporation; and obtaining 501 (c) (3), tax-exempt status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Care was taken to assure that all legal documents stated clearly that New Hope is a Christian ministry.

The Beginning

After all legal approvals, Cathy left her job at Arbor Hospice and New Hope was born. She was hired on January 1, 2000 as Executive Director; John served as volunteer Board Chairman; and

Betty served as volunteer Corporate Secretary. A contract was established with Ward for New Hope's first Workshop and close to 100 people attended. The Workshop was judged to be a complete success. Ward's Single Adult Ministries were critical in financially supporting New Hope Workshops at Ward, and that support continues to this day.

Cathy's golf-outing-committee at Arbor Hospice decided to follow her to New Hope. In the spring of 2000, New Hope had its first major fund raiser. Around \$20,000 was raised, and that plus seed money that had been donated, put New Hope on solid footing for its first year.

A volunteer Board of Directors was formed --- initially with 3 members; later this was expanded to 6, and even later to 9 volunteer members.

Early Board meetings took place in the dining room of Cathy's home, and occasionally in ours. Cathy found a small office in Northville that New Hope could afford. Betty, Cathy, and others spackled, painted, decorated, and prayed. Our involvement on the Board focused mostly on the "business side" of the ministry --- on creating budgets, negotiating leases, obtaining and continuing insurances, and maintaining a proper set of records that could withstand audit and (heaven forbid) legal challenges.

As Cathy often says to groups, "Life is a Journey." The New Hope chapter in our journey was, we believe, directed by God. Now, in our retirement years, it is most gratifying for us to know that New Hope has helped thousands of people, and to see the ministry continue to thrive. We pray that thousands more will be helped by this wonderful, Christian ministry.

Betty and John Baird
January 2018