

## Things You Should Know About Widows

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one-third of all women who become widowed are younger than age 60, and half of those widowed become so by age 65. In fact, seven out of ten baby boomers can expect to outlive their husbands. Here are eight things you need to know about the ever-increasing member of society, the widow:

- A widow's deepest pains last longer than a year. Immediately after a death, the church community is adept at responding with flowers or a casserole but far less gifted in maintaining a ministry to her long-term. Her experience can feel like major surgery—a radical amputation, to be specific. She may be numb for several months. After the cards and letters stop, the visits drop off, and friends return to their normal lives, her hardest work has just begun.
- A grieving widow who lives alone may go several days without hearing another human voice, especially months after the initial funeral. Emails and text messages are good; however, phone calls and visits may be better. While this may not seem like the most efficient use of your time, efficiency and effectiveness are sometimes mutually exclusive.
- A grieving widow's pain is unique and volatile. What encourages one woman may be painfully unhelpful to another. Grief is like a virus that waxes and wanes with intensity. Emotional mine fields such as these may require intimate knowledge of the bereaved. Don't let this stop you from communicating with her. Just sitting and listening is helpful.
- A grieving widow is often physically and emotionally exhausted. Don't call her late at night or early in the morning. Be patient if she is slow in responding to your acts of kindness. Graciously accept her "no thank you" when she says she's not

up to going to dinner. She isn't refusing help or harboring bitterness. She may simply need rest.

- A grieving widow loves her children. Watching her children suffer is a misery that compounds grief and one in which the body of Christ is uniquely suited to offer comfort. Loving a widow's children is loving the widow. Young Life does this so well.
- A grieving widow often feels second (or third) to everyone else. Remember to check in during weather disasters, power outages, pandemics. Still invite her to banquets, committee meetings, etc. Better yet, have someone offer to pick her up. Being the only single, the 11<sup>th</sup>, at a table for 10 is awkward.
- A grieving widow may be struggling with her faith. Meet her where she is. Don't make her feel guilty. A grieving widow needs compassion and not pity. While compassion walks beside the bereaved, pity stands off at a safe distance.
- A grieving widow's finances may dramatically change if her spouse was the primary breadwinner. More than half of elderly widows now living in poverty were not poor before the death of their husbands. She may have life insurance policies, long-term savings plans, and family to lean on, yet still find her finances overwhelming.

**Adapted from Gaye Clark** , Erlanger Health Care Systems, article in Christian Living