



# Life After Breath

HELPING WIDOWS AFTER THE DEATH OF THEIR SPOUSE



Dear Friends,

Whether or not you are affiliated with a church, religious organization, or absolutely any other type of alliance, association, business, company, or combination of them all, you are welcome here. This protocol was first birthed from the personal tragedy of the loss of my husband. He was a Los Angeles City Firefighter, and died from duty related causes in 2005. As a result, this protocol was originally intended for use within fire departments and is now being used in that setting across the United States and Canada.

The more I spoke of the premise to others, I realized that there was a need for such guidelines within our church, which then blossomed into a vision for communities and so forth. I knew the heart of God was tender to the needs of society's most vulnerable as His Word admonishes so poignantly: "External religious worship, (religion as it is expressed in outward acts) that is pure and unblemished in the sight of God the Father is this: to visit and help and care for the orphans and widows in their affliction and need, and to keep oneself unspotted and uncontaminated from the world" (James 1:27; Amplified Version). Isaiah also tells us to "defend the orphan and plead for the widow."

The adaptation you are about to read is intended for use within a church body and is formatted as such. However, feel free to use it no matter your organization, but please, please understand that each link within the protocol is essential to its success. It's like a chain; without one of the links, it loses its strength. As it will be a "new language" of sorts for you, there could be parts of it that you might not understand or that you may think are not important. Trust me, it's important. If you need any help or have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for reading and I'm glad you're here. It tells me that you're going through something devastating and I wish that were not so. I want to tell you that I would rather there was another way through life, or that I understood it all, or that at least I could go through it with you. I can tell you—and I'm certain about this—that everything God says He is is true and then some, and then more, and then beyond what you could have ever hoped or dreamed of. His presence and comfort are beyond explaining. I will never stop partnering with you in prayer to get through this. Grieve hard and as long as you need. Worship the Lord with it, and when we see each other one day on the other side of this life we'll smile and know that it was true; He got us through.

In Jesus' Name,  
Susan VandePol



## Introduction

Because a widow's situation is unique, the emphasis throughout this ministry is to help alleviate the often undefined awkward and vulnerable position in which she finds herself. She is not sure of whom to ask for help when she needs it, and though it is not often spoken about, there are certain uncomfortable societal and cultural boundaries that make it difficult for a widow to ask a man for help, regardless of whether he is single or married. She wants to receive help from within the church body because she knows that she can trust them. This issue of trust is often overlooked, but for a widow, is extremely important. At the same time, church members want to support them, but are unsure of what type of help should be offered, and how frequent the contact should be between the family and the church body. Many within the local church family are often grieving themselves, and are in need of a way to express that grief in a manner that they know will help the family without making the now single wife, or possibly a male church member's family feel uncomfortable.

This ministry addresses these issues and gives some guidelines to help allay these previously mentioned difficulties. Because the aid that will be offered is under the umbrella of the widow's home church, and within Biblical parameters, much of the awkwardness and fear of being single from both the widow's and the church members' perspective is removed. Both she and the church family feel safe which is imperative. Much of the regret that the church family may have as a result of not helping or, helping too much because of the uncertainties already mentioned is largely eliminated.

Within this protocol, suggestions are included on how and when to initiate contact with the grieving family, time parameters within which to offer assistance, church liaison definitions, communication logs to help liaisons in keeping track of the family's needs, plus a few other reference logs that may be helpful. Having the Primary Liaison chosen and resources gathered before a death is suggested and will be helpful in the effort to minimize the turmoil of finding help for the widow and her family at the time immediately after the death of her loved one. The help extended will enable the local church to give assistance to surviving families by assessing and meeting the needs of those families. Their needs can be defined and then networked out by the Liaison to the appropriate church or trusted community member in the effort to aid the family as the transition through the grieving process takes place. The church should acquire names of trusted members from within the family's church/community, including contact information and area of expertise and/or ability within which they are willing to help.



## Procedures For Liaisons

### Primary Liaison

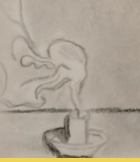
- I. This Liaison should be identified before a death occurs if possible. An Elder, Deacon, Deaconess, couple, or other church member may be used. They will be the overseer of the program, the gathering of resources, and the contact information for the family.
  - A. The Primary Liaison should initiate contact with the family by phone within 48 to 96 hours after the death of the husband.
  - B. He/she should introduce themselves, what the call is for, how the aid can be implemented, and assure its confidentiality.
  - C. Tell the widow that you will contact her the week after the funeral, and leave a contact number if there are any needs before then.
  - D. Explain the duties of the "Family Liaison" and ask if there is a family member, relative or close friend who may be willing to step into that role. If so, get that person's contact information. If there is no one, the Primary Liaison or church leadership may appoint one, or act in that role themselves.
  - E. Initiate contact with the Family Liaison, explain the protocol, and ask if they would be willing to fill that role.
  - F. Call the widow the week after the funeral, and ask if there are any needs. Assess and log these needs.
  - G. Evaluate the urgency, coordinate with the Family Liaison, and have them contact the appropriate church/community member, and make sure that the aid is networked out within 24 to 48 hours if possible. Keep the family apprised.
  - H. Follow up with the family and church/community member within 72 hours of aid given.
- II. It is suggested that this contact, in association with this ministry, originating with the church continue for two years tapering off at the following intervals:
  - Bi-weekly for the first four months
  - Monthly after that through the first year
  - Bi-monthly through the second year
- III. If needed, determine if the grieving family will be able to pay for any practical help given. If not, evaluate the cost and method of payment for any services rendered with the church staff, and see if paying for the help given is a possibility. Hopefully, and preferably, this discussion will have already taken place within the church staff, and the Liaison will know what the limits are of the home church's ability to come alongside the family financially.
- IV. Sometimes, a family may live far outside of the home church's geographic reach and ability to help quickly in the event of an emergency. If this is the case, and as friendships are often formed between many churches spread out over a wide area, consider contacting those churches near the family and inform them of the situation in an effort to get help to the family in a more timely manner if the need is urgent. These churches may even want to help if the family has the need for something like a work party at their home.



- V. It may be a good idea for the Primary Liaison to contact another family member, friend, work and/or school affiliate if deemed necessary, as these outside contacts may sometimes provide insight into the grieving family's needs that otherwise may go unnoticed. Of course, permission from the widow must be acquired prior to doing so.
  - A. Refer to Emergency Contact information page.
  - B. If these contacts are made, inform them of the protocol and leave Liaison contact numbers.
- VI. Small though it may seem, this Primary Liaison should be responsible for sending flowers and/or a card to the surviving family from the home church for the funeral, and first and second anniversary of the husband's death.

## **Family Liaison**

- I. This Liaison can be an immediate family member, a relative, or a friend. They will work with the Primary Liaison, but will be the eyes and ears closest to the family and their needs.
- II. It is suggested that this contact, in association with this ministry, continue in conjunction with the Primary Liaison at the same intervals. It should be noted that there may be times when contact will be more often depending on the help needed.



## Resources

These resources should ideally be gathered before a fatality occurs, and the information maintained by the Primary Liaison. The needs of a widow and her family will vary, but for the most part, if her practical needs are met, the potential for her and her family to heal emotionally and transition through to their new “normal” will be greater.

### I. Counseling, Grief Coaching, Life Coaching

- A. Such referrals may come from within or outside of the church body, but should be verified as legitimate and of Godly character, integrity, and quality.

### II. Financial

- A. Here also, referrals may come from within or outside of the church body, and may include everything from teaching the widow how to use an ATM card, to understanding how to develop a spending plan, to understanding investments. It is important to use wisdom in this area, as a Liaison should not become personally involved in the handling or financial advising of any family financial resources. Financial advice should be left to the family and financial experts.

### III. Legal

- A. Again, whether coming from within or outside the church, legal advice should be provided by experts, not Liaisons.

### IV. Practical

- A. This includes but is not limited to: property maintenance, home or auto repair, and guidance in any or all of these areas.

Liaisons should refer to their existing church resource list that coincides with this ministry. There should be no expectation that assistance will be provided without charge unless stated by the church. The emphasis is to assure the family that they are paying a fair price for quality service from a source that they can trust, while at the same time helping the widow feel safe and secure.





## Boundaries and Decorum

It needs to be mentioned that this program should be conducted within certain personal and Biblical boundaries. Ideally, this should all go without saying. Realistically, it must be said with the reminder that it is not the Liaison's, or church or community member's role to replace the husband who died, and he/she should understand that there should be a balance between providing support for the surviving family, and their own family and personal or professional responsibilities.

When a Liaison or church/community member is going to go to the home of a widow in conjunction with this ministry, they should inform the Primary Liaison, and make sure that the visit is logged. This will help to maintain accountability, ensure that the aid needed was given, and will be helpful for the Liaison to refer to in the future. Contact with the family should be made confirming the reason for the visit, day and time of arrival, and that it is under the auspices of this ministry. It is also very important to note that when a male church/community member goes to the home of a widow, he should never go alone. This will help "avoid the appearance of evil," help maintain the integrity of this ministry, and assure that the widow feels safe. If there becomes an issue regarding a relationship between the widow and a male involved in this ministry, that church/community member should withdraw from giving aid within this ministry.



## Family Information

Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Widow: \_\_\_\_\_

Children/Ages:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Home address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address (if applicable):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of deceased: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of passing: \_\_\_\_\_

Cause of death: \_\_\_\_\_





## Emergency Contact Information

Name of nearest relative: \_\_\_\_\_

Home address:

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Mailing address (if applicable):

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Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of friend: \_\_\_\_\_

Home address:

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Mailing address (if applicable):

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Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_



## Emergency Contact Information (continued)

### School Information

1. Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



## Communication Log

Date of contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Needs expressed:

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Action taken:

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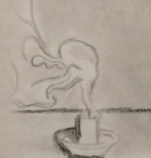
Follow-up:

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## Church and Community Resources

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Company: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Area of expertise: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Company: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Area of expertise: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
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