

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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SUICIDE

As a part of his regular routine, Fr. Ron Rolheiser, the noted author, columnist and lecturer, writes an annual column on suicide. They are insightful, consoling, and helpful articles. He addresses this topic because he knows people who are grieving a suicide.

I am one of those people, so I figure I should address it too.

In fact, today, Sunday, January 13, 2013 is the tenth anniversary of the suicide of our twenty-six year old daughter, Karla. Yesterday I put the finishing touches on my next book, *The Unique Grief of Suicide: Questions and Hope*. So, I've been thinking a lot about Karla lately.

Ten years ago our parish was magnificent in supporting us as we struggled with the shock and loss of our daughter. Our pastor, Fr. Bill Hitpas, led the way with his compassion, skill, and sensitive presence as well as a warm, inviting style of presiding at the funeral liturgy. The rest of the parish was also understanding and sympathetic, and expressed these feelings openly and effectively.

Since I worked for the diocese at the time, the Bishop, Wilton Gregory, also attended and, both publicly and privately, extended his empathy and support in human and consoling ways.

We watched the video of the wake service and funeral today and cried again as we relived the unfathomable sadness of those days. There was absolutely nothing but sincere compassion from our church community then – and it continues until this day. There never has been anything even close to a condemnation or negative insinuation about how she died. Everyone knows it was suicide and that she had bipolar disorder. But no one judged her or implied that she might not be in heaven. Jesus clearly was and is present to us through these loving people.

There was a time when the church and society in general, automatically condemned suiciders and the family grieving the suicide. Fortunately, those days are gone. But some remnants of that attitude still remain and I am very sad to report that the condemnatory tone can be found in the wording of our Catholic Catechism's section on suicide (Paragraphs 2280- 2283). To its credit, it does say that "grave psychological disturbances...can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide." And it also says that "we should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives."

