



Preface

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, while attending a national conference on death and grief, I went out to dinner with a friend. The restaurant manager stopped by our table to chat and asked what sort of conference brought us to the city. My friend and I looked at each other, collectively took a deep breath, and replied, “Death.” The restaurant manager seemed shocked and quickly left our table. About twenty minutes later, he returned and apologized for having bolted. “I didn’t know what to say to people attending a conference on death,” he explained, adding, “I know how to talk to the people at the next table. They are here for a conference on window curtains.” Then he went on to tell us that a close family member had died a few months earlier, and he shared a bit of what his journey of grief had been like.

This incident reflects two reasons for writing this book. First, grief is all around us—a thread that connects all of humanity. It is only a matter of time before everyone in ministry will be called to respond to another in grief. Sometimes we may feel comfortable entering into this experience with others, and other times we may not. Like the restaurant manager, we may even feel tempted to bolt when the topic of death or grief comes up. And this is the second reason for this book. I believe that pastoral grief care is critical, challenging, and privileged work. People in grief are often

at their most vulnerable, and we must be able to engage with and respond to them in informed, sensitive, and compassionate ways. I hope this book, which bridges contemporary grief theory and ministerial practice, helps us do just that.

I wish to express my great gratitude to all who have supported and assisted me in the writing of this book. I am especially indebted to all who over many years have shared with me their stories of loss and grief. These stories have moved me deeply. Thanks to the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion in Crawfordsville, Indiana, for providing a generous writing fellowship. I am indebted to colleagues at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, particularly Francine Cardman, Christopher Frechette, S.J., Meg Guider, O.S.F., and John Stachniewicz. I am grateful to other friends and colleagues who have read and commented on some or all of the manuscript, particularly Elizabeth Keene, Chris Loughlin, O.P., Paula Norbert, and Kenneth Pargament. Merle Jordan of Boston University has been an extraordinary consultant and incarnates what I believe it means to be truly pastoral. Jennifer Grieco was a terrific research assistant. The book is stronger because of the thoughtful feedback and creative insights of students in my courses. I am deeply grateful for the support of my family and of good friends, especially Mary Hehir and Mer Zovko. Rolf Jacobson of Luther Seminary introduced me to the wonderful people at Fortress Press. Susan Johnson of Fortress Press has been a most creative and calming editor. And my deepest love and gratitude go to my husband, Allen Fairfax, for his faithful and patient support, good cheer, and loving kindness. Thank you.