

Board Member News

Editor's Note: This season of Thanksgiving gives us pause to reflect with gratitude for those among us who have made a difference, not only in our own lives but in the lives of those we serve. It is with thankful hearts that we recognize members of our MCDES community for their contributions to promote our organizational goals and objectives of networking, support, and education.

We are all connected, one to another. Thanks to Kay Johnson, who wraps up her two-year stint as Chair, handing her responsibilities off to a very capable, Florence Wright. Thank you, Kay, for your unflappable leadership, and also for your well-expressed tribute within these pages to Ed Holland, who faithfully served MCDES (2002-2020) in a multitude of roles. We are grateful for both your and Ed's dedication to MCDES and your friendship.

Thanks to Paul Johnson, past board member (1982-2017) for helping us formally recognize and bid farewell to Jan Bergman. It is no small item that initial MCDES board leadership often evolves from mentor and working relationships among those dedicated to the important work of death, dying and bereavement. Jan, thank you for your years of service with MCDES (209-2020) We will miss your smiling face and your comprehensive evaluation reports! You have made a difference!

Lastly, thanks to board member Allison Chant, for her tribute written about her dear friend and former board member (1990's-2013), Judy Young. Judy's legacy to MCDES and the death and dying community is far-reaching. We recognize with gratitude all the connections that brought these fine professionals together in service to the bereavement community. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well." Thank you.

Ed Holland

By Kay Johnson

Ed Holland has been an active, fully engaged and dedicated MCDES Board Member for approximately 20 years and is retiring from the board as of this December. Our paths crossed while doing hospice bereavement work and I have had the pleasure of serving on the board with him during two of my appointments. Ed is truly one-of-a-kind with immense expertise to offer, given his seasoned experience as a hospice chaplain, grief counselor and LMFT. A memory I will never forget occurred while we were both on staff for the "Families Growing Through Grief" weekend at Mount Olivet Retreat Center. I called Ed for assistance as I noticed a bat hanging from the ceiling corner and he matter-of-factly stated that he was busy reading the newspaper. Ed was "in his zone." I've learned more throughout the years what that means and fully respect that "zone."

Contributions to MCDES as an organization and Board Member are abundant: he attended one of the early organizational meetings of MCTC (now MCDES) in the late 1970's, has attended most of the MCTC/MCDES events offered since then and hosted a conference at Methodist Hospital. Ed served as MCDES liaison to Minnesota Network for Hospice and Palliative Care, on the MCDES Finance Committee, and as the assistant to the former MCDES Treasurer, Paul Johnson. Ed took on the critical role of coordinating the revisions of MCDES' Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws and has served as the purchaser and guardian of MCDES projectors. Ed has taken a lead role in recruiting and selecting conference speakers within the Conference Planning Committee under the mentorship of Ted Bowman and Ben Wolfe.

Our Board meetings won't be the same without his attention to detail, reviewing minutes and documents,

ability to assist us with staying on task, courage to challenge our ways of thinking, spirit in recognizing unpopular opinions/ideas, organizational ability through multi-tasking, his natural capacity to network and connect with people and organizations, his dry sense of humor, (I admit that I often didn't "get it" and he would kindly rephrase), and last but not least, in his own words, "I happily served as the MCDES Board cynic and curmudgeon (my most enjoyable role!)" Job well done, Ed!

We all (board and conference attendees) have benefitted from his endless dedication, skill, and passion. He has been a great teacher, leader, friend and board member. The board is grate-



Ed Holland

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ful for his gift of time, for being so reliable and for his tenacity! Ed, enjoy retirement and know you have made a difference.

With our deepest gratitude,
Kay Johnson, Chair and the
entire MCDES Board.

Thoughts About Ed From Former Board Members

“Only a few come along that are and remain steadily solid, friendly, value-driven, and wise about grief and bereavement care...and about friendship/colleagueship.” ~ Ted Bowman

“The time we spent serving together on the Board provided a variety of contexts in which our friendship could strengthen and grow. Congratulations on your many years of service to MCDES and thanks for allowing our mutual involvement with it to develop into one of the most valued friendships.”

~ Paul Johnson

“I want to personally thank Ed, for EVERYTHING he did over all his years on the MCDES board. His expertise, his passion for “doing the right thing,” his collegiality, and his cooperative nature to get things done. Ed will be GREATLY, GREATLY missed by MCDES. I also want to thank Ed for his friendship over the years, and once again, thank him for all he has done for MCDES!”

~ Ben Wolfe

Everybody can be great
because anybody can serve.

You don't have to have a
college degree to serve....You
only need a heart full of grace,
a soul generated by love.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Letter from Jan Bergman on Retiring From MCDES Board

Former MCDES Board Member Paul Johnson introduced me to the world of grief counseling when I was a hospice social worker at Hospice of the Lakes. In 2004 I transitioned to the role of hospice bereavement counselor under his tutelage. That same year Paul directed me to my first MCDES Conference. Wow! The speaker was amazing, the conference was well organized, Ben Wolfe offered us Lobster and Wine, and I was all in.

Over the next five years I was impressed by the consistent, high quality programming, the affordable pricing, and, something that has become unusual in recent years, lunch provided onsite. I found it reassuring to be a member of MCDES, getting to know and network with other professionals at Spring and Fall conferences. And I counted on *Coalition News* to provide a constant source of information relevant to my professional work in grief and loss.

In Dec 2009 I had the privilege of joining the MCDES Board. Early on I wrote a few articles for *Coalition News*, and regularly co-hosted our board meetings. I eventually found my sweet spot in compiling the results of conference evaluations, a labor-intensive job that I really enjoyed. You will not be surprised to hear that MCDES members and conference attendees have a lot to say! And the Board listens, drawing from the evaluations when considering selection of speakers and topics, and issues to be included in the newsletter. Over the past eighteen months, we have transitioned to having a committee compiling the evaluations. To that end, Eunie Alsaker, Diane Bauer, Kay Johnson/Florence Wright, along with Verla Johansson, will con-

tinue with that task.

A couple years ago, I had the opportunity to join the finance committee—not a natural fit for me, but a very good learning experience, nonetheless. We are well-

served by Treasurer Peter Thoreen, Tim Thorpe, and Edward Holland. In recent years, my favorite conference-related role has been to offer the reflective reading after the lighting of the Memory Candle. So many excellent poets and writers to draw from. I appreciated receiving your feedback about these as well.

Be Here Now: The world continues to change, and MCDES aims to change with it. COVID-19 has launched us into the virtual realm. On October 2, we launched our first virtual conference, with Dr. Kenneth Hardy. It went very well and was well received. Of course, the speaker was superb! We were grateful he introduced us to Tony, his excellent computer guru, who worked with Verla, Edward Holland, and the conference committee. Together they got MCDES set up and adapted to this new venue. All conference attendees were able to complete their first online evaluations, and for the most part it was easier for us to compile the data rather than doing so by hand. In any case, we will continue to look to you for feedback as we move forward.

On A Personal Note, since I've been involved with MCDES, my



Jan Bergman

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but damn, that hug felt good.” Carl’s willingness to trust me with his story made me cry. That’s another ritual we can still share; our tears.

I called a facility recently to make a memorial donation and was given this story. Ninety-two-year old Mary lived in senior housing. She had made a brand-new friend there, who, over the course of the next 14 years, became like “her twin, separated at birth.” They did everything together, singing, drinking coffee, sharing their family pictures and it seemed, even duplicating their life experiences. “If Mary hurt her leg, June would shortly follow and hurt her own leg.” Mary died a couple weeks ago. The staff watched June closely. They suspected she would miss Mary too much. June died, 11 days later, probably unable to live without her best friend beside her. Other similar stories have followed, spouses dying within days of one another, mostly in long-term care. We are losing our finest treasures; our elders, and it appears, the very oldest are sometimes leaving together.

I am collecting my own stories about Pat, who surprised me with a call from ICU the day before she died. Her voice, deep but determined, stays with me. It was her parting gift. My gift to her, (and to me!) was a final chance to say, “I love you so much.” There was a lone owl hooting by my window one night when I asked for a sign from her before I fell asleep. (She knew I loved owls!) And there’s been her ten-year-old grandson, Luca’s, startling gift of “goosies” running up and down his spine immediately after he asked his mother one day, “Why doesn’t Nana visit me?” Meaning-making in the face of loss; a comfort.

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spouse and I have watched our son finish high school, college, earn a graduate degree, take his first professional job and buy a house. Woo-hoo! Professionally I have transitioned back and forth between hospice social work and grief counseling, based on family needs, work opportunities, health issues, and most recently a six-month stint in Costa Rica, cut short by the advent of COVID-19, but what an experience! I’ll continue studying Spanish and will maintain my status among the ungainfully employed as a Casual Hospice Grief Counselor (in this age of furloughs).

I will finish out my 11th year on the MCDES Board this December, but I plan to maintain my MCDES membership indefinitely.

To MCDES Board Members (past and present), and to MCDES Members and conference attendees, it has been a great privilege and pleasure to work with you all over the years! What an amazing group of people you are, and what remarkable work you do!

Thank You for your many contributions to this organization, to the community, and to me.

Sincerely,
Jan Bergman, MSSW, LISW

Jan Bergman

By Paul Johnson

I first met Jan Bergman in 2002 when I took the position of Director of Bereavement Services with HealthPartners Hospice of the Lakes. She was one of the hospice social workers in our program. I got to know her through our interdisciplinary team meetings and witnessed the thoroughness with which she served families

during this very difficult time in their lives.

In 2004 there was a vacancy on our bereavement team, and I was very excited when Jan was selected to fill that vacancy. She became a bereavement counselor and worked very closely with me in serving our hospice families. Working together on a daily basis, I was able to see all of the personal skills Jan brought to that position. I was also pleased that she was excited about becoming a member of MCDES.

After participating in a number of MCDES conferences and interacting with other participants, it was readily apparent that Jan’s skills could also be utilized by the MCDES Board. She was appointed to fill a vacancy in 2009 and has been an active board member ever since.

As a Board colleague I was especially appreciative of Jan’s willingness to take on the responsibility of tabulating the evaluations completed by attendees at the conclusion of each of our conferences. The tedious nature of that work was not a deterrent for Jan, as she always produced a comprehensive report that the Board used to improve future conferences.

Jan also took on the responsibility of hosting our quarterly board meetings at the Allina facility where she worked. Besides providing a centrally-located and comfortable facility for our meetings, she always arranged for tasty and economical refreshments.

As Jan retires from the Board, she can look back proudly on several years of valued contributions to MCDES. It was my honor to introduce her to MCDES, but my greatest satisfaction came from having her join the Board and watching her use her skills in making it an even better organization.