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## 7 DEATH CEREMONIES

*I heartily agree with funeral directors that ceremonies at a time of death are important in meeting the social and emotional needs of survivors. This chapter presents the viewpoint, however, that effective and appropriate ceremonies are possible with very little expense. And that conversely, elaborate and expensive ceremonies may distract attention from the meaning and value of the life of the one who has died.*

*The chapter includes detailed instruction on many aspects of death ceremonies, particularly encouraging participation of family and friends in whatever type of service is chosen. Appendix 7, "Sample Death Ceremonies," includes sample ceremonies and readings which may be used.*

*Much of the work of preparing this chapter was done by Ann Baly, of the Bowling Green Memorial Society, who studied the subject over a period of years and corresponded with hundreds of clergy and lay people. Valuable ideas were derived also from Dr. LeRoy Bowman's *The American Funeral*, which remains an authoritative source after thirty-eight years, and from my own experience.*

Humankind, from earliest times, has practiced death ceremonies and procedures in great variety. The reason for these ceremonies is not hard to understand. Such procedures are important to the healing process. No human being lives in a social vacuum; our speech, habits, values — the very meaning of life — derive from our association with one another. Hence the death of one individual is traumatic for the survivors. Recognizing that death ceremonies and related customs are important in meeting the social and emotional needs of survivors, we should plan these ceremonies carefully.

In recent years there has been a worldwide move towards deritualized funerals (and other ceremonies, too). Our purpose in this section of the *Manual* is not to weaken or eliminate ritual but to help create more meaningful rituals.

*A State Funeral.* On the death of a prominent person with whom many people had a meaningful emotional relationship, there is need for a ceremonial in which large numbers of people can take part.

An outstanding case in which these needs were sensitively met was the funeral of President John F. Kennedy. The casket was not opened for public viewing. There were no truckloads of flowers in the funeral procession. Since the entire nation felt a close connection with President Kennedy, an impressive ceremony, widely televised, in which the whole nation could participate, was in good taste and filled an important need.

### *Three Types of Death Ceremonies*

A *funeral service* is, by definition, a service held in the presence of the body, with either an open or closed casket. A *memorial service* is by definition a service held after the body has been removed. It can be either a substitute for a funeral service or in addition to it. A *commitment*, or *committal service* is a brief, optional service held at the graveside or in the chapel of a crematory. It is usually in addition to a funeral or memorial service and is the occasion at which the immediate family and possibly a few close friends bid good-bye to the body.

Ministers and funeral directors are trained in conducting funeral and committal services, but not all have had experience with memorial services. Most of this chapter, therefore, is devoted to memorial services.

### *Funeral and Committal Services*

First, however, I want to offer a few comments on funeral and committal services. These have greater possibilities for variety and for survivor participation than are usually realized. They may be programmed closely or may provide for spontaneous participation.

Many years ago a young priest in Hays, Kansas, read the *Manual* and liked the idea of participation by funeral attenders. He designed a model funeral service which was performed at a national meeting of the Catholic Art Association in which I took part. The service proved to be a skillful blending of Catholic ritual with Quaker sharing of testimony. I recall also an excellent Quaker funeral with a closed casket, at which the funeral director presided and the attenders, including the husband of the woman who had died, did the speaking as they felt moved.

At a funeral, the choice of pallbearers should favor members of the family who may wish to take part. Instead of civic leaders and business associates, the family should have the first chance — including women and teenagers. I have known women who felt deeply deprived because

they were excluded from this privilege. The less husky pallbearers should be distributed so that they don't have to lift too much. Indeed, if the box is too heavy, it suggests that the family may have been extravagant in choosing it. Remember also to be careful not to call upon persons with serious heart or back problems. There are more such than we commonly realize.

At a committal service, too, there can be family participation. At my wife's interment I recited one of her favorite poems and helped lower the box into the ground. Family members may be encouraged to start filling in the grave. Such things are emotionally helpful to the survivors.

An important decision to be made in planning a funeral service is the choice between an open or closed casket. It is the overwhelming preference of clergymen — Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish — that the casket be closed. In many cases the viewing of the remains is confined to family members and takes place before the funeral. When family members have been with the body at death or soon after, no later viewing is necessary.

A good "memory image," as funeral directors call it, may be created without viewing the body. Personal reminiscences of the living person can usually generate a better image than viewing the "restored" body.

There are, however, times when cosmetic restoration can be helpful, as when relatives from far away wish to see the body. This does not necessarily require a public viewing. Sensitivity to the wishes of the family should be the key to decisions in this matter.

If a service is held with the casket present, it may be covered with a gray cloth (or pall) as is done, for instance, in Episcopal churches. Thus a solid bronze casket carries no more prestige than a plywood box. This symbolizes the belief that we are all equal in death and helps focus on the spiritual significance of the occasion.

### *Memorial Services*

A memorial service performs much the same function as a funeral service, but tends to have a more positive atmosphere. This is mainly because it is focused on the values of the person who has died instead of on the dead body.

Members of the family should be encouraged — but never pressured — to speak or to offer songs or prayers as they may choose. The following experience is an example of how helpful a memorial service can be, with appropriate family participation.

A friend of mine lost a grown daughter in an automobile accident.

He loved her dearly, but there had been some stress between them, and this made her death doubly hard for him. I went to see him and his wife. It happened that I, too, had lost a daughter some time before in a similar accident.

The family were not members of the Society of Friends, but I offered to arrange a memorial service in the Friends Meeting House and suggested that the father might like to speak at such a meeting. They accepted the offer, but he wasn't sure he would be able to speak. However, he called me shortly afterward and said he did indeed want to speak and wanted me to preside.

At the service, the meeting room was decorated with wildflowers and on the mantle was a painting done by the young woman. Her former music teacher played a piece she had especially liked. Then I spoke, saying that we had gathered in the girl's memory and that any who felt moved to speak should feel free to do so. Then the father got up. In his hand was a bunch of little cards, each with a reminder of some incident from his daughter's life, starting from early childhood. He spoke with difficulty at first, but soon became more fluent. As he continued to relate happy memories, a faraway look came into his eyes and he began to smile, and the assembled friends smiled with him.

His wife thought he was speaking too long and tried to catch his eye, but their son, seated next to her, said "Let him talk." And he did, for quite a while. When he sat down there was a period of silence, then their friends spoke in turn, spontaneously, words of comfort and philosophy and reminiscence. When the speaking ran its course and the service was over, it was dark outside. We carried a few chairs into the yard and set candles on them. Friends moved freely inside and outside, visiting with the family and each other. That meeting was, as any good funeral or memorial service should be, the point at which the family could begin to resume normal life and look to the future. They expressed the warmest appreciation.

There was an interesting sequel when a few weeks later the father had occasion to attend the funeral of a business colleague. It was a strictly conventional service at which the minister delivered a cut-and-dried oration — and that was it. My friend was struck by the contrast between the services and was angry at the impersonal and empty character of his friend's funeral.

### *Self-Planned Services*

Some people like to plan their own services. These may be regular funeral services for which the person has selected the readings and music and perhaps the persons to do the readings. Some have planned that their family and friends shall simply come together for a social

evening in their memory, with refreshments and fellowship, and perhaps entertainment arranged by the one who has died. Some people make recordings of readings or music to be played at their funeral or memorial services.

### *Multiple Services*

It is often desirable to hold more than one gathering in cases where different groups or distant places are involved. On the occasion of my wife's death, one gathering was held in North Carolina and another in Ohio, and I spoke at both.

Sometimes friends or colleagues in a remote place hold a memorial service independently. This should be fully reported to the family, who will take comfort from it.

### *No Service at All*

Is it ever appropriate to have no funeral or memorial service at all? Yes, under some circumstances this is entirely appropriate. For instance, if the person wanted it that way, the family may properly comply with that wish.

Recently, a young man was killed in an accident two thousand miles from his parents' home. It had been years since he lived with his parents. His work kept him moving from place to place and he had lost contact with his boyhood friends. His parents quite properly decided not to hold a formal service. Friends of the family called at their home to express their love and sympathy.

While death ceremonies do in most cases meet an important need, the decision not to hold a service in a particular situation may be entirely appropriate.

### *Combination Programs*

A mixture of programming and spontaneous contributions is often a good arrangement. Commonly the program starts with music while people are gathering. If family members or friends are musicians, it is appropriate for them to play. Personal participation is more important than the technical excellence of recorded music. The latter can be used if no musicians are available.

After the opening music an appropriate reading is in order, either poetry or prose. Best of all is some bit of inspirational writing by the person who has died, if this is available. A few suitable selections are offered in Appendix 7, "Sample Death Ceremonies."

Following the reading a brief talk may be given relating to the person who has died. This can be followed by more music and another reading. Attenders can then be invited to share their thoughts, feelings and memories. When this seems to have run its course, there can be more music followed, if desired, by a prayer and/or a period of silence. Attenders should be invited to remain afterwards to visit.

#### *Ceremonies on the Death of the Very Young*

The tragic death of a young child presents special problems because of the greater guilt and anger often mingled with the family's grief. If the memorial service is handled wisely the love the parents had for the child often can be channeled into greater affection for one another and for their surviving children. A minister conducting a service can develop this concept, or an attender, if the meeting allows for participation.

The death ceremony for a baby will naturally be less extensive than for an adult or older child, though it should provide an opportunity for friends to give emotional support. It is important to have a ceremony, if only a modest one.

In the case of a stillborn infant, it is well for the family to have a simple ceremony of their own, giving the child a name, recognizing it as a member of the family and honoring its birth and death. Miscarriages and abortions also involve grief, and an informal ceremony can be very helpful. See Chapter 3, "Bereavement," for additional suggestions.

#### *How to Plan a Service*

Ideally the family should sit down together, along with their clergyman if they have one, and talk it over. Ann Baty describes this well: "You reminisce, you recall things he said, things he wrote, his ideals, his goals, his plans, his affections — even the annoying things he did. You look over old snapshots. You talk about him and you think about him. From these reflections you begin to plan your ceremony of remembrance." This is a wholesome process that can do much to begin emotional healing.

**Time.** The time usually preferred for a memorial service is the same as for a funeral service — two or three days after the death. Evenings and weekends are preferable so that more people can attend. The timing may be modified to meet individual situations, as, for instance, if some member of the family is in the hospital or too far away to come until later. Additional ceremonies at a later date may be appropriate. After

my father's death there were two memorial gatherings, followed seven months later by a two day convocation in his memory attended by family and colleagues from far and wide.

**Place.** The place of meeting, too, depends on circumstances and should accommodate the expected attendance. To assemble a handful of people in a large hall or sanctuary is forlorn. To turn people away for lack of space is even worse. A familiar place is good. It may be a church or a living room — or even outdoors.

#### *The Format of a Memorial Service*

Here are a few basic components with which a memorial service may be planned and procedures to be considered. A service may be designed to use these components in any way the family prefers. Most religious groups have specific worship ceremonies for death, and a clergyman of that faith can assist in preparing and carrying out the plans.

Forms and liturgies may be adapted to include many of the following elements and will in turn suggest other forms and content. Most forms of ritual permit greater flexibility than is generally used. Don't be afraid to express your wishes and explore possibilities.

**Instrumental Music.** While people are gathering, it is often good to have some muted organ music, if in a church, or quiet recorded music elsewhere. Or the attenders can gather in silence and have the service begin with music. Music by family and friends is best of all.

I recall a memorial service in my own family, held in a yard beneath the trees, in which by prearrangement the sound of musical chimes from a nearby church (of a different denomination) came through the trees beautifully at just the right time. Music can be interspersed in the program, too, if desired, or used to close it.

**Singing.** This is a very desirable form of music for a service, since it allows for participation by family and friends. Unless the song or songs are well known to the attenders, it is good to have song sheets or hymn books available. If printed or duplicated programs are used, words of the songs may be included. Solo or ensemble singing can have a place, especially if done by friends or members of the family. Always encourage family participation.

**The Presiding Function.** One individual, generally a minister or a friend of the family, customarily presides, stating the purpose of the gathering and setting the program in motion. This person may or may not also contribute remarks, readings and prayers. If attenders are

invited to take part the presiding person will explain when and how this is to be done. The presiding person also signals the end of the service.

**Prayers.** For many families, depending on their practice and belief, this is an important part of the service. Prayers may be offered by the minister or other presiding person or by any family member or friend.

**Biographical Remarks.** It is often appropriate to give a biographical account of the person's life at the outset of the service. This adds interest and meaning to the service and provides an opportunity for family participation.

**Reminiscences.** Whether programmed or unprogrammed, these add greatly to the service and help to convey in depth some feeling of the person's life and values. Family members especially should be encouraged to offer their thoughts and remembrings.

Sometimes certain family members and friends are asked specifically to contribute their recollections, and these are scheduled in sequence to be the main part of the program. I recall a fine memorial service in which a series of speakers had the same topic: "I remember Charlotte."

Don't avoid humorous reminiscences or incidents that may have involved some frustration. If presented in good taste, these carry overtones of affection and a fuller picture of the person's life and personality.

**Visual Materials.** The use of films, slides or pictures is sometimes appropriate, if such material is available. A family member, preferably, should do the narrating. A small display of photographs from the life of the person is always appropriate. Sometimes the family likes to have articles present that remind them of the person who has died and that add a touch of intimacy or color. This may take the form of craft or art work, a favorite toy in the case of a child, or something connected with an adult's hobby or profession.

**Silence.** Though most commonly associated with Quakers, this practice is observed in many groups, with a period of silence included as part of the service.

**Readings.** There is a wealth of beautiful and inspiring poetry, prose and scripture to draw upon. The Bible is a rich source. Likewise the writings of Kahlil Gibran, Rabindranath Tagore and others. These readings can be programmed or, in the case of unprogrammed services, they can be offered by attenders. It is very appropriate to include writings of the person who has died, if available. A few selected readings and sources are listed in Appendix 7, "Sample Death Ceremonies."

**Unprogrammed Contributions.** These may constitute the entire service, following the opening music, perhaps a biographical sketch, and introductory remarks in which the attenders are invited to speak. Or they may be called for later in the service, or omitted entirely. It is well for the presiding person to suggest that at least a short period of silence be allowed between speakings.

Care should be taken that time for unprogrammed contributions not be cut short. I have known family members who carried regrets for years that they were cut off from speaking because the service was "running too long."

A word of caution: If the attenders are unfamiliar with the practice of unprogrammed speaking, it may be well to have a few people prepared in advance to begin the speaking.

**Visiting After the Service.** It is often desirable for attenders to have an opportunity to visit informally after the service, if facilities allow for this.

**Refreshments.** The serving of refreshments during the visiting is a pleasant practice that facilitates conversation. Some may wish to serve a meal after the funeral or memorial service. The custom of the funeral feast is well known. In theory this is supplied by the family of the deceased, but in common practice, it is thoughtful friends and neighbors who supply the food and do the work.

### *Flexibility*

Established procedures are often useful, but they need not be binding. One memorial service was held with everyone seated in a circle. At the close of the service they all stood and joined hands to sing a final song together. Another service (for a golfer) was held as a walking party across a golf course, winding up at the club house for refreshments. Another took the form of a reception at the home of the family whose member had died.

### *Printed Programs*

Programs are not necessary, but sometimes are nice to have. If a service is largely unprogrammed, there is no need for a printed program. If it is highly programmed and especially if it involves group singing, then a program, including the words of songs, can be helpful. This will depend partly on the availability of duplicating equipment. If the service is held in a church, the church may have printed program blanks which can be used. A longer program, perhaps with the full text

of the ceremony, also can be used as a death announcement to mail to those who could not attend. This may include a biographical sketch and some personal tributes.

### Remember

Grief has many dimensions, which are experienced by different people in different ways. Likewise death ceremonies take many forms. As Ann Bay says, do not be coerced into passive acceptance of a conventional pattern; do not be afraid to be creative. Remember that death is a natural event and an occasion for the honest expression of your deepest values.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY/CHAPTER 7 (See also Appendices I and 7)

*Bittersweet . . . hello goodbye*, Sister Jane Marie Lamb, OP, Belleville, IL: SHARE National Office, 1988. An extensive resource in planning farewell rituals when a baby dies.

*Bridging the Bereavement Gap: A Manual for the Preparation and Programming of Hospice Bereavement Services*, Donna O'Toole. Bunnsville, NC 28714: Rainbow Connection, 1985.

*Final Celebrations*, K. Sublette and M. Flagg. Ventura, CA: Pathfinder Publishing, 1992. A guide to assist individuals and families plan and personalize funeral and memorial ceremonies as a celebration of life.

*Reminiscing Together*, H. Thorshheim & B. Roberts. An instructive book of exercises and activities to strengthen memories. Written especially for those growing older, this book is rich in ideas on how people of all ages can access the past. Techniques are taught on how the senses can be used to stimulate memory — through photographs and pictures, songs and sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. Ideas throughout on the use of stories to bridge generations and build continuity and community with others.

*Rituals for Living and Dying*, David Feinstein and Peg Elliot Mayo. Harper Collins, CA, 1992. The authors explain the importance and role of ritual in life and death and offer well-crafted step-by-step structured activities and wise insights to help readers confronting the grief of illness or loss to fashion rituals and rites of passage that nurture relationships, ease transitions and feed the spirit. An insightful book for individuals and families facing loss and for those working with them.

## 8 HOW THE DEAD CAN HELP THE LIVING

*This chapter is essentially a tract — an urgent appeal for human solidarity, to persuade people to think in terms of life and to share with the living any organs or tissues which, at the time of death, they or their loved ones no longer need. To bury or burn organs or tissues needed by the living is a form of blasphemy against life. Let us not be guilty of it. As for myself, I'm leaving my entire body for medical education.*

*This chapter sets forth the options and the procedures for various types of donations. Directories of medical schools and eye banks, addresses of helpful organizations, and information on transplantation of specific organs will be found in Appendix 8, "Anatomical Gifts."*

Poet Robert Test states the issue beautifully:

The day will come when my body will lie upon a white sheet tucked neatly under the four corners of a mattress, located in a hospital busily occupied with the living and the dying. At a certain moment a doctor will determine that my brain has ceased to function and that, for all intents and purposes, my life has stopped.

When that happens, do not attempt to instill artificial life into my body by the use of a machine and don't call this my deathbed. Let it be called the Bed of Life, and let my body be taken from it to help others lead fuller lives.

Give my sight to the man who has never seen a sunrise, a baby's face or love in the eyes of a woman. Give my heart to the person whose own heart has caused nothing but endless days of pain. Give my blood to the teenager who was pulled from the wreckage of his car, so that he may live to see his grandchildren play. Give my kidneys to a person who depends upon a machine to exist from week to week. Take my bones, every muscle, every fiber and nerve in my body and find a way to make a crippled child walk. Explore every corner of my brain. Take my cells, if necessary, and let them grow so that, someday, a speechless boy will shout at the

- TEXAS:** *Austin:* Austin Mem. & Burial Information Soc., Box 4382 78765-4382 (512) 477-5238  
*Dallas:* Mem. Soc. of North Texas, 4015 Normandy 75205 (215) 528-6006  
*Denton:* Memorial Society of North Texas, 4015 Normandy, Dallas 75205 (800) 371-2221 (for use in Dallas/Ft. Worth area only)  
*El Paso:* Mem. Soc. of El Paso, Box 4951 79914-4951 (505) 824-4565  
*Fort Worth:* Memorial Society of North Texas, 1959 Sandy Lane 76112 (800) 371-2221 (for use in Dallas-Ft. Worth area only)  
*Houston:* Houston Area Memorial Society, 5200 Fannin St. 77004-5899 (713) 526-4267  
*Lubbock:* Lubbock Area Mem. Soc., Box 6562 79413-6562 (214) 528-6006  
*San Antonio:* San Antonio Memorial Society, 7150 Interstate 10 West 78213 (210) 341-2213  
*Wichita Falls:* Memorial Society of North Texas, 4015 Normandy, Dallas 75205 (800) 371-2221 (for use in Dallas/Ft. Worth area only)
- UTAH:** *Salt Lake City:* Utah Mem. Assn., 307 M St. 84103 (801) 581-6608
- VERMONT:** *Burlington:* Vermont Mem. Soc., Bx 67 05401-0067 (802) 862-7474
- VIRGINIA:** *Alexandria:* Mt. Vernon Mem. Soc., 1909 Windmill Lane 22307 (703) 765-5950
- Arlington:* Mem. Soc. of Northern Va., 4444 Arlington Blvd. 22204 (703) 271-9240  
*Charlottesville:* Memorial Planning Society of the Piedmont, 717 Rugby Rd. 22903 (804) 293-8179  
*Richmond:* Memorial Society of Gr. Richmond, P.O. Box 29315 23229-9315 (804) 285-9157  
*Virginia Beach:* Memorial Society of Tidewater, Box 4621 23454-4621 (804) 481-2991
- WASHINGTON:** *Seattle:* People's Memorial Association, 2366 Eastlake Ave. E. 98102 (206) 325-0489  
*Spokane:* Spokane Mem. Assn., Box 13613 99213-13613 (509) 924-8400  
*Yakima:* Mem. Soc. of Central Wash., POB 379 98907-0379 (509) 452-1712
- WEST VIRGINIA:** (Northeast West Virginia served by Maryland Memorial Society)
- WISCONSIN:** *Egg Harbor:* Mem. Soc. of Door County, 6900 Lost Lake Road 54209 (414) 868-3136  
*Madison:* Mem. Soc. of Madison, 5235 Harbor Ct. 53705 (608) 255-8333  
*Milwaukee:* Fun. & Mem. Soc. of Greater Milwaukee, 13001 W. North Ave., Brookfield 53005 (414) 782-5335  
*Racine:* Mem. Soc. of SE Wisconsin, 6900 Lost Lake Road, Egg Harbor 54209-9231 (414) 552-8540

## APPENDIX 7 / Sample Death Ceremonies

*Editor's Note: Most religious traditions include death services. The ceremonies in this appendix supplement these traditional services.*

### Memorial Services

On the following pages are several memorial services, each of which has been selected for some feature that seemed especially interesting. They have been compiled by Ann Baby of the Bowling Green, Ohio Memorial Society. Each of the first seven was written for a particular person who had died. Of the others, one is a general type of service that can be used for anyone. It is followed by two committal services — one for burial and one for cremation. The children's "Good-bye Service" is not intended for a formal service but is meant to be used to help a child or children to cope with a grievous loss.

### 1. Service with Flower Communion

The memorial service for Esme Harold Naaman was prepared by a friend. Esme's death had ended several months of loving care given by friends who made it possible for him to die at home.

An order of service was mimeographed and folded into a booklet of ten pages plus cover. It contained the full text of all the selections that were used. It was mailed to friends and family who could not attend and served, for some, as a notice of Esme's death. The cover had his name and the dates of his birth and death with a paragraph about the kind of person he was.

After an interval of music by Bach and Brahms, as people gathered, the service began with these words: "We are a group of friends gathered together to pay loving tribute to Esme Naaman and to share with his family and each other our appreciation of a rare and remarkable human being."

Words written about him by a friend or two were read, as were a couple of letters that he had received (from brother and son) and which contained revealing sentiments. There were other readings: from *Voice of the Desert* by Joseph Wood Krutch, from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran and from Kenneth L. Patton. There were intervals of music (Sibelius, Croft, Mozart, Bach) and a



short eulogy. A statement of the kind of person Esme had been was read by the minister.

Finally a friend said, "We invite you to take a blossom in our diverse remembrances of Esme." To the accompaniment of Bach's "Vater Unser in Himmelfahrt," four friends passed shallow baskets of chrysanthemum blossoms in yellow, bronze and white as a flower communion; after that was a recitation of The Lord's Prayer and then a recessional by Bach.

The service was held in a Unitarian Church but was conducted by lay friends, rather than by the minister. The selections written by Kenneth L. Patton were *The Measure of Sorrow* and *Our Own Good-Byes*.

## II. Service Using Writings of the Deceased

Marcos Romero was a very creative young man from South America. While attending college in the United States, he was killed in a motorcycle accident. His friends put together this memorial service, using Marcos' own writings. The short service was held in a room in one of the college halls, and it was conducted entirely by students, his friends.

A program was printed and titled "Remembering Marcos Romero, A service of Readings and Reflections." Date and place of the service also were printed on the cover.

The service began with a reading by a friend, followed by this litany:

LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
Support one another's efforts  
LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
Rejoice in another's fulfillment  
LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
Support each other through difficult times  
LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
Rejoice together in times of rejoicing  
LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Friends read from Marcos' writings, then sang a song written for Marcos by a friend. "Morning Has Broken" was sung by the group (the words were printed on the program).

There was a benediction from Marcos' writings "Life is a matter of doing whatever has to be done with as much love as possible. By love, I mean concentration and dedication of one's life. I find that it is not so important to plan for the future, but to love everything we do and to let go and flow as a river flows."

The service ended with the reading of a poem written by Marcos Romero, titled "Good-bye: Dedicated to All Those Friends of Mine Who Listen."

## III. Service with Organ Music

This service was arranged by friends of the deceased and was conducted by them. Harold Thomas Marlow had cared for his mother for many years until

she died; he never married. After his mother died, he spent his time and energy working for his church; he left everything he had to the church.

The church had an organ and an organist, and most of the music was played by the organist. The service:

Prelude Trumpet Tune in C and Trumpet Tune in D  
— Purcell

Opening Words "Reasons for a Funeral or Memorial Service"  
— Rev. Roy Phillips

We do best in our present and later lives if, when one we love dies, we bring together those whose lives were touched significantly by the life of the one who has died. This is the reason for a funeral or a memorial service.

While such services have been understood in many varying ways, their human function is to set an experiential marker at the endpoint of life, to place a cairn at the conclusion of one human being's journey.

The cairns along a wilderness trail are built of earth rocks of various shapes and sizes. The memorial cairn at the end of a life is also a composite, but an experiential one. It is made up of the memories, the thoughts and the feelings of all who are gathered in the one place together. It is a recollection (a re-collection) of what was for a time together and is now scattered and scattering. Here is the one we knew. This is how our lives were touched by that life. Here is what we think and how we feel.

The words spoken in the literal funeral or memorial service are not themselves the marker. The spoken words are evokers of experiences — thoughts, feelings, memories — within the people of the gathered group. These experiences are the memorial cairn.

At the end of a life, we compose a symphony an ordered creation whose notes and themes are the experiences of the people gathered. Themes dark and bright are sounded to recollect and to order the impact of the life of the one who had died — honestly, fully, tenderly — and in the spirit of thanksgiving for the quality of that lived life.

The words of a memorial service should strive to evoke remembrance, thanksgiving, a sense of the uniqueness of the person's life, a sense of the privilege of having known that person, a sense of loss, of sadness, a feeling of emptiness, of unsureness and a hint that the ending of this life is a rehearsal of what is to come for every one of us. The words should evoke a sense of trust in the slow, but steady, grace of healing and the affirmation that we can live on and will live on, blessed by that life and by the memory of the one who once was and is now gone, but who is and will be present in the world, and in us in mysterious and hidden ways.

Harold Thomas Marlow, scholar, churchman, friend, has died. We are gathered here to pay honor to his spirit and to the life he lived, and to consecrate his memory. The readings and music speak of him; reflect his spirit in life; reflect our feeling for him, and our feeling at this time.

Introit "Well-Tempered Clavichord"  
— Bach



**Readings** "A Celebration for George Sarton" (final stanza)— *May Sarton*

"On Death"

— *Kahlil Gibran***Solo** "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring"— *Bach***Invitation to Thought**

(Words about Tom spoken by the minister, and ending with a short meditation)

Do you seek Tom Marlow? Why seek ye the living among the dead? All tombs are empty, signposts toward the silent mystery that is our origin and destiny. Seek the living among the living. Seek Tom in yourselves, in the patterns of your mind and memory, in the shape of the world made a little different by him, in the very rhythm of your heart of hearts. Amen.

**Solo** "Pathétique Sonata Andante Cantabile"— *Beethoven***Eulogy** (read by a boyhood friend)**Solo** "Für Elise"— *Beethoven***Reading** "There Are Men Too Gentle to Live Among Wolves"— *James Kavanaugh***Music** "Suite in C"— *Bach***Closing Words**

We, the living, have come together to ponder the death of one known to us, loved by us. We have come with sorrow that a good life should have to end. We have come with deep memories of our times with him, of joy and sorrow we shared with him, of the delightful and even the impatient moments we knew when he was with us. Here was a man, a man with hopes and dreams; a man with secret fears and unanswered questions; but a man with a zest for life and the strength to weather the storms which each of us must face. We, the living, give thanks that we have known Tom. We give thanks that he walked among us. We give thanks that he lived. Amen.

**Postlude** "St. Anthony Chorale"— *Haydn-Brahms***Sources**

The readings suggested in this service can be found in the following sources: *May Sarton, Collected Poems: 1930-1973*, Norton, 1974; *Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet*, Alfred A. Knopf; James Kavanaugh, *There Are Men too Gentle to Live Among Wolves*, Dutton, 1970.

\*Our apologies to the four-legged wolves. They are not the ones referred to in this poem. As Farley Mowatt says, "Never Cry Wolf" unless you specify which kind.

**IV Service Held for a Teen-Aged Girl**

Mary, sixteen, was killed while on vacation with her family. Her body was cremated with a private committal service.

When the family returned to their home, a memorial service was held in the United Methodist Church to which they belonged. Significant objects relating to Mary, things she prized, graced the chancel area.

Music significant to the family, including "Bridge Over Troubled Water," was played.

The pastor spoke sentences of hope and comfort from the Scriptures, and he read the Twenty-Third Psalm. He prayed, and the congregation prayed The Lord's Prayer in unison. They sang "Precious Lord."

The youth minister read portions of the eighth chapter of Romans and preached on the text, "The Spirit Himself Intercedes for Us with Sighs Too Deep for Words."

A friend sang "One Day at a Time."

Those present were invited to share their thoughts about Mary with one another as the spirit moved them. (Mary's high school English teacher read from Mary's writings. One of her brothers read a poem she had written. Her father and mother, referring to the objects in the room and recent conversations with Mary, expressed their grief and hope and their need for the community of love.)

The congregation sang "Joy Is Like the Rain."

They were invited to come forward and stand with family for Holy communion. The minister took the bread and a cup, gave thanks, broke the bread — a loaf baked by a friend — and gave the bread and the cup to the people, who served one another hand to hand.

They sang "Amazing Grace," received the benediction, and sang "Shalom" — the congregation's customary closing song. The people spontaneously shared their love with the family, and then gradually dispersed.

— from *Abingdon Funeral Manual* by Perry H. Biddle, Jr.  
Quoted with permission, Abingdon Press, Nashville TN

**V A Memorial Walk**

A "Memorial Walk" was held for Steve Persons on a Sunday afternoon at the small golf course in the Mobile Home Park where he had been living. Steve had been an avid golfer for many years and many friends knew him best in the golf setting.

Steve's friends gathered at the designated entrance to a path that followed the edge of the greens toward the Mobile Home Park club house just two short blocks away. The family arrived and led the group along the path to a midpoint bordering the golf course, where a large oak tree spread its branches. Here they stopped. Some sat on a bench beneath the tree as the friends grouped themselves around the family. While those in attendance absorbed the beauty of the golf course where Steve had spent so many happy hours, his nephew spoke some words of greeting, then gave a biographical sketch of Steve's life. Two of Steve's favorite songs were played on a cassette tape recorder, after which a

friend spoke briefly and respectfully about Steve's interests and accomplishments in the world of music. The family then led the walk to the club house entrance where they turned and greeted their friends who passed through the door into the building.

Inside, the group found seats in the informal lounge. Simple refreshments were served while favorite classical piano selections were played. People were able to relax comfortably to talk to each other and the family, and especially to talk with relatives from afar whom they had not seen for a long time.

This memorial service, though quite simple, was very comforting and filled with love. Real support and sympathy was shown to the family as they and their friends exchanged incidents, anecdotes and many remembrances about their beloved Steve throughout the rest of the afternoon.

### VI. An Unstructured Service Held in a Farmyard

This was a service held for Tom Blank. He had grown up on a farm near a small city. He had lived in the same community all of his life. After he died, his brother arranged for a memorial service held outdoors in the farmyard, just as Tom once, years before, had said he'd like it to be.

Chairs were carried out onto the lawn; a table of soft drinks was set up at one side. A rowboat that Tom had enjoyed using on the river in his playtime hours was filled with garden and field flowers; it also held a self-portrait Tom had painted.

There were some prepared readings, but guests were invited to, and did, speak as the spirit moved them to do so about their love for Tom.

### VII. A Quaker Service

A man describes the unplanned service for his wife as "The most beautiful and meaningful memorial service I ever attended."

She had become a very active and devoted Friend (Quaker) after having been a Catholic for more than sixty years. She died very early on a Saturday morning. A friend of hers went all over the campus (where they taught) and spread the word to all her friends, asking them to attend the regular Sunday morning service of the Friends Meeting—even if they were not Quakers. And they did. "In the traditional Quaker manner," the gentleman writes, "all sat around in a circle with only a rug and a large candle in the center, and a number of those who knew her spoke feelingly of what she had meant to them, and what she had done for other people. There were no rehearsed speeches, no eulogy by someone who had to be briefed. The testimonies were given from firsthand experience and from the heart . . . and at the end, all joined hands with their neighbors, in accordance with their custom."

### VIII. Love Memorial for Our Son (as described by his mother)

Scott had been a skydiver for ten years, with over 2,000 jumps and twenty-four hours of freefall. His skydiving had taken him all over the United

States and Europe. He had always assured me, when I worried, that he was safer in the air than driving on the highway.

We were totally unprepared, therefore, for the news of his death 1,000 miles away from home. We didn't know what to do. We were aware of the local Memorial Society; we weren't members, but we knew people who were. We called them and got the telephone number of the Memorial Society in Tampa, where Scott had been killed. We called there, and they put us in touch with a funeral home. Scott's body was cremated. Everyone was most helpful and thoughtful. The ashes were brought back with Scott's belongings and his car.

We wanted to have a very special and beautiful memorial service for our son; he was a very special and beautiful person. We also wanted his ten-year-old daughter to have something beautiful to remember. At first we weren't sure just how to go ahead, suddenly ideas began coming. I believe Scott must have been helping me; even the poem we used for a memorial card was the first one I looked at.

All our family and friends helped. There was no time to get printing done, nor to order special paper. Our daughter made up a sample memorial card, and we had quick-print copies made on stationery.

The urn, with ashes, was placed in a cut crystal bowl surrounded by red and white rose petals with a tall basket of red and white carnations on each side for the service in the Catholic church. From the church everyone went to the park on the river, where Scott had been best man at his brother's wedding some months before. A service was held there, while Scott's skydiving team flew over the river and scattered the ashes together with a bushel of rose petals. A red or white carnation was given to each of those gathered there to cast upon the water with their special love and a prayer for Scott. Sheri, Scott's daughter, cast a white rose bud.

Since there were a great many people from out of town, we asked everyone to come to our house for refreshments, which had been brought in and were served by our wonderful friends and neighbors. We all shared our memories of Scott; his skydiving awards were presented to us at that time.

### IX. Recognition of Death

(Adapted from *The Book of Celebration* by Duke T. Gray and from "A Humanist Funeral Service" by Corliss Lamont and distributed by the Memorial Society of London, Box 4595, London, Ontario N5W 5J5.)

This service may be used either for a funeral service, with the body present, or for a memorial service following burial or cremation. Either service may be done in a church or elsewhere. It is designed to include congregational participation if copies can be made available so that those gathered can take part. This is an important way of helping to evoke the grief and hope which must have its expression. Otherwise, the minister or someone else may simply read the unison or responsive parts.

Music (optional)

Responsive Reading

Reader: Oh, Death, where is your sting?  
Oh, Grave, where is your victory?

Unison: Peace be with us.  
Reader: We must all die, and are as water spilt on the ground,  
which cannot be gathered up again.

Unison: Peace be with us.

Reader: Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your  
arm: for love is strong as death.

Unison: Peace be with us.  
Reader: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be com-  
forted.

Unison: Peace be with us.

Reader: Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.  
Unison: Peace be with us.

Reader: I have set before you life and death, blessing and  
cursing: Therefore choose life, that both you and your  
descendants may live.

Unison: Peace be with us.  
Reader: And now abide faith, hope and love, these three; but the  
greatest of these is love.

#### The Welcome

Let us call to memory the dead yet ever-living who have passed  
the doors beyond which we cannot see. They dwell at peace in the  
halls of memory whose hallowed treasure it is ours to keep, from this  
day forward.

We have gathered in this place to do honor and praise to the  
life and memory of \_\_\_\_\_. We have gathered to offer thanksgiving  
and gratitude that one such as he/she has lived among us. We have  
gathered in celebration of death, and in so doing, in celebration of life  
— for life and death are one, even as the river flows to the sea.

*(A candle may be lighted)*

#### Opening Prayer (in unison)

Holy Spirit of Life, and of peace in death, lift our sorrows  
Beloved memory and fragile hope, heal the wounds of our mortal  
loss.

Indestructible remembrance, in whom the spirits of the departed do  
rest from their labors:

We bless you for the memory of those most dear to us, who have  
lived in joy and departed in peace.

May we follow the best in them, and, truly loving and serving the gifts  
they gave us,

Be gathered with them into the life abundant, against whose very  
richness  
The forces of death cannot prevail. Amen.

#### The Circle of Life

Reader: To everything there is a season

Unison: And a time to every purpose under heaven:

Reader: A time to be born, and a time to die;

Unison: A time to plant, and a time to harvest;

Reader: A time to kill, a time to heal;

Unison: A time to break, and a time to build;  
Reader: A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

Unison: A time to mourn, and a time to dance  
Reader: A time to cast away stones, and a time to bring stones  
together;

Unison: A time to embrace, and a time to be apart;  
Reader: A time to get, and a time to lose;

Unison: A time to keep silence, a time to speak;  
Reader: We should rejoice in our works, for that is our portion;  
Unison: Cast your bread upon the waters; for you  
shall find it after many days.

— Ecclesiastes

Music (if desired)

#### Readings

(Readings, an address or remarks, and/or eulogy or biographical  
sketch)

"In Memory of W.B. Yeats" (final stanza)

— W.H. Auden

"On Death" from *The Prophet*

— Kahlil Gibran

#### Closing Prayer

Now the work is left to us, the living, to carry forth the beauty  
and joy of that life which has been taken from us. Where we weep,  
he/she would have us laugh. Where we mourn, he/she would have us  
rejoice. But we know that he/she will forgive us our grief, for to grieve  
is to love, to love is to cherish, and to cherish is to give praise and  
thanksgiving for the life which has blessed us all. To that life we pray  
courage and strength, that our frailty be forgiven, our sorrows  
redeemed, the wounds of our loss healed, in the sure knowledge that  
life moves forward and does not tarry with yesterday and that the life  
before us beckons to greater glory as the only memorial that is fitting  
and just. Amen.

### X. Committal Services

**A Committal Service for Cremation:** Most crematories have an adjacent  
chapel or an anteroom in which people may gather for a brief ceremony of  
committal just before the cremation process begins:

In committing the body of \_\_\_\_\_ to the flames, we  
do so with deep reverence for that body as the temple, during life, of  
a unique and beloved personality. Through the purifying process of  
fire, this body now becomes transformed into the more simple and  
ultimate elements of our universe. Fire is, itself, one of the great  
forces of Nature.

"Fruit-Gathering" by Sir Rabindranath Tagore (See "Selected  
Readings," pages 139–140, 144.)

To the flame, then, we give finally the body of our friend with  
the full and certain knowledge that, in the words of Socrates, "No evil  
can befall a good man either in life or after death."

**Benediction**

Let us depart in peace, and look to the morning, assured that tomorrow the Sun will rise again.  
Life gives, and Life takes away; blessed be life, above all, forever. Amen.

**Alternative Benediction**

Now, for us, the living,  
may the love of friends,  
the radiance of memory,  
the fellowship of hope,  
and the life abundant  
fill us with all strength and peace,  
that we may greet the breaking  
of tomorrow's dawn with praise. Amen.

*An Interment Service for Burial:* This is a service held at the grave site at the time of burial; sometimes it is called a "grave-side."

**Opening Words**

Whatsoever things are true,  
Whatsoever things are honest,  
Whatsoever things are just,  
Whatsoever things are pure,  
Whatsoever things are lovely,  
Whatsoever things are of good report:  
if there be any virtue,  
and if there be any praise,  
Think on these things.

— Philippians 4

We know in part, and we prophesy in part.  
But when that which is perfect is come,  
that which is in part shall be done away.  
For now we see through a glass darkly;  
but then face to face;  
Now I know in part; but then shall I know  
even as also I am known.

— Corinthians 13

**Prayer**

**Reader:** In the midst of life, we are in death.

Let us know full well that the spirit of our beloved dwells now in our hearts:

Let us seek the courage, in love, to carry forward his/her memory in the lives we now lead.

Holy Spirit of Life, receive from us the person of \_\_\_\_\_, Let the best which was in him/her, be renewed in strength in us.

May we now give to others the love that we no longer can give to him/her,  
For the lives we lead are now his/her honor and memorial.  
He/she would bless our sorrows with courage.

**Unison:**

May our time of pain issue in larger peace.  
He/she would wish it so;  
So let it be. Amen.

**Burial**

For as much as the spirit of our brother/sister dwells no more in this mortal form, we commit the body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the sure knowledge that his/her life continues in us, and that his/her works abide upon the earth. The torch he/she lit, we now carry forward, as also others will pass along ours.

A flower may be tossed into the grave.

Down gently down  
Softer to sleep  
than bed of night  
From the littleness  
Go.  
Down gently down  
Wider to wake  
Than need of Sun  
Into the greatness  
Go.

**XI. A Good-Bye Ceremony for Children**

This ceremony was developed in a workshop on celebrations. This workshop tried to create ceremonies for those special situations that are important in our lives, but that are not customarily noted with a ceremony. One group chose to develop an observance to mark the death of a child's pet, but as they talked about, they realized that there are other deaths that might affect a child very deeply — not the devastating loss of a parent or sibling; that would be a different problem altogether. They were thinking of those incomprehensible, bewildering deaths, such as the death of a friend, of a good neighbor, of a slightly known or distant relative, of a teacher.

This ceremony is intended to help a child cope with grief and bewilderment and outrage. It can easily be held at home, but could be held in a schoolroom. It can be conducted by parents (or a parent) for a single child, or for several children. It is important that the expressions be honest — use words like death, sorrow, grief — not euphemisms. It's all right to cry. Begin with a statement of purpose, such as:

"We've gathered together today to remember with love, our friend, Jill, who has died. All living things must die, as we, too, will someday die. It makes us sad that this is so, but no thing lives forever."

*Read a poem, or have some music.*

Light a candle. "We light this candle; the light will symbolize for us Jill's life, as we think of how much we loved her. Although our

sadness is great, we also think how glad we are that she lived, and we are thankful that we knew her, for we had happy times together. If we had some bad times, too, they aren't important now. We loved her, she was a good friend, we'll miss her very much."

*Music, or read a poem.*

**Candlelighting Service:** Provide several small candles, and arrange it so that each one can safely be left standing near the large candle — perhaps on a metal tray or in a tray of damp sand. Each child takes a candle, and lighting it at the large candle, says, "I remember . . . (something to do with Jill)." then places the small burning candle near the large burning candle.

Extinguish the large candle, saying something like, "Jill, herself, has died, but memories of her, symbolized by these smaller candles, keep on glowing in our hearts and minds, just as the candles keep on glowing." Do not extinguish the candles, let them burn down, or, if the children are going to leave, let them leave while the candles are still burning.

*If this is a ceremony for a pet, it could end with burial.*

*To use flowers instead of candles, have a large bouquet from which each child takes a flower as memories are recalled.*

The children should understand, from what you say to them that, although the flowers will fade and die, because nothing living lasts forever, their memories will live on in their minds.

### *Selected Readings<sup>1</sup>*

The following readings are offered for use in planning memorial, funeral, and committal services. They are intended to supplement Biblical and other materials commonly available in reference works for clergy of various faiths.

Wise selection is the key to the effective use of readings. The sensibilities and wishes of the family as they plan the service should be the determining factor.

The readings offer perspective, too, to those contemplating their own death, or reflecting on past bereavement. They can be a source of inspiration and understanding for all students of death education.

### *General Readings*

We meet here in the presence of death to do homage to the Spirit of Life. We would feign make this hour Love's hour and these simple rites Love's confessional. For it is Love's tribute that we come to offer here today.

Our voices may be the voices of grief, but the language after

which grief gropes is the language of Love. And we who gather here come in Love's name to express, for those whose lives have been bereft of Love's visible presence, a calm and abiding trust in Love's immortality and consecrating power.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

No one entering this world can ever escape sadness. Each in his turn must bear his burdens, though he be rich or poor, and in his turn bid his loved ones farewell as they set out upon life's ventures. Each one must suffer that sad farewell when loved ones embark on the last voyage, and each in turn must himself take that final journey into the dark.

But to those who make this life a pledge to light and spirit there comes the assurance of a victory that shall redeem life's pain. Though our spirit be but the feeble glow of a candle, there is no dark that it cannot pierce. For him who keeps the candle burning bravely to the end, death is not defeat for light goes on.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

Bitter is the sorrow of bereavement, yet when a loved one passes, remember then the blessing we have received: rejoice that even for so brief a period our life has been enriched and deepened beyond the power of anything to destroy, for never beauty touched the heart of man without creating something eternal.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

And yet I say unto you, be of good courage, for although you may not escape sadness, it is because the life that has departed was rich and sweet that you are sad, and whatever has worth and dignity and beauty is not lost. Nay, this is the testimony not only of the ages since the dawn of time, but this is the message of the test tube and the telescope, even as prophets have proclaimed and poets sung, that nothing is ever lost, but that all things change and move throughout eternity. And dare we not believe that life itself shall be conserved, though bodies die and pass into the earth: yea, and that spirit through the crucible of mortality is not destroyed but purified and enriched and made more great?

— *Robert Terry Weston*

*Gitanjali — 87*

In desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of my room; I find her not.  
My house is small and what once has gone from it can never be regained.

But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have come to thy door.

I stand under the golden canopy of thine evening sky and I lift my eager eyes to thy face.

I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing can vanish — no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears.

Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it into the deepest fullness. Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe.  
— *Rabindranath Tagore*

Gitanjali — 84

It is the pang of separation that spreads throughout the world and gives birth to shapes innumerable in the infinite sky.

It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence all night from star to star and becomes lyric among rustling leaves in rainy darkness of July.

It is this overspreading pain that deepens into loves and desires, into sufferings and joys in human homes; and this it is that ever melts and flows in songs through my poet's heart.  
— *Rabindranath Tagore*

Gitanjali — 90

"On the day when death shall knock at thy door, what wilt thou offer him?"

"Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life — I will never let him go with empty hands.

"All the sweet vintage of my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door."  
When I finished she remarked that her vessel was full.  
— *Rabindranath Tagore*

Crossing the Bar

Sunset and evening star,

And one clear call for me!

And may there be no moaning of the bar,

When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,

Too full for sound and foam,

When that which drew from out the boundless deep

Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,

And after that the dark!

And may there be no sadness of farewell,

When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crossed the bar.

— *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

Fruit-Gathering: XLVI

The time is past when I could repay her for all that I received. Her night has found its morning and thou hast taken her to thy arms: and to thee I bring my gratitude and my gifts that were for her.

For all hurts and offenses to her I come to thee for forgiveness. I offer to thy service those flowers of my love that remained in bud when she waited for them to open.

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

Fruit-Gathering: XLIX

The pain was great when the strings were being tuned, my Master! Begin your music, and let me forget the pain; let me feel in beauty what you had in your mind through those pitiless days.

The waning night lingers at my doors, let her take her leave in songs.

Pour your heart into my life strings, my Master, in tunes that descend from your stars.

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

In Memoriam: LIII

O yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,

To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;

That not one life shall be destroy'd,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,

When God hath made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;

That not a moth with vain desire  
Is shrivel'd in a fruitless fire,  
Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything;

I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last — far off — at last, to all.  
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?

An infant crying in the night:  
An infant crying for the light:  
And with no language but a cry.

— *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

O God, eternal spirit of love and righteousness, through whose constant presence in our hearts we are made strong, and by whom we live, we come unto thee in this time of sorrow, and we are sustained by thine indwelling presence.

Thou teachest us to be reconciled unto sorrow; thou turnest sorrow into a universal sympathy and compassion. Trusting in thee we learn not merely to endure but to rejoice in life as a far more eternal and abiding thing than human flesh.

Not for ourselves alone, but for all who suffer and are afflicted by grief, we pray, that consciousness of time eternity of fulfillment may uplift and sustain, and thy compassion minister to them through human hands.

May we learn to be glad for that which has been, not as something taken away but as something given to us even if for a brief time, through which we have been blessed. Teach us, we pray, to rejoice again, to share all beauty we have known, all love, all hope, all faith, and to be grateful for they tender hand which at the end bringeth release in peace and blessed sleep.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

I had rather think of those I have loved and lost as having returned to earth, as having become a part of the elemental wealth of the world, I would rather dream of them as unconscious dust; I would rather dream of them as laughing in the stream, floating in the clouds, bursting in light upon the shores of other worlds; I would rather think of them as the lost visions of a forgotten night, than to have even the faintest fear . . . But as for me, I will leave the dead where nature leaves them. Whatever flower of hope springs in my heart I will cherish; I will give it breath of sighs and rain of tears.

— *R. G. Ingersoll, "The House of Death"*

O thou, who art the inspirer of the faith that burns ever more brightly within the souls of men, unto thee do we turn in this time of testing. Within us do well up the great mysteries of the ages. The unanswered questions of all saddened hearts are on our lips. We would be assured and comforted if that might be within the power of our hearts to know and understand. But as we pause to honor a memory made beautiful by life, we pray only that our faith be strengthened by the faith that was so strong in him.

Maker of Mysteries, guide thou us whose spiritual vision is dim and uncertain. As the joy of close comradeship is withdrawn, do thou come with thy divine fellowship and renew our confidence in the everlasting life of the spirit of man.

— *Francis G. Ricker*

### Mourn Not the Dead

Mourn not the dead that in the cool earth lie  
Dust unto dust —  
The calm, sweet earth that mothers all who die  
As all men must;

But rather mourn the apathetic throng —  
The cowed and meek  
Who see the world's great anguish and its wrong  
And dare not speak!

— *Ralph Chaplin*

### A Scriptural Message for Use in a Memorial Service

by *Rev. Philip Nordstrom* (adapted):

God is our refuge and strength, our constant help in every sorrow; Therefore we will not fear even though this earthly dust be removed and be carried into the Eternal Sea, For therein is a river whose fountains gladden the City of God, the holy temples of his dwelling place.

Come behold now this work of the Lord, what transformations he hath wrought on this earth, in this holy clay: He hath made an end to this transitory struggle, He hath unbent this bow, and shattered the shaft, And he hath refined as in fire, this mortal chariot unto immortality.<sup>1</sup>

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.  
Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and say unto her that her iniquity is pardoned.  
For he shall lead his flock like a shepherd,  
He shall carry the lambs in his arms and gently lead those that are with young.

Have you not known?  
Have you not heard that the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary.  
For he giveth power to the faint and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.  
They shall walk and not faint, they shall run and not be weary, they shall mount up with wings as eagles.<sup>2</sup>

Behold, I will not leave you comfortless, but I will come unto you, and I will make my abode with you, and will come in and sup with you.<sup>3</sup>

In this world, ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Based on Psalm 46. <sup>2</sup>Isaiah 40:1-2, 11, 28-31. <sup>3</sup>John 14: 18,23. <sup>4</sup>John 16:33.



My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you.<sup>5</sup>  
Behold! I will give you the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and  
sorrowing and sighing shall be done away.<sup>6</sup>

Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give  
you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly  
in heart, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.<sup>7</sup>

Incline your ear, and come unto me, hear, and your soul shall live.<sup>8</sup>  
Remember that the eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the  
everlasting arms.

Comfort ye! Comfort ye, my people!  
Says your God.

### Readings for a Child

We are hurting, Lord. With our child's death went all our  
hopes, our dreams, our future.

But in our grief we can now fully appreciate the little things in  
life. We are thankful for even the short time we had with our child.  
We realize how fragile and brief life can be. We now take nothing  
for granted.

Thank you for being with us in our time of sadness and grief.  
We look to you for strength.

— *From burial service for Benjamin Matthew Jones*

In the flesh there is no continuing life, for things that are of  
flesh must perish after the way of flesh; yet there is no spirit  
however weak or faint, however young, but leaves its glow upon  
the world; no spirit, however long or short its sojourn here, but  
speaks of greater and enduring life through its own sublime mystery  
and beauty. The spirit is of the nature of eternity: even as it smiles  
upon us here, suddenly there is a light about our heads and life is  
changed. So this bright spark of the eternal fire is not lost in death.  
The first brave smile of the tiniest babe kindles a warmth in other  
hearts that shall never die. Though death strike sorrow to our hearts,  
the glory of that smile still lingers within, to outlive sorrow and  
bind us to all childhood with enfolding love.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

### Readings for the Aged

Beautiful are the youth whose rich emotions flash and burn,  
whose lithe bodies filled with energy and grace sway in their happy  
dance of life; and beautiful likewise are the mature who have

<sup>5</sup>John 14:27. <sup>6</sup>Isaiah 61:3. <sup>7</sup>Matthew 11:28-30. <sup>8</sup>Isaiah 56:3.

learned compassion and patience, charity and wisdom, though they  
be rarer far than beautiful youth. But most beautiful and most rare  
is a gracious old age which has drawn from life the skill to take its  
varied strands: the harsh advance of age, the pang of grief, the  
passing of dear friends, the loss of strength, and with fresh insight  
weave them into a rich and gracious pattern all its own. This is the  
greatest skill of all, to take the bitter with the sweet and make it  
beautiful, to take the whole of life in all its moods, its strengths and  
weaknesses, and of the whole make one great and celestial har-  
mony.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

### Readings for a Parent

Blessed are they who rear their families in honor and in  
gentleness, who live courageous and upright lives, who live life in  
its fullness, do their part, and then at eventide retire to rest.

Though pain be in the heart, let none grieve, for here a gentle  
soul has cast its glow upon us, and like the glory of an autumn sun,  
has lit the world with kindness through its day, and at the close has  
gently sunk to rest.

Rather rejoice for that which (she) has given, the light we know  
and treasure still within our hearts, a light we trust still shineth  
beyond the distant peaks (this world's horizon), for life goes on,  
and spirit knows no death.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

### For Burial Committal Services

Requiem

Fall softly, O thou coat of winter snow, and keep our loved one  
warm;

Kiss him gently, sun and rain, in the quiet of his rest;

Watch over him, wind and stars, in the silence of the night;

Grow thou to cover him, grass and flowers, and make beautiful his  
couch,

And thou, Great Spirit of Love and Peace, take him into thine arms  
and lull him to rest forevermore. Amen.

— *Rev. John G. MacKinnon*

Deep wet moss and cool blue shadows

Beneath a bending fir,

And the purple solitude of mountains,

When only the dark owls stir —

Oh, there will come a day, a twilight,

When I shall sink to rest

In deep wet moss and cool blue shadows

Upon a mountain's breast,

And yield a body torn with passions,  
 And bruised with earthly scars,  
 To the cool oblivion of evening,  
 Of solitude and stars.

— *Lew Sarett*

Song

She's somewhere in the sunlight strong,  
 Her tears are in the falling rain,  
 She calls me in the wind's soft song.  
 And with the flowers she comes again.

Yon bird is but her messenger,  
 The moon is but her silver car,  
 Yeal sun and moon are sent by her,  
 And every wistful waiting star.

— *Richard LeGallienne*

*For Cremation Committal Service*

Fruit-Gathering: XL

O Fire, my brother, I sing victory to you.  
 You are the bright red image of fearful freedom.  
 You swing your arms in the sky; you sweep your impetuous fingers  
 across the harp-string, your dance music is beautiful.

When my days are ended and the gates are opened you will burn to  
 ashes this cordage of hands and feet.  
 My body will be one with you, my heart will be caught in the  
 whirls of your frenzy, and the burning heat that was my  
 life will flash up and mingle itself in your flame.

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

It is but fitting that we should commit this body to the flame  
 So like that which but recently did burn  
 Within that fine brave head.  
 It is as if he doth return  
 Unto the fountain whence he came,  
 Source of all spirits bright,  
 The comradeship and life of all pure souls,  
 As now he enters into purifying light.

— *Robert Terry Weston*

*Additional Readings*

"To W.P.I." by George Santayana

"Dirge Without Music," by Edna St. Vincent Millay

"Death," "Joy and Sorrow," and "Pain," from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran.  
 Psalms 19, 23 and 121.

REFERENCE

<sup>1</sup>Quotations by Robert Terry Weston, R.G. Ingersoll, Francis G. Ricker, Rev. John G. Mackinnon, and Richard LeGallienne, are taken from *A Cup of Strength: Readings in Time of Sorrow and Bereavement*, compiled by Robert Terry Weston, 1945. Reprinted by permission from Robert Terry Weston.