

# **Planning the Memorial Service**

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## **Planning the Memorial Service**

Friends,

In Unitarian Universalist practice and now, more and more in common usage, memorial services may either follow a somewhat traditional form or may be created and celebrated in more diverse forms.

The purpose of the service, and the hope of those participating in it, is to celebrate the life of the person who has died, to speak of the nature of the loss of this person on all who survive, and to acknowledge that the memory and influence this person whose life has ended will live on in us.

The service may be scheduled soon after death, or at a date in the future that may allow more friends and family to learn of the death and make arrangements to attend.

Memorial services can take place in houses of worship, in nature, in the home, or any other setting that seems appropriate. It is important, whatever the places, to make sure that those attending can access the site, are comfortable and can hear the service.

What follows are some of the materials that I have collected and used in memorial services that I have led. The materials intentionally cover a range of perspectives -- theological, human, and philosophical. Naturally, the service should endeavor to speak in terms of the beliefs and hopes of the person who has died, but it should also be sensitive to and honor the potentially diverse understandings that others – family, friends, colleagues – bring with their sense of loss.

I have organized the materials here in what is one of the usual orders in which the service can be conducted. Please feel free to modify the service - its length, its order, its form –to make it most appropriate for the person who has died and for those who have come to this service to celebrate the life that has been and to mourn what has been lost in its passing.

I hope that these materials are helpful. Please do contact me if you have questions.. Rev Rali Weaver 617-459-5979 revraliweaver@gmail.com

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## **The Memorial Service**

### **Prelude**

### **Opening Words**

1. Because I could not stop for Death  
He kindly stopped for me  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves  
And Immortality.

-- *Emily Dickenson (479)*

2. Do not live too far in the past or the future. Live now.

In each moment expect a miracle: ten kinds of birds at the feeder, and the tracks of a fox in the snow.

Pick up a magnifying glass and scrutinize that crocus. See the pollen at the center of the daffodil, life's dust, death-defying life. Be astonished at the flower, arrested by its beauty.

Run naked in the garden in the morning and hope the wild geese fly by.

Get silly and laugh loudly with your grandchildren or your grandparents.

Refuse to leave the dead behind, but bring their memory to all your chores and games and corners of the quiet, warm tears.

Know always that joy and sorrows are woven together; one cannot be without the other. If you love, know that sometimes your love will bring you tears; if you grieve, know it is because at some time you were willing to love.

Do not be afraid to die today. But expect life!

-- *Elizabeth Tarbox, UU Minister*

3. Gather the stars if you wish it so.  
Gather the songs and keep them.  
Gather the faces of women.  
Gather for keeping years and years.  
And then...

Loosen your hands, let go and say good-bye.

Let the stars and songs go.

Let the faces and years go.

Loosen your hands and say good-bye.

-- Carl Sandburg, "Stars, Songs, Faces"

## Call to Worship/Invocation

1. We gather in fellowship, in community, in shared love.  
We gather to affirm that a life well lived has meaning for us and for our world.  
We gather to quietly say thanks and to recognize the blessings that endure,  
And to offer our thanks.

-- DPH

2. We come together from the diversity of our grieving,  
to gather in the warmth of this community  
giving stubborn witness to our belief that  
in times of sadness, there is room for laughter.  
In times of darkness, there always will be light.  
May we hold fast to the conviction  
that what we do with our lives matters  
and that a caring world is possible after all.

-- Maureen Killoran, UU Minister

3. We gather this morning,  
not so much to cry at what we have lost,  
but to affirm the persistence of another's  
lasting influence on us.  
We gather to assert that a life well lived  
has meaning for us and for our world.  
We offer our thanks for  
the inspiration, hope and joy  
that was \_\_\_\_\_'s gift to us.  
The memory of her/him will live on in us  
and bring us both comfort and courage.

-- DPH

## First Hymn

*If you wish to include hymns in the service, please select one here from those listed below or from another source as the first hymn and another for later in the service. The reference numbers are from the Unitarian Universalist hymnal -- Hymns for the*

*Celebration of Life. Other music -- instrumental, choral, etc. -- may of course be substituted. The few hymns listed here are intended to be possibilities, not limitations.*

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### **1. Morning Has Broken (#38 HCL)**

Morning has broken, like the first morning,  
blackbird has spoken like the first bird.  
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!  
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word.

Sweet the rain's new fall sun lit from heaven,  
like the first dew fall on the first grass.  
Praise the sweetness of the wet garden,  
sprung in completeness where God's feet pass.

Mine is the sun light! Mine is the morning  
born of the dewfall Eden saw play!  
Praise with elation, praise every morning,  
God's recreation of the new day!

### **2. In the Sweet Fields of Autumn (#97 HCL)**

In sweet fields of autumn, the gold grain is falling,  
The white clouds drift lonely, the wild swan is  
calling. alas for the daisies, the tall fern and grasses,  
when wind sweep and rain fall  
fill low lands and passes.

The snows of December shall fill windy hollow;  
the bleak rain trails after,  
and March wind shall follow.  
The deer through valleys leave print of their going;  
and diamonds of sleet mark the ridges of snowing.

The stillness of death shall stoop over the water, the  
plover sweeps low where the pale streamlets falter;  
but deep in the earth clod the black seed is living;  
when spring mounts her bugles for rousing and giving.

## **First Reflection or Reflections**

*The reflections on the life of the person who has died by service leader, family members and/or friends are probably the most remembered and helpful part of the service. They can tell of the person as the speaker knew him or her, with appreciation, with sadness, with thankfulness and with humor. There can be one or two speakers in the times set aside in the service for reflections. In general, it is better for the speaker to have her or his comments outlined or written both to provide a sense of comfort for the speaker and better communication to those listening.*

## **Prayer or Silent Meditation**

*Choose a prayer and one for later if you so wish. A time of silent reflection is also an option. Please feel free to bring in other prayers or readings that speak to you and are appropriate for the values and beliefs of the person who has died.*

### **1. Lord, make me an instrument of Your Peace.**

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, Joy.  
O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

*-- St. Francis of Assisi*

### **2. Do not stand at my grave and weep. I am not there,**

I do not sleep. I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow. I am the sunlight on the ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn's rain.  
When you awaken in the morning hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry:  
I am not there, I did not die.

*-- Hopi Tradition*

3. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy kingdom come.  
 Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our trespasses,  
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
 for ever and ever.

--*The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13*

### **First Reading or Readings**

*Please choose a reading or two for use here and for use later in the service. The readings offer those in attendance a chance to reflect both on their connection to the one whose life is being celebrated and to consider the inevitable losses, including of friends, those one loves and the inevitable of oneself, that are part of life*

1. To live in this world, you must be able to do three things:  
 to love what is mortal;  
 to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on it;  
 and, when the time comes to let it go, to let it go.  
 -- *Mary Oliver, In Blackwater Woods*
2. After the dazzle of day is done,  
 Only the dark, dark night shows to my eyes the stars;  
 After the clangor of organ majestic or chorus, or perfect band,  
 Silent, athwart my soul, moves the symphony true.  
 -- *Walt Whitman, Sands at Seventy*
3. As usual, I was thinking about the moments of the past,  
 letting my memory rush over them like water  
 rushing over the stones on the bottom of a stream.  
 I was even thinking a little about the future, that place  
 where people are doing a dance we cannot imagine,  
 a dance whose name we can only guess.  
 -- *Billy Collins, Nostalgia*
4. It is not the number of days we live  
 Or even the number of years,  
 For life is given to every one

It is free--though fraught with tears.  
It is what one does with this gift of life--  
It is how and not how long--  
For life is forever, --your chance just now

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Is to make of it strife or a song.  
So don't count the hours,  
Or even the days  
Or look for a name or a sign  
It's only your thoughts and your deeds  
And your loves  
That will give you true measure of time.  
For it's not the number of days or years  
It isn't the fame or wealth--  
It's the way we've used the gift of life,  
It's the oneness of God with self.  
-- Deborah Greeley, UU Leader

5. Let children walk with nature,  
let them see the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life,  
their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains  
and mountains and streams of our blessed star,  
and they will learn that death is stingless indeed,  
and as beautiful as life.  
-- John Muir, *Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*

6. Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you hold in your hand,  
what your counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop.  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans



and the simple breath that kept him alive.

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Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes any sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase  
bread, only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

*--Naomi Shihab Nye, Kindness*

7. I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From whence does my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved,  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is your keeper;  
The Lord is your shade on your right hand.  
The sun shall not smite you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth  
and for evermore.

*-- Psalm 121*

8. I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun, I  
effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.  
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.  
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fiber your blood.  
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,

Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.  
-- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1891

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9. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want;  
he makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters;  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the  
valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil  
for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff,  
they comfort me.  
Though preparest a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
thou anointest my head with oil,  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.  
-- *Psalms 23 RSV*

10. With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
He has showed you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?  
-- *Micah 6: 6-8 RSV*

11. Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age  
should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage  
against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in  
flight, And learn, too late, they grieved it on its  
way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

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Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. -- -- *--Dylan Thomas, In Country Sleep*

*and Other Poems*

12. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the  
heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build  
up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a  
time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. --  
*Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 KJV*

13. Hello, sun in my face.  
Hello, you who make the morning  
and spread it over the fields  
and into the faces of the tulips  
and the nodding morning glories,  
and into the windows of, even, the  
miserable and the crotchety  
best preacher that ever was,  
dear star, that just happens  
to be where you are in the universe

to keep us from ever-darkness,  
to ease us with warm touching,  
to hold us in the great hands of light  
gold morning, good morning, good morning.  
Watch, now, how I start the day  
In happiness, in kindness.

-- Mary Oliver, *Why I Wake Early*

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14. They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it.  
Death cannot kill what never dies.  
Nor can spirits ever be divided, that love and live in the same divine principle,  
the root and record of their friendship.  
If absence be not death, neither is theirs.  
Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another  
still.  
For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is  
omnipresent. In this divine glass they see face to face; and their converse is  
free, as well as pure.  
This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their  
friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because  
immortal.”

-- William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude / More Fruits of Solitude*

15. If I should die before the rest of you,  
Break not a flower, nor inscribe a stone,  
Nor, when I'm gone, speak in a Sunday voice,  
But be the usual selves that I have known,  
Weep if you must:  
Parting is hell,  
But life goes on  
So . . . sing as well!  
-- Joyce Grenfell

16. Dear lovely Death  
That taketh all things under wing  
Never to kill  
Only to change  
Into some other thing  
This suffering flesh,  
To make it either more or less,

But not again the same  
Dear lovely Death,  
Change is thy other name.  
--Langston Hughes, 1931

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17. If suddenly you do not exist, if suddenly you are not living. I shall go on living. I do not dare, I do not dare to write it, if you die. I shall go on living. Because where a man has no voice, there shall be my voice  
Where blacks are beaten, I can not be dead. When my brothers go to jail I shall go with them. When victory, not my victory, but the great victory arrives, even though I am mute I must speak: I shall see it come even though I am blind. No, forgive me, if you are not living, if you, beloved, my love, if you have died.

-- Pablo Neruda, *Dead Woman*

18. You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

-- Mary Oliver, *Wild Geese*

19. Remember Me:

To the living, I am gone.

To the sorrowful, I will never return.

To the angry, I was cheated,

But to the happy, I am at peace,

And to the faithful, I have never left.

I cannot be seen, but I can be heard.

So as you stand upon a shore, gazing at a beautiful sea – remember me. As you look in awe at a mighty forest and its grand majesty – remember me. As you look upon a flower and admire its simplicity – remember me. Remember me in your heart, your thoughts, your memories of the times we loved, the times we cried, the times we fought, the times we laughed.

For if you always think of me, I will never be gone. -- Margaret Mead

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20. If I can stop one heart from breaking,

I shall not live in vain

If I can ease one life the Aching,

Or cool one pain,

Or help one fainting robin

Unto his nest again,

I shall not live in vain.

-- Emily Dickinson (467)

21. Death is not too high a price to pay

for having lived.

Mountains never die,

nor do the seas or rocks or endless sky.

Through countless centuries of time, they stay  
eternal, deathless.

Yet they never live!

If choice there were, I would not hesitate  
to choose mortality.

Whatever Fate

demanded in return for life I'd give,

for never to have seen the fertile plains

nor heard the winds nor felt the warm sun on sands

beside the salty sea, nor touched the hands  
of those I love-without these, all the gains  
of timelessness would not be worth one day  
of living and of loving; come what may.

--Dorothy N. Monroe, "The Cost"

22. When death comes

like the hungry bear in autumn;  
when death comes and takes all the bright  
coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;  
when death comes  
like the measles-pox

when death comes  
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of  
curiosity, wondering:  
what is it going to be like, that cottage of

darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything  
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,  
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,  
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as  
common  
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the  
mouth,  
tending, as all music does, toward silence,

and each body a lion of courage, and  
something  
precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say all my life  
I was a bride married to amazement.  
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into  
my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder  
if I have made of my life something  
particular, and real.

I don't want to find myself sighing and  
frightened,  
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited  
this world  
-- *Mary Oliver*

23. When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down



in tall grasses,  
and even elephants  
lumber after safety.

When great trees fall  
in forests,  
small things recoil into silence,  
their senses  
eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die,  
the air around us becomes  
light, rare, sterile.  
We breathe, briefly.  
Our eyes, briefly,  
see with  
a hurtful clarity.  
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,  
examines,  
gnaws on kind words  
unsaid,  
promised walks  
never taken.

Great souls die and  
our reality, bound to  
them, takes leave of us.  
Our souls,  
dependent upon their  
nurture,  
now shrink, wizened.  
Our minds, formed  
and informed by their  
radiance, fall away.  
We are not so much maddened  
as reduced to the unutterable ignorance of  
dark, cold  
caves.

And when great souls die,  
after a period peace blooms,

slowly and always

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irregularly. Spaces fill  
with a kind of  
soothing electric vibration.  
Our senses, restored, never  
to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be  
better. For they existed.

-- *Maya Angelou*

24. Look, the trees  
are turning  
their own bodies  
into pillars  
of light,  
are giving off the rich  
fragrance of cinnamon  
and fulfillment,  
the long tapers  
of cattails  
are bursting and floating away over  
the blue shoulders  
of the ponds,  
and every pond,  
no matter what its  
name is, is  
nameless now.  
Every year  
everything  
I have ever learned  
In my lifetime  
leads back to this: the fires  
and the black river of loss  
whose other side  
is salvation,  
whose meaning  
none of us will ever know.  
To live in this world  
you must be able  
to do three things:  
to love what is mortal;

to hold it  
against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;

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and, when the time comes to let it  
go, to let it go.

-- *Mary Oliver, In Blackwater Woods*

25. When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down  
in tall grasses,  
and even elephants  
lumber after safety.

When great trees fall  
in forests,  
small things recoil into silence,  
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to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be  
better. For they existed.

— Maya Angelou

### **Responsive Readings:**

1. At the rising of the sun and at its going down;  
*We remember them.*

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter;

2. *We remember them.*

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring;

3. *We remember them.*

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer; *We remember them.*

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of the autumn; *We remember them.*

At the beginning of the year and when it ends;  
*We remember them.*

As long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as We  
*remember them.*

When we are weary and in need of strength;  
*We remember them.*

When we are lost and sick at heart;  
*We remember them.*

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When we have decisions that are difficult to make;

4. *We remember them.*

When we have joy we crave to share;  
*We remember them.*

When we have achievements that are based on theirs;  
*We remember them.*

For as long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as,  
*We remember them.*

-- Sylvan Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer

**Second Reflection or Reflections:**

*Reflection or reflections by service leader, family members and/or*

*friends.* **Moment of Silent Meditation or Prayer**

**Second Reading or Readings**

*From of readings above or another source.*

**Third Reflection or Reflections:**

*Reflection or reflections by service leader, family members and/or friends.*

### **Closing Prayer**

1. Our simple prayer, our deepest hope,  
 is that we will be able now to continue to trust in life,  
 to continue to believe in hope,  
 to continue to feel and appreciate  
 the love that has come to us and will be with us.  
 May we in our hurt, in our pain,  
 not avoid each other, not be afraid of each other,  
 but cling to each other even more firmly  
 in our shared humanity.  
 May we in our confusion not forget those feelings of joy,  
 the power of that love, that came to us and changed us so  
 deeply. May we having suffered this loss not fear life  
 but continue to love it  
 to have faith in it  
 in its complexity.  
 Life is good.  
 Love endures.  
 Our ability to have hope, to have faith, to trust,  
 speaks more to the truth of life  
 than we usually know.  
 For the gifts of life, and hope, and love,  
 we are thankful, even now.

-- *DPH*

### **Closing Words/Benediction**

1. This World is not Conclusion;  
 A Species stands beyond -  
 Invisible, as Music -  
 But positive, as Sound.  
 -- *Emily Dickenson, (373)*

2. As for death,  
     I can't wait to be the hummingbird,  
     Can you?  
         -- *Mary Oliver, Little Afternoon at the Edge of Little Sister Pond*

3. And now may the peace which passes understanding,  
     The peace which comes with acceptance and thanksgiving, The  
     peace of the Spirit which rises above all the strains of the earth – Be  
     and abide with us all,  
     Both this day and forevermore.  
         -- *Traditional based on Philippians 4:7*

4. What we have once enjoyed  
     and deeply loved  
     we can never lose,  
     For that we love deeply,  
     becomes a part of us.  
         -- *Helen Keller*

5. The dead are not dead if we have loved them truly.  
     In our own lives we can give them a kind of immortality.  
     Let us arise and take up the work they have left  
     unfinished. -- *Felix Adler, founder of Ethical Culture*

6. And now may the courage of the early morning's dawning,  
     And the strength of the eternal hills at noontime,  
     And the peace of the open spaces at evening's ending,  
     And the love of God,  
     Abide in your hearts now and forever.  
         -- *For All Who Minister, Church of the Brethren, 1933*

## Postlude

## **Memorial Service on the Death of a Child**

The death of a child is one of the hardest realities any of us, and particularly parents, have to face. It is terribly hard to place in any context of what life is and should be. It seems not to be in the natural order of things, yet it is a very real part of life.

How to reach some understanding of and how to acknowledge the loss and pain and how to affirm the grief become almost unanswerable questions. And there is, of course, no simple answer to them. Each parent, each family and each friend struggle to find what is right to say, what is helpful, what do we have the energy to do.

Short, formulaic answers are offered, but while we can appreciate the kind spirit in which they are offered, they often prove less than satisfactory. It is hard to imagine anything that could be. But in the confusion and the efforts to help or to find help, sometimes a quiet word is said or note sent by someone who has shared the experience offering some perspective or some piece of music or encounter with the beauty of the world offers solace and hope that there will eventually be at least some healing and that life will go on even with this deepest of pains.

A memorial service can offer the parents, the family and the friends a chance to be together to acknowledge the loss, recognize their shared grief and their support as individuals and as a community of friends. Even at times such as these, and perhaps particularly at them, it is good to be together.

The structure of the service can be in any form that seems appropriate to the parents and their family. It usually involves, in different proportions, music, readings, a time for meditation and prayer, and comments by those close to the parents, or by the parents themselves if they feel they can do so, acknowledging both the loss, pain and grief and at the same time affirming their belief that healing will come and that life will move forward.

One model for this kind of a service is this, but it is important to shape the service to your own understandings of what is needed and appropriate:

- Opening Music
- Opening Words – describing the reason that we have gathered.
- Readings – one or two
- Reflection I – a personal statement acknowledging the loss and the grief •  
Meditation – spoken and/or silent
- Reflection II – an affirmation of the support of the community
- Readings – one or two
- Reflection III – a time for a parent or the parents, or members of their family to speak
- Closing Words – affirming the loss and the continuation of life
- Closing Music



*Readings on the Death of a Baby or a Child*

1 Do not stand at my grave and weep,  
 I am not there, I do not sleep.  
 I am a thousand winds that blow.  
 I am the diamond glint on snow.  
 I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
 I am the gentle autumn rain.  
 When you wake in the morning hush,  
 I am the swift, uplifting rush  
 Of quiet birds in circling flight.  
 I am the soft starlight at night.  
 Do not stand at my grave and weep.  
 I am not there, I do not sleep.  
 Do not stand at my grave and cry.  
 I am not there, I did not die!  
 -- Mary Frye (1932)

2. A mother held her new baby and very slowly rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she held him, she sang:  
 I'll love you forever,  
 I'll like you for always,  
 As long as I'm living  
 my baby you'll be.  
 -- Robert Munsch, *Excerpt from "I'll Love You Forever,"*

3. This was a life that had hardly begun  
 No time to find your place in the Sun  
 No time to do all you could have done  
 But we loved you enough for a lifetime  
  
 No time to enjoy the world and its wealth  
 No time to take life down off the shelf  
 No time to sing the songs of yourself  
 Though you had enough love for a lifetime  
  
 Those who live long endure sadness and tears  
 But you'll never suffer the sorrowing years  
 No betrayal, no anger, no hatred, no fears  
 Just love - Only love - In your lifetime.  
 -- Mary Yarnall, *Too Soon*

4. The world may never notice If a Snowdrop doesn't bloom,  
 Or even pause to wonder If the petals fall too soon. But  
 every life that ever forms,  
 Or ever comes to be,  
 Touches the world in some small way  
 For all eternity.  
 The little one we longed for  
 Was swiftly here and gone.  
 But the love that was then planted Is a light that still shines on.  
 And though our arms are empty,  
 Our hearts know what to do.  
 For every beating of our hearts  
 Says that we love you.

-- *Author Unknown*

1. She died, - - this was the way she died;  
 And when her breath was done,  
 Took up her simple wardrobe  
 And started for the sun.  
 Her little figure at the gate  
 The angels must have spied,  
 Since I could never find her  
 Upon the mortal side.

-- *Emily Dickinson, Vanished*

2. I feel as though my heart must stop with pain.  
 I miss you so, the darkness will not pale.  
 My darling child, come to me again.  
 I know you cannot come, and still I strain  
 To put my arms around you through the veil.

I feel as though my heart must stop with pain.  
 Other lives and loves call me in vain.  
 I try to turn away from you and fail.  
 My darling child, come to me again.

You are my unendurable refrain.

Back and back I hurry to impale  
My heart on you, to stop my heart with pain.  
Yet nothing that I do undoes the plain  
Brutal fact which always must prevail.

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Ah, my darling, come to me again!  
You are both my sunshine and my rain,  
My dearest joy, my anguish, and my grail.  
I feel as though my heart must stop with pain.  
My darling child, come to me again.

-- *Nicholas Gordon, I Feel as Though My Heart Must Stop with Pain*

3. Memories - tender, loving, bittersweet they can never be taken from you, Nothing can detract from the joy and the beauty you and your loved one shared. Your love for the person and his or her love for you cannot be altered by time or circumstance.

The memories are yours to keep.

Yesterday has ended, though you store it in the treasure house of the past.

-- *Earl Grollman*

4. The Glory of Life is not that it endures forever, but that, for a time, it includes so much that is beautiful.

It is a tree to those that grasp it, and happy are all who retain it.

Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peaceful.

We do not demand that the flower shall never die, nor that the song shall never end.

Nor would we be angry with life because one day its beauty will be dust, its music silent, and all its laughter and tears forgotten.

Life, the reality, is ours; we would shape it as nobly as we can.

We will not linger, like timid sailors in port, but will live dangerously, devoting ourselves with vigor to what seems to us good, beautiful and true. The glory of Life is Love. Unending.

-- *Author Unknown*

5. We cannot judge a biography by its length, by the number of pages in it; we must judge by the richness of the contents. Sometimes the "unfinishes" are among the most beautiful symphonies.

-- *Viktor Frankl*