

Our journey through the secular year

Time for remembrance

Remembrance

Remembering a loved one is an important spiritual practice. It brings death into the context of our daily lives, and reminds us that death does not have the final word – memories live on. But for most people death is a taboo subject, and remembering is one way in which churches can help the bereaved. Of course, death and dying are not the sole preserve of the Church. Many organisations and people work or have an interest in this area of human existence. The Dying Matters Coalition – with its 32,000 members, including faith-based organisations – was set up to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement – your church may be interested in joining the coalition [WEB](#).

A time to remember

The autumn months are often associated with remembrance. There are public commemorations of Remembrance/Armistice Day (11 November) and Remembrance Sunday and church commemorations of All Saints (1 November) and All Souls (2 November). But this season of remembering also provides an opportunity to offer other acts of remembrance and reflection; for example, for those who have been bereaved, or faced significant loss of any kind, during the past year.

Many hospices have their annual remembrance event during the autumn; for example, 'Light up a Life' and 'A Time to Remember' [WEB](#). Some churches organise annual or quarterly services designed to give those who have been bereaved an opportunity for remembrance and reflection.

The purpose of remembering

- It is an opportunity for people to express their grief in a safe and secure environment.
- It helps people to come to terms with their grief and find a way through the pain.
- It helps to make the whole experience less overwhelming.
- It helps by bringing people together – grief can be a socially isolating experience for many.
- It helps to be with people who identify with what you are going through – and who will not say things such as, 'You should be over it by now.'
- It is an opportunity for healing.
- It is therapeutically important to do so – we need to remember.
- Remembering often leads to a sense of thanksgiving, and even enjoyment.
- It can give encouragement to those who struggle with the non-linear, unpredictable and personal nature of grieving.

The ritual of remembering

Contemporary society isn't big on ritual. By ritual, we mean 'a specific behaviour or activity which gives symbolic expression to feelings and thoughts of individuals or of a group of people'. But if there is no ritual available, people frequently make up their own. For example, the roadside shrines, memorials and flower tributes that are frequently seen at places where there have been tragic events, are the result of rituals – the ritual of going to that place and putting something there, accompanied by thoughts, feelings and sometimes written or verbal expressions too. Remembrance rituals have therapeutic value in the care of the bereaved. They promote hope and healing.

Look back with gratitude.
Look up with trust.
Look forward with hope.