

Thank you for the days

An outline order for a service of remembrance and reflection

The following thoughts and ideas are just suggestions – though tried and tested ones – so do be creative, and adapt the ideas to suit local context and needs.

Preparation

- Send a personal invitation to all the families with whom the church has had any contact in connection with a bereavement over the past year.
- Compile a list of the names of those to be remembered, but also make the list available near the entrance so that those arriving can add names to the list.
- Set up a prayer tree using a bare branch from a tree/shrub in a tub. You will also need leaf-shaped cards with string (e.g. luggage tags trimmed to shape) and pens (see Prayers).
- Hymns/songs are suggested; however, it may be helpful, particularly if the number present is small, to listen to some or all of them – e.g. sung by a choir or music group, or from a recording – as many people find it difficult to sing on such an occasion.

Gather

After welcoming people, it is helpful to outline why remembering is important – you could share some of the information given on page 3.

Opening prayer

O God, almighty and everlasting,
compassionate and ever-loving;
as we gather to remember those we have loved,
hold us in your loving arms,
and help us to know that those we love are safe with you,
and that we can all be united in your love,
our Creator, our Saviour, and our Comforter.

Amen.

Bible verse Lamentations 3.22-23

God's loyal love couldn't have run out, his merciful love couldn't have dried up. They're created new every morning. How great your faithfulness! I'm sticking with God (I say it over and over). He's all I've got left.

The Message version

Hymn: Great is thy faithfulness

Poem

A poem or reading about treasuring memories – e.g. 'Memories keep those we love close to us forever' by Linda E. Knight [WEB](#).

Music

An appropriate contemporary song – e.g. *Days* by The Kinks.

Bible reading Romans 8.31-39

You could omit verses 33 and 36.

Act of remembrance

Called by name

Read the names slowly, of those to be remembered, with a pause after each one, and a longer pause after every group of four or five. Although this could be accompanied by music, the use of silence is helpful in this instance.

Lighting of candles

Invite people to light a candle or tealight in memory of a loved one, and to place it (e.g.) on tables, boxes or stands set at different heights at the front of the worship space. Alternatively, you could give out small candles with drip shields and pass the flame along the rows until everyone holds a lighted candle.

While this is happening – and it can take a long while if there are many present – play one or more pieces of appropriate background music, such as:

- Samuel Barber, *Adagio for strings*
- Edward Elgar, 'Nimrod' from *Enigma Variations*
- The Hilliard Ensemble/Jan Garbarek, 'Parce mihi Domine' from the album *Officium*
- Ennio Morricone's 'Gabriel's Oboe' from the film *The Mission*
- Wolfgang Mozart, 'Adagio' from Clarinet Concerto in A
- John Tavener, *Lament of the Mother of God*

When everyone has lit and placed their candle, invite them to say together:

We light a candle for the memories of gatherings, special times.

We light a candle for the tears that flow as we remember the ones we love, that flow secretly when we are alone.

We light a candle for the hopes we shared, and the hope that brings confidence for the future.

We light a candle for peace and strength – for those we remember, and for ourselves – to heal memories of past hurt and present sorrow, to live each day to the full, and to deal gently with ourselves.

Poem

A poem or reading about hope – e.g. 'The sea and the beach' by Tessa Wilkinson [WEB](#).

Hymn – e.g. Love divine, all loves excelling; Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us; Make me a channel of your peace

Active worship and other ideas

Here are some alternative ideas, suitable for all ages, that could be used in a service of remembrance, or on other occasions.

Tree lights Prepare a tree with white 'Christmas' lights. This could be the Prayer tree (see right). At a suitable point, dim the house lights, and switch on the tree lights. If a tree is not appropriate or possible, you could simply create a display using Christmas lights.

Letting go Prepare a deep container of water. Give everyone a small pebble or stone. At a suitable point, invite people to place their stone in the water, as a symbol of letting go (don't be too specific about what is being let go – let each person choose whatever they wish to let go of).

Togetherness Build a cairn. Give everyone a pebble or stone. Invite people to come and add their stone to the pile as a symbol of togetherness in grief, and of being together in a special place. As they place their stone on the pile invite people to say, silently or aloud, as they wish: 'I add my stone to build on all that has gone before'.

Memory box A memory box holds special things that belonged to a loved one who has died. This could include photos, favourite music (e.g. a CD), letters, small objects – anything that is treasured as a memory of a loved one. The items will be a reminder of happy times together, and offer some comfort. The box can also be a useful way to pass on memories – e.g. of a parent who died when a child was very young. They are also something that children can do for themselves. Creating a memory box can be an emotional, even overwhelming, experience. It can be helpful to have the support of a close relative or friend while doing this. The box itself could be homemade, but suitable and specially made boxes are also available to buy.

A salt jar You will need a small jar full of salt for each person, a supply of different colours of chalk ground into a powder, and sheets of paper to work on. Ask people to empty their jar onto the paper and to make four or five piles. Invite them to colour each pile with a little chalk, and to associate that colour with a specific or special memory of the person who has died. The piles of coloured salt are carefully returned to the jar, making four/five layers of different colour. Secure the lid firmly. With children, this is best done with one-to-one support; many children enjoy talking about their memories as they colour the chalk. Do not rush the activity. The layered jar can be given pride of place at home as a reminder of their special person. As a less messy alternative, use coloured beads and make bead bracelets.

Letters Some people may value the opportunity to say the things that went unsaid, or that they simply want to say again. Writing a letter is a good way to do this. It could, according to the circumstances, include words of confession, or expressions of hope or wishes. It could simply be a way to say goodbye or 'I love you'. People of all ages can write letters (or emails, for those technically inclined). Some thought might be given to what will happen to the letter: it could be 'sent' (e.g. symbolically burnt), added to a memory box, or kept.

A diary or journal It can be helpful for a bereaved person to write a diary or journal of the journey through grief. By doing this they can see how, despite the overwhelming feelings of the moment, they are moving through the grief process. In some ways this is similar to writing a letter, but there is an ongoing element to it – and the focus is more on the feelings of the bereaved person.

Prayers

Prayer tree

Give out leaf-shaped pieces of card and pens. Invite people to write their own thoughts, longings, hopes – whatever they might wish to pray for – on the leaf, then to hang it on the prayer tree (see *Preparation*). Suggest that anyone who can't find the words to express their thoughts could simply write their loved one's name – or leave the leaf blank.

Sending out

A gift

Give a bulb or a packet of seeds to each person or family, and invite them to take the gift home and plant it in memory of their loved one, and enjoy cherishing the plant/flower as it grows.

Hymn: O Christ the same, through all our story's pages

Blessing

Do not long for yesterday. Do not look forward to what might happen tomorrow. The same loving God who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow and every day. Either God will shield you from suffering or give you unfailing strength to bear it. So be at peace then and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings.

St Francis de Sales

God be your comfort, and strength;
God be your hope and support;
God be your light and your way;
and the blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life,
remain with you now and for ever. **Amen.**

New Zealand Prayer Book

Time to meet

Arrange simple refreshments, and invite everyone to meet and share with others who have been bereaved. Look out for those who are on their own, and make them feel cared for. It would be helpful to have people who are trained in listening, and contact details available for local bereavement groups.

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