

NOTES

This short ceremony is designed for family members and friends to gather remotely via phone or video technology to remember the life of a loved one who has died. It is not meant to replace a formal in-person service. It offers a way to commemorate a loved one while offering timely solace to family and friends. The format and readings are just suggestions. While the ceremony can be used as-is, is also perfectly okay to modify it in any way that suits your needs. For instance, you may opt instead to swap the poems or rituals for ones that are meaningful to you.

It is not necessary that this ceremony be led by clerical, spiritual care, or other personnel. You may certainly invite these people to participate and/or lead the ceremony. However, any friend or family member can also serve as the facilitator, functioning in a “master of ceremonies” (MC) role throughout the service. The MC role may also be divided up and shared among several people, as long as you determine ahead of time where you will hand off. It is suggested that whomever is serving as the facilitator read the script very slowly to allow everyone to follow along. It is encouraged to take silent pauses throughout the ceremony. This allows the words and ritual to be more fully absorbed by all participants as an intentional, meaningful, and sacred ceremony. Please see “Lead Facilitator ‘MC’ Guide” for more detailed information.

It is strongly suggested that a different person be in charge of setting up, hosting, and trouble-shooting technology. Please see the “Technology Guide for Online Ceremonies” for more detailed information about technology. It is not necessary to use video; this ceremony can be done via telephone. However, video is the preferred method, as it allows participants to feel

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more connected. Also, some freely available video software, such as Zoom, has time limits. For example, without a paid account, Zoom will abruptly end the meeting after 40 minutes. This can be upsetting and painful for participants, so it is extremely important that the facilitator know how much time is available and manage that time to avoid getting abruptly cut off. Towards the end, there will be time for sharing. It will be especially important to watch the time here.

It is suggested to limit the ceremony to no more than approximately 10 people so that extensive personal sharing does not extend the duration. Keeping the group small preserves an intimate setting, although it is certainly possible for more to attend. Although you may choose to allow participants to announce themselves when they arrive, it is strongly suggested that the technology organizer / meeting host mute all participants before getting started to reduce background noise.

All attendees should bring a candle, something to light it with, and a piece of paper. Ideally, the paper should be a different color than the candle, for example, if a person's candle is blue, then a white piece of printer paper is perfect. But, with a white candle, try to find a different color of paper or maybe color the paper yourself with multiple colors using crayons or markers. During the ritual, we will be dripping melting wax from the candles onto the paper. This can be dangerous. Children must be supervised during this portion of the ritual, and it might be best for a parent, guardian, or other adult to help or perform this act.

A lit candle should never be left unattended. If a person has to step away from the ceremony for any reason, they should extinguish their candle during their absence. When they return, they can relight it. If possible, tapered candles are preferred over votives or other candles that might be in jars; it's easier to drip wax onto the paper with them, but they also do come with

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the risk of wax dripping onto your hand as you hold it. If desired, you can prevent this with any manner of household objects. Even a coffee filter wrapped around the end of the candle and flared outward to protect your hand works very well.

Prior to the ceremony beginning, the MC should ask the attendees who feels comfortable sharing a memory about the deceased. The script below mentions love, joy, anger, and laughter. If there are those who might be willing to share a memory of the deceased relating to each of these, that would be ideal. With respect to anger, we don't want to reopen old wounds, so a memory of the deceased's strong will or driven focus toward a goal is better than a participant's anger directed towards the deceased. There is no need to limit your ceremony to only four such memories; anyone who wants to share should be encouraged to do so. But, care should be taken to avoid putting pressure on anyone; some people won't feel up to doing so, others might have in other circumstances but might feel uncomfortable doing so because of the technology involved. If possible, the MC should double-check with those who will speak during the ceremony right before things get started both to confirm their involvement and, in practical terms, to be sure their microphone is working correctly.

Also prior to the ceremony, the MC should also ask whether anyone would be willing to share either a poem or play/sing a piece of music at the end. Otherwise, the MC should be prepared to offer a short poem that is meaningful to them. If there's no one to perform, maybe a YouTube video of the deceased's favorite song or band can be watched by the attendees. Again, please see "Technology Guide for Online Ceremonies" for detailed information to help this go as smoothly as possible.

PREPARATIONS

The MC should share with the attendees the ways in which they should prepare their space. It will save time if attendees can make this happen before the ceremony itself. The goal is to make the lighting somewhat dim yet being sure that each person is able to stay safe in their physical space. Pull drapes or otherwise cover windows if it's daytime for any attendee and turn off overhead lights. If possible, maybe even reduce the brightness settings on monitors to reduce their glow, though the MC should be sure that they are somewhat visible since they will begin and end the ceremony prior to candles being lit. That said, anyone who is visually impaired or who may move differently than others and needs a well lit environment for their own safety should prioritize these considerations and leave the room bright. Especially once candles are lit, it's best to err on the side of caution.

INTRODUCTION

The MC should begin the ceremony by welcoming guests, thanking them for joining, and briefly going over technology basics (please be sure to have read "Technology Guide for Online Ceremonies" beforehand). Especially important is explaining how participants can mute/unmute and that they should remain muted when not speaking.

CEREMONY

When everyone has arrived, the tech person should make sure that everyone is muted except for the MC. If anyone hasn't prepared their space as described above, the MC should let folks still getting ready to finish their setup. When it's time to begin, the MC continues:

MC: Thank you all for gathering to remember [NAME]. Please take a moment to get settled and take a few deep breaths.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: Your breath can sustain you throughout this ceremony, so feel free to come back to it at any time.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: We've come together today to remember [NAME] and how they impacted our lives. We sit in shared, but separate darkness. Our physical space may be a reminder of how we are feeling today, although grieve differently and may be experiencing any number of things right now. While we do so, it can be helpful to remember that hope endures and that there is light in the darkness, even if sometimes it is very dim and hard to find.

(Pause for a few seconds, as the MC lights their candle)

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MC: Please, all of you, take a moment to light your candles. Bring a little light back into your darkened room.

(Pause as they do so.)

MC: Hold your candle in front of you. Now that we can see everyone, notice how the differences in our rooms have faded away. We are, all of us, together in a similar space even though we can't, at this time, be together in the same space.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: Fire has many meanings. Sometimes it is thrilling and dangerous. Sometimes it feels comforting, warm, and safe. It is used for light and heat and cooking. It is also passion; the passion in our lives—the love, the joy, the anger, and the laughter—and in our memories shining in the darkness.

(Pause for a few moments)

MC: Some of us have volunteered to share a memory of [NAME] and how their passion moved them in different ways. Carefully, after each person shares their story, everyone can drip some wax from the lit candle onto the paper. As you do so, please say aloud, "Thank you, [NAME]."

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(The MC should name each volunteer to let them know when to speak. The tech person unmutes each person and re-mutes them when they've completed. MC should be sure to keep track of time. When each person has shared, the MC continues:)

MC: Is there anyone else who would like to share a memory of [NAME]?

(Pause to a few moments. If anyone else wants to speak, let them do so, but if no one volunteers, don't wait too long. If sharing continues, the MC should keep track of time.)

MC: Thank you, everyone. Like the tears that may have fallen from our eyes, the wax that we've collected on our sheets of paper are in honor of [NAME] and what they meant to us. By now, the wax on it should be cool enough to move, set your paper aside. We will return to it shortly.

If a volunteer has agreed to read a poem or play/sing a piece of music, ask them to do so now.

MC: Let us now take a brief moment of silence, remembering [NAME].

(Pause for 10 seconds)

CLOSING

MC: As we draw this ceremony to a close, and taking great care, I would now like to ask everyone to please gently and carefully extend your hand, the one not holding a candle, out towards the camera. In this way, we join together with one another. Though we cannot be physically present at this time, the spirit of our joining together to celebrate [NAME] remains strong.

(Pause for a few seconds)

MC: May these loving memories of [NAME] remain in our hearts, bringing us comfort during these difficult times. As we remember [NAME] in the coming days and weeks as we await a chance to celebrate in-person, let us feel each other's presence through the strong connection we have made together here today.

(Pause few seconds)

MC: May each of us find peace and comfort in remembering [NAME]. Thank you all for gathering. Before we go, save your paper and the wax it collected; we'll discuss what we want to do with these to turn them into a memory project for [NAME] later. This concludes our ceremony.

(The MC blows out their candle, attendees will likely follow suit, but if not they should ask them to do so so that no candles are left that could possibly go unattended.)

END

DISPOSITION OF THE WAX

The MC has a few options here. Either, they could have decided what they want to do with the wax, in conjunction with the deceased's family or closest companions if the MC is not a member thereof, prior to the ceremony. Or, if they've not done so yet, they should find a time to get back together with as many attendees as possible to decide their next steps. This should probably not be done immediately following the above ceremony; let people process and settle into their changed world first. But in a few days, no more than a week, you will all want to discuss the next step.

One idea is to take the paper and the wax and use these as the basis for drawings or other works of art, perhaps even to be displayed at a formal ceremony later on. Maybe they could be something as simple as "connecting the dots," which might reveal a shape of something that reminds attendees of the deceased. Alternatively, the wax could be collected by each member and when they're feeling particularly sad or in grief, they can melt a bit of it in another candle's flame to remind themselves of this ceremony. Finally, the paper and wax could be mailed to an individual who can make candles. The ceremonial wax could be mixed with additional supplies (as needed) to form one or more candles made from this ceremony that could be given to the

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deceased family, friends, or even back to each attendee. Be open to other ideas; if an attendee is passionate about a specific idea, let them run with it and see where it might go.