

Zoom Memorial Meeting for Unprogrammed Friends

In this time of physical distancing, the need to recognize and solemnize the passing of loved ones is intensified, even while shelter in place protocols make traditional memorials impossible for the time being. Physical distancing may be with us for many months, and may return from time to time in the future. Therefore, this virtual Zoom memorial format is offered for use by Quaker Meetings and others who prefer a simple service. Please feel emboldened to offer a memorial in this way, and also to modify these suggestions to fit your community and the person who has died.

Observances which we might normally do near the time of death are not possible now. It is therefore worth considering holding the Zoom memorial much sooner than a traditional one--even within a week of the death. Ritual at the time of death can set the tone for the grief process, as our Muslim, Jewish, and Roman Catholic friends well know. For Friends to do an earlier observance, the traditional Memorial Minute would need to be written more quickly, with the understanding that it might be revised or expanded on later, for an in-person memorial.

Prior to memorial. Invite folks to the memorial, using the Zoom recommended process for avoiding unwanted visitors. Protect the invitations, but consider not having a password, rather using the waiting room to avoid disruptive visitors. Select the option to have all guests enter muted. In the invite, encourage them to dress as they would for an in-person memorial.

At the memorial.

- 1) Begin worship with members of Ministry and Counsel, elders, and members of the family of the deceased ten minutes before the scheduled time of the memorial. This will season the virtual space, encouraging Friends to enter and settle into silence.
- 2) When people have gathered:
 - a) Recheck that all are muted
 - b) Use your meeting's usual introduction to memorials, thanking people for coming, explaining that each individual must discern if they feel moved to speak out of silence, leaving space between messages, etc. Add that people will have to unmute themselves to speak
 - c) Acknowledge that Zoom is a new format, and engage them in the experiment. Point out that videoconferencing enables safe participation by people over a large geographic area. Friends have historically worshiped in prisons, houses, cow sheds, on shipboard, and will eventually hold worship on the spaceship Woodhouse, bound for planet Friendship in the Shalom System. God can find us wherever we are together in Spirit.
 - d) Let them know that after some moments, a member of Ministry and Counsel (or a family member) will read the Memorial Minute, to be followed by open worship.
- 3) Allow some silence after the welcome for the meeting to settle.

4) Read the Memorial Minute or Program Spiritual Biography. Some meetings read a finalized Memorial Minute, and some a simpler description of the life of the deceased. In the interest of time, the latter is recommended. If it is to be read, a Memorial Minute can be a provisional minute prepared more quickly than the usual process to be improved upon for the meeting archive, or for an in-person memorial when that is possible. Those who prepare it should remember that it is meant to be a telling of the spiritual journey of the departed Friend, not a narration of events only or a curriculum vitae. (Consult your Faith and Practice for more instruction.)

5) Open the space for waiting worship. Let Friends know that worship will go for about an hour and give a reminder to take a moment between ministry. Be ready to gently interrupt folks who go too long by thanking them. In the meetinghouse this is rarely a problem, but Zoom changes peoples' sense of shared time, especially for phone-in attendees.

6) Have a member of M&C, who has the gift of knowing when worship is at an end, close the worship by thanking Friends for coming together. (Some Friends put their palms up and toward the camera as a version of joining hands to close meeting on Zoom.) Make any announcement about donations in lieu of flowers, etc. You can acknowledge, "When Marianne's family got a television set in the 1950's, that was a big deal. She wouldn't have expected her memorial to look like this, but I believe that she would be glad we've come together to honor her in our traditional way today." (or similar)

7) Fellowship. (Optional) Creating a slideshow/PowerPoint of gathered photos is sometimes a great contribution that can be made by a tech-savvy family member, and can easily be sent out or put on DVD for the family and meeting archive later. As a conclusion, you can share your screen (or the creator of the slideshow can be given permission to share theirs) and show a slideshow of the life of the departed Friend accompanied by music. Turn off your camera and microphone, but leave the meeting up for those who would like to watch the slideshow for a moment. You could also conclude with a song, but Zoom does not allow for unison singing, so it would need to be a solo voice, instrument, or folks on a shared Zoom window (in the same space).

After the Memorial.

- 1) Have a pastoral care committee member follow up with those most affected by the Friend's passing within a week of the memorial. Listen for complicated grief caused by multiple losses, a sense of trauma, or suicidality. Grief itself is not a pathology, but some complicated or traumatic grief needs particular attention. If the person died in the hospital during the COVID-19 outbreak, there is a high probability that family and friends were not able to be at bedside, and this may be a source of pain and even self-recrimination. The pastoral care member should put a check-in time on the calendar in 30 days, at 3, 6, and 12 months, if this is welcomed by the bereaved.

- 2) If your meeting does not already do so, consider having an annual meeting for memorials for all meeting members and attenders who have died. In some meetings, this is just for members and attenders who have died, but other meetings welcome sharing about individual's significant losses outside of Friends.

Carl Magruder, M.Div., BCC, initially wrote this document for SoulWays Spiritual Accompaniment (a Civic Light Project). The document was reviewed by Pacific Yearly Meeting's (PYM) Faith and Practice Revision Committee, which Carl co-clerks, and is presented as a resource for during this time of physical distancing. It has NOT been finalized for PYM's Faith and Practice as of April 24, 2020.

Please contact SoulWays (www.civilight.org/soulways) and let us know how you modified this process to fit your situation, any changes or omissions you noticed, and any successes you might want to share. This helps us improve this tool and share what is working.