

Contents

- ▼ [A Guide to Planning Online Memorial Services During a Pandemic \[1\]](#)
 - [Memorials and Funerals in Times of Physical Distancing \[2\]](#)
 - [Technical Tips for Conducting Online Memorials \[3\]](#)
 - [Planning In-Person Memorial Services When Restrictions are Lifted \[4\]](#)
 - [Tips for Designing Worship Elements for Online Memorial Services \[5\]](#)
 - [What Do We Do Now? A Faith Formation Response to Death During a Global Pandemic \[6\]](#)
 - [Working with the Primary Mourners to Plan an Online Memorial Service \[7\]](#)

A GUIDE TO PLANNING ONLINE MEMORIAL SERVICES DURING A PANDEMIC

By Renee Ruchotzke

April 3, 2020

A Funeral or Memorial Service is a rite of passage when people gather together to mourn and memorialize the person who has died. During a pandemic, when physical presence is not possible, we can still do our best to create time and space to gather in virtual space until such time that a physical gathering is possible.

It is important to hold yourselves gently in taking this on. There is no right way of doing this, and it can't possibly have the same richness of an in-person service. Think of this as an early step in a grieving process where there will be an opportunity to experience a deeper, in-person service in the future.

What follows are resources and ideas to help you plan while accommodating the limitations of not being in person.

For more information contact conglife@uua.org [8].





[9]

MEMORIALS AND FUNERALS IN TIMES OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Part of [A Guide to Planning Online Memorial Services During a Pandemic](#) [1]

By Sarah Gibb Millspaugh

April 3, 2020

When authorities limit in-person gatherings to 25 or 10 or even fewer people, it necessarily affects our capacity to hold funerals and memorial services. We may choose to have a small in-person gathering that fits within local requirements for physical distancing, we may wish to delay services, or we may choose to [hold a service online](#) [3].

Bereaved friends and family may wish to hold their own at-home private memorial service. UU hospice chaplain Rev. Kristen Rohm has created a guide to [Grieving and Creating a Memorial at Home](#) [10] which she and Hospice of Santa Barbara have shared with us.

Burials and cremations are time-sensitive and cannot be delayed until social distancing restrictions are lifted. Local funeral homes will be aware of how many people will be permitted to gather for a graveside service or whether a minister would be permitted to accompany a family to a crematorium.

Memorial services are less time-sensitive, and it will be up to the discretion of families and officiants when and how to hold them. You may wish to hold a memorial service online, with livestreaming and/or videoconferencing software. Our [guidance for worshipping online](#) [11] can help you with the logistics of how such an event can be run. Our [tips for online memorial services](#) [3] can assist you with planning content and participation.

If you choose to postpone a memorial service until a time that physical distancing restrictions are lifted, [we offer some guidance for in-person memorial services](#) [4] that can help planning run more smoothly, especially since congregations may be coordinating multiple services for people who passed away while physical gatherings were prohibited.

Additional Resources for Funerals and Memorials During COVID-19

- [How to Conduct a Funeral Online](#) [12] archived webinar, sponsored April 8, 2020 by Hartford Seminary.

- [Notes on an Online Memorial Service \[13\]](#) by Emily Ruth Mace, April 15, 2020, including PDF resources from the perspective of family, participant, and officiant.

For more information contact conglife@uua.org [8].



[14]

TECHNICAL TIPS FOR CONDUCTING ONLINE MEMORIALS

Part of [A Guide to Planning Online Memorial Services During a Pandemic](#) [1]

By Sarah Gibb Millspaugh

April 3, 2020

How can we adapt something we usually do in person—memorial services and celebrations of life—to happen online over videoconference? It's a question that many of our congregations are facing as we contend with [COVID-19](#) [15] and restrictions on gathering. Some of the challenges are identical to those we face in [bringing worship online](#) [11]. But others are unique. Here are some tips for memorial services that take place online:

- **Choose a widely-accessible platform** for the videoconference, like Zoom or Google Hangouts.
- **Provide orientation to the technology in advance** with an online tutorial or some open “office hours” for calling in. People who are unfamiliar with the technology *and* are bereaved will need some special love and care—consider offering a tutorial/tech rehearsal just for the family and closest friends who will be speaking.
- **Be mindful of privacy and security.** A strange thing about going online is that perfect strangers, even hostile strangers, can enter and disrupt online gatherings if their meeting numbers are posted online and precautions are not taken. Review our [guidance on Zoom safety and unwanted guests](#) [16].
- **Recruit one or more technical hosts.** The technical hosts run the technical side of the gathering, making sure that the slides and music, speakers and guests all can be seen or heard (or not heard) at the appropriate times. The technical host can also record the service and address technical issues as they arise.
- **Set up the “meeting” with a high level of control** for the technical host: disable screen sharing from everyone except pre-authorized people. Do not allow people to unmute themselves or turn their video camera on: ask the host to do it when and if people are taking their turn. Consider disabling the chat feature, as well, as it can be highly distracting. If the meeting is run as a webinar, you can select an option where participants can only chat with the “panelists.” This could be used for participants to send short recollections to the officiant, who can then read them aloud. You do not want someone’s fumbling with their device to accidentally disrupt the whole service.

- **Post an Order of Service online** and share the link in advance, and in the chat box.
- **Create an online receiving line?** Consider inviting participants to sign up for times to greet the bereaved via video, much like they would greet them in a receiving line after an in-person service.
- **Simulate an online reception** with online breakout room conversations, or a slide show of photos, or a time to share informal stories in the videoconference chat.
- **What else?** As more and more of us venture into the relatively new territory of online memorials, we're gaining skills and knowledge. What have you learned? What would you add to this list? Contact [Rev. Sarah Gibb Millsbaugh](mailto:Rev.SarahGibbMillsbaugh@uua.org) [17] with your thoughts.

For more information contact conglife@uua.org [8].



[18]

PLANNING IN-PERSON MEMORIAL SERVICES WHEN RESTRICTIONS ARE LIFTED

Part of [A Guide to Planning Online Memorial Services During a Pandemic](#) [1]

By Sarah Gibb Millspaugh

April 3, 2020

When restrictions on gathering are lifted, many congregations will have several memorial services they will need to schedule and hold. This can be an intense time for your congregation's lay memorial service team, ministers, music directors, and administrators/building managers. Some advance planning to get systems in place will serve you well.

- **Develop a Memorial Service Guide.** This [sample memorial service guide](#) [19], from Winchester Unitarian Society in Massachusetts, is given to the bereaved to help in planning the service and reception. This [sample planning sheet](#) [20] is used by the same congregation so that the minister, music director, administrator, and lay planning team can get the information they need for each memorial event.
- **Recruit and convene a Memorial Services Team.** This team, usually all volunteer, will attend to the logistics of the service and reception: receiving and arranging the catered or potluck food, receiving and arranging the flowers, making coffee and tea, directing traffic in the parking lot and helping guests find their way, serving as ushers and greeters, guiding guests to the restrooms, and more. What are the logistics involved in services and receptions at your congregation? Can you create a spreadsheet of the tasks and roles involved, and orient your whole team to them? And can this team take turns serving at the various services, so they can share the load?
- **Develop Relationships with Local Mortuaries and Funeral Homes.** As death approaches, some families will not know who to call to pick up their loved one's bodies. If the congregation can provide a few recommendations of mortuaries or funeral homes, it will be a kindness to the bereaved in their time of great loss. Further, if the mortuary or funeral home has a role to play in the service, having a relationship in advance will increase your ease of collaboration.
- **Develop Relationships with Trusted Caterers.** When families are devastated after the loss of a loved one, sifting through long lists to find a memorial service caterer can feel overwhelming. If you are able to provide a list of caterers that have done a good job at the congregation's events in the past it can also ease the family's burden.

- **Train Your Memorial Services Team in Safe Food Handling.** When we are able to gather in person again, COVID-19 and other viruses will still be with us. Contact your local health authorities to find out about best practices training for all who handle food and beverages in your congregation.
- **Invest Some Time in Diversifying Your Memorial Service Readings.** In Unitarian Universalism, every memorial service is individualized for the person who it honors. However, we often use similar closing words, opening words, prayers, and readings from service to service. Knowing that you may be conducting far more services this year than in a usual year, take some time to build up your readings so that you aren't repeating the same words at each service (unless, of course, it's an intentional tradition.)

Having some of these logistical things squared away can help the memorial's leadership focus on ministering to the bereaved and comforting them in their grief. It is going to be a long journey of healing, with many members of our congregations feeling loss painfully and acutely. Let us surround them with our loving support as we create meaning services to remember their dear friends and loved ones.

For more information contact conglife@uua.org [8].

TIPS FOR DESIGNING WORSHIP ELEMENTS FOR ONLINE MEMORIAL SERVICES

Part of [A Guide to Planning Online Memorial Services During a Pandemic](#) [1]

By Renee Ruchotzke

April 8, 2020

When designing an online memorial service there are some worshipful elements that can enhance the experience. These are a few ideas that will hopefully spark creativity for your own situation and context. Again, there is no right way to do this! We humans need to be together during times of grief, and an online service cannot meet the deeper needs.



Center Yourself

Being online takes a [special kind of energy](#) [21]. Prepare yourself so that you can be fully present.

Visual Elements

Provide a slide show with photos of the deceased while people are gathering before the service and to play afterward. You may want to include interesting "facts" that didn't fit a eulogy.

If possible, make the space of the service leader free from distractions. You may want to include elements such as fresh flowers, a bowl with water, candles, etc. Don't be tempted to use a video background - authenticity is more important than optics.

The family or other primary mourners may also display flowers, if any were sent to their homes. They also may want to have objects of special meaning with them such as a prayer shawl or stuffed animal.

Also find creative visual ways to mark the beginning and endings of the service elements.

Music

Grief is a time of deep emotion, and music is the most poignant vehicle to express and process emotion. Plan for music between all of the spoken elements

Ritual

Sometimes ritual can provide a container for emotions that are hard to articulate. Encouraging participants to each have a candle to light or an object to share on screen may provide a feeling a connection.

If communion or another ritual is part of the family's practice, you may want to incorporate this into the service. Participants can have their own bread and wine to be blessed and shared during the service.

Silence

Silence may feel awkward online, but taking time to turn off cameras and mics will create space for tears and reflection.

Eulogy(ies)

Online, shorter is better. Encourage the family to save most of the stories for the physical memorial service.

Pastoral Online Housekeeping

The Rev. Alexa Fraser offers a sample script to welcome people to Zoom with a tone appropriate to the occasion.

This is a different format of service. Different and yet the same. The same because it is a tradition a millennia old to gather to grieve when a person dies. We gather for all but maybe particularly when the person was so loved, so filled with life and love and so young.

And it is different because we are in different physical places. We use this tool called Zoom to be together today, and it will be enough. But it will be different so let me mention to those of you who aren't familiar with the tool a few features that will help you participate fully.

- You will notice you are muted. That is so background noise in one home doesn't impact all of us.
- Please look at the upper right corner of your screen. You go there to click "speaker view" to see the person who is talking. The alternative is "gallery view" and you might want to see all of us assembled together, but mostly we recommend you use "speaker view". Also the Order of Service for today's event has its own screen. You can click on that as you would to look at a paper program of the service.

- There is a chat button at the bottom of your screen. If you click on that you can see any comments anyone has made and that will serve as a virtual guest book. We invite you to send love through chat, and we'll save that and provide it to the family.
- At the end of the service we will create a virtual receiving line by breaking into groups. The family will visit you in each group or room.

Last, a recording will be made of the service as a permanent record for the family of this day.

At the end she explains about the breakout rooms and how we will use them so the family can first be together and then join the larger group.

Resources

Webinar: [Distance Funerals, Complicated Grief: \[22\]](#) Gathering to grieve during COVID19 - Chaplaincy Innovation Lab

For more information contact conglife@uua.org [8].

WHAT DO WE DO NOW? A FAITH FORMATION RESPONSE TO DEATH DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Part of [A Guide to Planning Online Memorial Services During a Pandemic](#) [1]

By Mark Hicks

May 19, 2020

When his brother died of COVID-19, Mark Hicks helped to plan a meaningful memorial for his family. This is his story.

[Video on YouTube](#) [23]

For more information contact conglife@uua.org [8].

WORKING WITH THE PRIMARY MOURNERS TO PLAN AN ONLINE MEMORIAL SERVICE

Part of [A Guide to Planning Online Memorial Services During a Pandemic](#) [1]

By Renee Ruchotzke

April 8, 2020

In order to create a memorial service that is meaningful, you will want to spend "slow time" with those who were closest to the deceased. Your gift of listening is an important part of spiritual care for the bereaved.

This is a time to listen to stories, to learn important details and to be a listening presence as they do what they need as part of the grieving process. If you've been in contact with the health professionals or others who knew the deceased, collect their stories and anecdotes. Take notes -- both for the online service and for a physical service later.



Some of the details you will want to collect include:

- Dates of birth and death
- Names of family and other primary mourners
- Marriage(s)
- Theology and/or religious history of the deceased as well as the primary mourners
- Vocation(s)
- Places they've lived
- Other details that made them the unique being that they were
- Difficulties or Regrets (Acknowledge that the deceased was not perfect)

You will also want to ask if the deceased had favorite songs, poems or hymns that they might want included in the service. Keep these notes for when you plan the physical service in the future.

For more information contact conglife@uua.org [8].

Source URL: <https://www.uua.org/book/244662>

Links

- [1] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/memorials>
- [2] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/physical-distance-memorials>
- [3] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/memorials/online>
- [4] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/person-memorials>
- [5] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/memorials/online-memorial-elements>
- [6] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/memorials/hicks-memorial>
- [7] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/memorials/primary-mourners>
- [8] <mailto:conglife@uua.org>
- [9] <https://assets.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/cemetery-grass.jpeg>
- [10] https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/at_home_memorial_rohm.pdf
- [11] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/streaming>
- [12] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAi4LbGa02k&feature=youtu.be>
- [13] <https://www.emilyrmace.com/notes-on-a-zoom-memorial-service/>
- [14] <https://assets.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/bouquet-of-flowers.jpeg>
- [15] <https://www.uua.org/safe/pandemics/covid-19>
- [16] <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/zoom-bombing>
- [17] <https://www.uua.org/offices/people/sarah-gibb-millspaugh>
- [18] <https://assets.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/candle-service.jpeg>
- [19] <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RhQFaB4bTZX5Ly0E4oEO1ZFNwNRQgwSG/view?usp=sharing>
- [20] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PktDWBBWh_dSeCiBR4vLZj2DVjVtSvCv/view?usp=sharing
- [21] <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mindful.org%2Fzoom-exhaustion-is-real-here-are-six-ways-to-find-balance-and-stay-connected>
- [22] <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/2020/04/webinar-distance-funerals-complicated-grief-gathering-to-grieve-during-covid19>
- [23] <http://www.youtube.com/video/mJIVrQBgHsU?rel=0>

