

Pastoral Care for the Families of the Deceased During Covid-19:

A Zoom Remembrance Service

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INTRODUCTION

Many aspects of our lives have changed in a very short period of time. Coronavirus has changed our lives in unexpected and unwanted ways. One aspect of the challenge of living in these times is dealing with death, dying and grief. While these are always human realities, now they are exacerbated by a virus, which is experienced the world over. Grief becomes increasingly complicated and painful when the person dying dies alone from Covid-19. This strange time raises painful and crucial questions: What happens when a loved one is dying and the family is unable to be at their side through the dying process? What happens when a family member is dying and their family is unable to properly say goodbye? What happens when the family cannot gather around their dying loved one to be present, tell stories, share memories and prepare for the separation to come? What happens when familiar funeral rituals cannot be *observed* at the time of death?

In many of our cultural and religious traditions, rituals provide structure and predictability in the aftermath of death. The *Order of Christian Funerals*, #52, refers to the importance of ritual planning as a ministry of consolation, which offers comfort in the time of grief, loss, and distress. Ritual has the very real power to do this, but what happens when these rituals are taken away? Due to the government restrictions because of the virus, gathering with many family and friends is no longer an option. The rituals that humans have relied on for centuries to help grieve and heal are not an immediate option in our pandemic reality. When these rituals do not occur, often grief becomes prolonged and complicated. The impact on family and friends is immeasurable.

The following “Zoom Remembrance” resource is being suggested as an unofficial ritual; a source of pastoral care and accompaniment for families and friends wishing to remember their deceased while waiting for Covid-19 restrictions to be lifted and funerals can be resumed. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis stated that we need a Church capable of walking at people’s sides – a Church, which accompanies people on their journey. A Zoom Remembrance service might serve as one way to accompany people in their deepest loss and in that loss to further evangelize them with the Gospel. This virtual resource can assist all to remember the deceased through shared stories of God’s abiding presence in the midst of grief. Stories convey important information to others in ways that few other forms of communication can accomplish. The following is basic information on what a Zoom Remembrance is and how to plan one, speak at one, and attend one.

What is a Zoom Remembrance?

A Zoom Remembrance is an interactive and collaborative prayer service of remembrance conducted through audio and video web conferencing allowing families, friends, Church families, and colleagues to pastorally care for the loved ones of the deceased. These individuals can gather from all over to memorialize, eulogize, and celebrate those who have died during the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic. Using a desktop, tablet or mobile device, this virtual online service can easily be used to participate and view a Zoom Remembrance. Zoom Remembrances are not meant to take the place of a traditional funeral but might serve as a time of grief support and remembrance to loved ones and families until Covid-19 restrictions are lifted and the Funeral Mass or Memorial Mass of the deceased can be celebrated.

What is Zoom and How to Get It?

Zoom is the leader in modern enterprise video communications, with an easy, reliable cloud platform for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat, webinars, and so much more, across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems. Go to <https://zoom.us/> to learn how to host a Zoom gathering.

Who are the Speakers for a Zoom Remembrance?

Speakers are individuals that actively participate in the Zoom Remembrance service. These might include funeral directors, clergy, a cantor (singer), musicians, and immediate family and friends who typically provide prayers, scripture, music, eulogies, and stories of the deceased. Similar to a traditional funeral when the family asks someone to speak, a Zoom Remembrance speaker will receive an invitation by email in advance of the service. This invitation includes pertinent information about the service but also the time of the service. This link is unique to the speakers and should not be shared with the general public.

Who are Guests and Attendees?

Guests or attendees are anyone joining or clicking the link to join watch and/or listen to the Zoom Memorial. Anyone who is attending to join, watch and/or listen to the service can access the publicly accessible link that will be shared on the host website or circulated via email.

How to Speak and Participate at a Service

1. The virtual Zoom Remembrance service information can be found in the email that you will receive from the Zoom Remembrance host.
2. You are highly encouraged to test your Zoom connection prior to the service so that you do not find yourself having an issue at the last minute. You can test your Zoom connection on your computer, phone, or tablet here: <https://zoom.us/test>
3. Try to join the virtual service twenty (20) minutes early to make sure your technology is running properly. This way you will not be late if there is a connection issue or something on your device is not working.

4. By joining early, you will have an opportunity to speak with the host and, in some cases, the immediate family prior to the service beginning.
5. Click on the link in the email to the Zoom Remembrance (You will be able to “enter” the session once the host starts the Zoom Remembrance).
6. You may be asked to launch or install the Zoom application if you have not used it before. (Again, when you test your connection ahead of time at <https://zoom.us/test>, this will ensure you have everything set up correctly.)
7. Once launched, you will be asked to type in your full name and email address.
8. If you join prior to the host starting the service you will see a box with a message stating the “Zoom Reembrace will begin shortly.”
9. You will automatically join the service when it begins.
10. Prepare your brief remarks well in advance of the service and rehearse them.
11. When it is your time to speak, the host will introduce and prompt you.
12. Please check that your microphone is unmuted and that your video is started if you wish to be seen, prior to speaking.
13. Speak clearly into the microphone on your computer, tablet, or mobile device.
14. After you are finished speaking, make sure that your microphone is muted to avoid background noise while others are speaking.
15. At the conclusion of the service, you can exit by pressing, “Leave” or by closing the browser screen.

Etiquette for Speakers

1. Remember that what you participate in is prayer.
2. Except when enabling and disabling your speaking functions, remember to keep your hands off the keyboard and close your email and other programs so you can give the Zoom Remembrance Service your complete attention.
3. Dress properly. When you are called upon to speak your video may be enabled. Although you are remote, it is still a prayer service so you want to be respectful. Remember, people will be able to see you.
4. Unless you are speaking, keep your device muted until it is time to talk. The host may also have you (and everyone else) muted and he/she will unmute you at the proper time. There is usually a two-to-three second delay after someone talks, so it is best to speak clearly and concisely.
5. Choose an appropriate background and find a quiet space that appears professional and is free from distractions.

TYPICAL ELEMENTS OF A ZOOM REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

What follows are some suggested elements of a Zoom Remembrance. The service is one of prayer and respect. The suggested Order of Service tends to have a ritual format, but again, each ceremony is unique. Forty-five minutes would be a long time for guests to sit quietly, so the host should be conscious of the time.

It is best to have a celebrant or host, who knows the deceased and family leading the Zoom prayer experience. The Zoom Remembrance is created so that either a member of the clergy or

layperson can lead it. It takes a special skillset to ‘hold’ the energy, to keep on track, to ensure that all are comfortable and can hear, see, etc.

Finally, encourage many voices – have family and friends attend to read a scripture passage, a prayer or share a favorite story. One person should be identified, in advance, to prepare and give the eulogy. A cantor or singer can share favorite hymns or songs. It is important to have a large, framed photo of the deceased present perhaps with candles and flowers.

CONCLUSION

Stories help us make sense of our world. We build our lives on them, we base our cultures upon them, and, we create our reality with them. Stories help shape us, bring us meaning, create us, and they also heal, bring us comfort, and alleviate pain. This is definitely true of our faith stories. Zoom Remembrances can be an opportunity for sharing of memories, celebration and remembering life moments before the official funeral. The power of storytelling in a Zoom Remembrance, when done well, can help restore a sense of order in a world of loss, can help participants rediscover the meaning of life, and renew hope in the hearts of grieving family and friends. Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” A Zoom Remembrance Service allows for that gathering of two, or three or more, in Jesus’ name, albeit in a different context than some might be used to, to share stories of faith and life. When this happens, surely, Jesus is present! What follows is a sample Order of Service for a Zoom Remembrance Service.

ORDER OF SERVICE

MUSIC or GATHERING HYMN

WELCOME

(By the host or celebrant. Remember those who cannot participate)

CANDLE LIGHTING

A CALL to WORSHIP (The Sign of the Cross) and GREETING

CULTURAL RELIGIOUS RITUALS

OPENING PRAYER *

SCRIPTURE READING(S) **

EULOGY & BIOGRAPHY

REMEMBRANCES FROM FAMILY & INVITED FRIENDS

(These should be brief and have someone facilitate in case someone goes long or is inappropriate)

MEDITATION MUSIC or SOLOIST
INTERCESSIONS***
THE LORD'S PRAYER
CLOSING WORDS FROM FAMILY and ANNOUNCEMENTS
CLOSING PRAYER & BLESSING****
CLOSING HYMN/SONG

***Sample Opening Prayer**

Leader: Lord, in our grief we turn to you. Are you not the God of love who opens your ears to all? Listen to our prayers for _____ whom you have called out of this world: Lead him/her to your kingdom of light and peace and count him/her among the saints in glory. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**** Sample Scripture Passages**

Old Testament

Job 19:1,23-27 "...I know that my redeemer lives..."
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 "...A time to be born, a time to die..."
Wisdom 3:1-9 "...The souls of the just are in the hand of God..."
Wisdom 4:7-14 "The Righteous One, though he die early, shall be at rest..."
Sirach 2:1-11 "...in fire gold is tested....Compassionate is the Lord..."
Isaiah 25:6,7-9 "...he will destroy death forever..."
Isaiah 35:1-10 "...Here is your God, he comes with vindication..."
Isaiah 40:1-11 "...Here is your God, Here comes with power..."
Lamentations 3:17-26 "...My portion is the Lord, says my soul..."
Ezekiel 37:12-14 "O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise..."

New Testament

Acts 10:34-43 "...Everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins"
Romans 5:5-11 "...We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son..."
Romans 5:17-21 "...through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all..."
Romans 6:3-9 "...if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall live with him..."
Romans 6:3-4.8-9 "...if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall live with him..."
Romans 8:14-23 "...Those who are led by the Spirit of God are Children of God"
Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 "...If God is for us, who can be against us?"
Romans 14:7-9, 10-12 "...This is why Christ died and came to life"

[1 Corinthians 2:6-10](#) "...Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard..."
[1 Corinthians 15:20-28](#) "In Adam all die, so too if Christ shall all be brought to life."
[1 Corinthians 15:51-57](#) "Death where is your victory?"
[2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1](#) "The one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us..."
[2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10](#) "We would rather leave the body and go home..."
[Philippians 3.7-14](#) "...I run toward the prize to which God calls me..."
[Philippians 3.20-21\(1\)](#) "He will change our lowly body..."
[2 Timothy 2:8-13](#) "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead..."
[2 Timothy 4:1-2, 6-8](#) "I have competed well, I have finished the race..."
[1 John 3:1-2](#) "Beloved, we are God's children now..."
[1 John 3:14-16](#) "We know that we have passed from death to life..."
[Revelation 14:13](#) "...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord..."
[Revelation 21:1-5, 6-7](#) "...I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem..."

Gospel

[Matthew 5:1-12](#) "The Eight Beatitudes"
[Matthew 11:25-30](#) "come to me . . . and I will give you rest."
[Matthew 25:31-46](#) "Come, you whom my Father has blessed"
[Mark 15:33-16:6](#) "Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last"
[Luke 7:11-17](#) "Young man, I say to you, arise."
[Luke 23:33, 39-43](#) "Today you will be with me in paradise."
[John 5:24-29](#) "Whoever hears my word and believes has passed from..."
[John 6:37-40](#) "All who believe in the Son will have eternal life..."
[John 6:51-58](#) "All who eat this bread will live forever..."
[John 11:17-27](#) "I am the resurrection and the life."
[John 11:32-45](#) "Lazarus, come out."
[John 12:23-28](#) "If a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies..."
[John 14.1-6](#) "There are many rooms in my Father's house."
[John 17.24-26](#) "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me..."

*** Sample Prayers of Intercession

Leader: God, the almighty Father, raised Christ his son from the dead; with confidence we ask him to save all his people, living and dead:

Reader: Please respond, "*hear our prayer*" after each petition

Reader: For _____ who in baptism was given the pledge of eternal life, that he/she may now be admitted to the company of the saints. Lord, in your mercy; R) hear our prayer.

Reader: For _____ who ate the body of Christ, the bread of life that he/she may be raised up on the last day. Lord, in your mercy; R) hear our prayer.

Reader: For our deceased relatives and friends and for all who have helped us, that they may have the reward of their goodness. Lord, in your mercy; R) hear our prayer.

Reader: For those who have fallen asleep in the hope of rising again, that they may see God face to face. Lord, in your mercy; R) hear our prayer.

Reader: For all of us, the family and friends of _____ that we may be consoled in our grief by the Lord, who wept at the death of his friend, Lazarus. Lord, in your mercy; R) hear our prayer.

Leader: God, our shelter and our strength, you listen in love to the cry of your people: hear the prayers we offer for our departed brothers and sisters. Cleanse them of their sins and grant them the fullness of redemption. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*****Sample Closing Prayer and Blessing**

Leader: Lord God, You entrusted _____ to our care in our family and our circle of friends. Now you embrace him/her in your love. Take _____ into your keeping together with all who have died. Comfort us who remain, for we seek to do your will and to know your saving peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God, we pray that you will show us the path of life and the fullness of joy in your presence.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.