Death and Memorials

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:33-35

Now I am clear, I am fully clear!

From George Fox’s last words, 1/13/1691

They that love beyond the World cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies. Nor can Spirits ever be divided that love and live in the same Divine Principle…. They live in one another still.

William Penn, 1693

Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-worn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home to Itself.

Thomas Kelly, 1941

A Friends’ memorial meeting for worship is a beautiful ritual, in its celebration of the life of the person who has died. But an elderly Friend in our meeting once expressed concern after a memorial that we had only spoken of the person’s life, not of their dying and death.

Part of the beauty of a memorial meeting is that it allows for not only memories and recollections, but for the immediate and continuing experience of deep connection with the person who has died, and shared connections among those who loved that person. In a sense, our memorial meetings are held for “that of God” in the dead person, and held by and with “that of God” in each of us. Therefore, the Friend who reminded us to acknowledge dying and death along with life was reminding us that “that of God” was present not only in the active life of this individual in the world, but also in her essential, stripped-down presence as she died.

Kirsten Backstrom, In Beauty: A Quaker Approach to End-of-Life Care, 2001

[[new quotations added—Biblical, George Fox, Kirsten Backstrom]]
See “Stages of Life” in the chapter on Living in the Spirit for discussion of the spiritual and community aspects of death.

Death often faces us with the most difficult of questions, yet it may be the occasion of our most profound insights into the meaning of life. As Friends seek to surround the bereaved with love and care, the sustaining power of God can bring to all concerned not only courage but a transforming truth about death and life itself. Although life instinctively avoids death, death is not the opposite of life. It is essential to the ongoing, changing nature of life.

Preparing for Death

**Individual Friends’ Responsibilities.** Friends are encouraged to prepare their wills and other documents concerned with end-of-life planning, and not to postpone dealing with these important matters. The will must be kept current in order to provide properly for members of the family, particularly minor children, and for the stewardship of property. A simple will can be written, but to be most helpful to the family it must be written with the knowledge of state laws.

**[Question for NPYM Friends: should the paragraph above give a more complete list (advanced directives, etc.)? If so, what do you suggest including?]**

Many Friends belong to memorial societies which contract with given mortuaries in an area for prompt, simple, and inexpensive disposition of the body, frequently through cremation.** It is useful to keep on file, often with membership records, members’ own personal suggestions about arrangements desired at the time of their death, including a list of persons to be notified. A suggested form for this purpose is found at the end of this chapter. Meetings are responsible to remind members to review and update this information every few years.

**[Names and addresses of memorial societies may be obtained from: Continental Association of Funeral and Memorial Societies, Suite 1100, 1828 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20036.**

**The Meeting’s Responsibilities.** When Friends suffer the loss of a loved one, there is sustaining strength in the loving concern and help of the Meeting and its members. It is important for the Meeting to be prepared about its responsibilities at the time of death. The Pastoral Care Committee* carries the main responsibility. A good resource for the Committee and the Meeting is the pamphlet “When Death Occurs in the Meeting.” ** It is helpful for the Committee to have a general plan of procedure worked out in advance and to have acquainted appropriate mortuaries with Friends’ attitudes and desires, thus reducing explanations to a minimum at the time of death.

*The Oversight Committee* is a traditional Quaker name for the committee that organizes memorials, handles requests for membership or marriage under the care of the meeting, and coordinates help and comfort for Friends in need. In many meetings this function is combined with care for the community’s spiritual life, hence the common name “Ministry & Oversight Committee” —the name used by NPYM and its Quarterly Meetings. However, “oversight” has connotations of slavery for many Friends, and they may use some other name in their meetings, such as Ministry & Counsel for a combined committee. Each Friends’ group names its committees in its own way. Reflecting the concern about “oversight,” this Faith and Practice uses “Pastoral Care Committee” for the committee in a local Friends’ group that has responsibility for memorials, memberships, etc.

**[Footnote added to explain usage of this committee name throughout Faith and Practice]**


**[Questions for NPYM Friends: Does this paragraph accurately describe your meeting’s preparation? Is there anything to be added? Does your meeting have contact with local mortuaries as described here? Do you use the materials mentioned in the 2nd footnote? What other resources do you use?]**

**[Would it be valuable to add suggestions or examples of how a Meeting community can assist a terminally ill Friend and his or her family? Would it be valuable to add something about how the...**
Meetings can help Friends prepare for death, and can assist family members, as needed, in carrying out responsibilities after the death. It is the responsibility of the Pastoral Care Committee to give whatever specific help may be necessary, and bereaved Friends are urged to make their needs known. The committee asks appropriate Friends to visit and counsel with the family or friends of the deceased, and to offer any needed assistance such as notifying relatives and friends or helping to plan a memorial meeting, and to assist in whatever ways the particular situation suggests.

**Memorial Meetings**

Friends’ testimony on simplicity and consideration for the wishes of the family govern the arrangements to be made. Friends generally feel that prompt and simple disposition of the body is appropriate, followed at a suitable time by a Memorial Meeting held in the regular place of worship or at some other suitable place.

For Friends, a Memorial Meeting is a Meeting for Worship on the occasion of death. Such a Memorial Meeting is approached in a spirit of peace and trust. It is an opportunity to come together to celebrate in the Light a life that has held meaning for us, and to support each other in healing our grief. Music or a prepared statement may be used if consistent with the spirit of the Meeting and the desire of the family. The use of flowers in such a Meeting is much the same as it might be in a Meeting for Worship. If persons other than Friends are expected to be present, it is helpful to have available a prepared statement explaining Friends’ Memorial Meetings. Near its beginning, a selected Friend may talk briefly about the manner of the Meeting, and describe how it will close. Some Meetings follow the practice of reading a brief biography of the deceased Friend and find that it frequently supplies information and insights of which more recent acquaintances have been unaware, and helps to draw together a group representing diverse areas of the Friend’s life.

[[previous paragraph divided into 2 for clarity]]

[[Questions for NPYM Friends: What has helped your Meeting in special cases such as:]]

- **Death of children**
- **Suicides (either assisted or unexpected)**

[[Has your group ever held a Meeting for Memorial after the death of a respected public figure? After a distressing event such as September 11? If so, how did you handle it?]]

**Memorial Minutes**

The Pastoral Care Committee prepares a memorial minute

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**Suggested Steps in Planning a Memorial Meeting**

**Pastoral Care Committee responsibilities**

- Check Meeting records for wishes at time of death.
- Name member(s) of Committee who will meet with the family:
  - Offer condolences and help;
  - Discuss condolences and help;
- Update wishes for memorial meeting.

**Notifications**

- Send obituary to media if desired.
- State where to send donations.
- Write memorial minute; send to family, to NPYM, to Quaker publications if desired.

**Logistics**

- Plan physical arrangements:
  - Location, date, time;
  - Expected attendance;
  - Room set-up;
  - Seating for close family;
  - Display tables if desired;
  - Parking;
  - Equipment if needed;
  - Help for guests with special needs;
  - Extra chairs if needed.
- Plan child care if needed.
- Plan social gathering & food if desired.
- Plan for flowers if desired (order, placement, what to do with them after the memorial).

**Program planning**

- Write & produce printed program:
  - Order of service, if any;
  - Biographical sketch or memorial minute;
  - Photograph;
- Description of Memorial Meeting in the manner of Friends.
- Designate who will open the meeting and introduce Friends’ practice at memorials.
- Designate who will close meeting.
about the deceased member and presents it to an upcoming Meeting for Business for inclusion in the minutes. Memorial minutes typically include a brief biography (often with special emphasis on the person’s activities among Friends), mention of the surviving family, and the date of the memorial meeting. The Clerk or Recording Clerk sends copies of the memorial minute to the family and to the Yearly Meeting. Copies of the minute may also be sent to Western Friend and other Friends’ publications.

[[description of memorial minutes added]]

[[Is it your group’s routine practice to send memorial minutes to your Quarterly Meeting?]]

Some questions for discussion around Death & Memorials in NPYM’s Faith & Practice

From NPYM Friends and the Committee on the Discipline

- Should Faith & Practice include a more complete list of legal documents which Friends should keep up to date (advanced directives, etc.)? If so, what do you suggest including?
- Does your Friends’ group keep such legal documents for all members, or only for members who request it?
- Does your group keep a completed Information and Instructions on Final Affairs form for all members, or only for members who request it?
- If your Friends’ group uses a different form than the one shown in Faith and Practice pp. 101-102, please send a copy to the Committee on the Discipline.
- Does this chapter accurately describe your group’s preparation for deaths? Is there anything to be added? Does your meeting have contact with local mortuaries as described here? Do you use the materials mentioned in the footnote on p. 100? What other resources do you use?
- Would it be valuable for this chapter to include suggestions or examples of how a Friends’ group can assist a terminally ill Friend and his or her family? Would it be valuable to add something about how the group can handle its own anticipatory grief?
- Is it your group’s routine practice to send memorial minutes to your Quarterly Meeting as well as to Yearly Meeting?
- How has your group met the challenge of losing a Friend who has carried many responsibilities for the Quaker community?
- What has helped your group in special cases such as:
  - Death of children
  - Suicides (either assisted [in WA and OR] or unexpected)
- Has your group ever held a Meeting for Memorial after the death of a respected public figure? After a distressing event such as September 11? If so, how did you handle it?
- Would it be helpful for this chapter to include ways a Friends’ group can remember deceased Friends apart from the Meeting for Memorial? (such as a memory plaque, special plants around the Meetinghouse, or an annual Meeting for Memorials to honor all deceased members and attenders)
### Information and Instructions on Final Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Soc. Sec. No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
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I request that the Religious Society of Friends carry out the following upon my death:

The information below may help the Religious Society of Friends carry out my wishes:

1. **Persons to notify immediately** (next of kin, local contacts, executor, etc.). Use back of form for additional names.
   - Name | Name
   - Address | Address
   - Telephone | Telephone
   - Relationship | Relationship

2. **Member of Memorial Society?**
   - [ ]No   - [ ]Yes:
   - Name
   - Address
   - Telephone

3. **Disposal of Body:**
   - [ ]Burial   - [ ]Cremation   - [ ]Medical or Scientific uses (describe)
   - If cremation, wishes for disposal of ashes
   - If burial, preferred cemetery
   - [ ]Common plot   - [ ]Family plot
   - Plot designation
   - Location of deed
   - Location of release papers
   - Preferred undertaker

4. **Burial Insurance:**
   - Company
   - Policy #
   - If there is no insurance, expenses will be met as follows

5. **Services desired** (include pertinent details; use back of form if needed)
   - [ ]Memorial Meeting for Worship   - [ ]Funeral   - [ ]Other (describe)
   - Special requests

6. **Flowers will be accepted**
   - [ ]No   - [ ]Yes; where:
   - In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to

7. **Special instructions if death occurs far from home**

8. **Location of will**
   - Location of insurance policies

9. **Instructions for care of minor children if there is no surviving parent**

10. **Information for death certificate** (must agree with legal records and policies)
    - Full legal name
    - Current address
    - Date of birth
    - Birthplace
    - Citizenship
    - Occupation
    - Present Employer
    - Employer’s address
    - Father’s full name
    - Mother’s maiden name

   **Signature**
   - Date
   **Received for meeting by**
   - Date