

*Memorial*

*Meeting*

*Preparation*

*Checklist*

## *Things to do in Preparing for a Memorial*

The death of a beloved member or attender can be a trying time for a Friends meeting. Ideally, the meeting community will unite in love and mutual support. Knowing in advance what steps are needed to assist the bereaved and prepare for a memorial service can help foster such unity. With this in mind, the Ministry and Advancement Committee of Illinois Yearly Meeting has prepared this brief account of matters that to consider following the death of a member, attender, or loved one related to the meeting community.

It should be clear in advance which meeting committee is responsible for memorial preparation. That committee needs to take action as soon as possible after notification of a death, beginning with the appointment of a point person to take on various responsibilities and to communicate with the proper parties. Designating a point person, and clarifying this within the committee and with the family of the deceased, will help avoid ambiguities, duplication of effort, miscommunications, and missed steps – all of which can lead to problems at a time when those involved are least able to handle them well.

While many of the matters listed below should be undertaken by the meeting, some are typically handled by a funeral home – often selected from an elaborate *a la carte* menu, for a fee that quickly adds up. Having the meeting's committee and point person acting on behalf of the family can be an important statement of Friends' testimony on simplicity, and can result in significant savings, both material and emotional, to the bereaved.

The following are among the items that should be considered following a death in the meeting family:

1. **Ministering to the family of the deceased.** The period immediately following the death of a loved one invariably involves grief, and Friends dealing with the family need to be sensitive to that fact. Anyone serving in this role needs to be a listener as much as a dispenser of information. He or she needs to be prepared to address a number of sensitive issues, including what to do with the body (burial, cremation, etc.) and whether any assistance is needed in matters of this sort.

While preparation for the memorial service needs to proceed apace, planning for it cannot trump consideration for the family of the deceased. Planning the service is part of our ministry to the family of the deceased, not merely done for the convenience of the meeting.

2. **Obituary/Death Notice.** While this is separate from the memorial minute (see below), it is an important base to cover. It's right to inquire of the family as to its progress, or even to find someone else to take it on, if the family is unable to do so. We owe it to the larger public simply to let folks know that the person in question has died. If necessary, someone can work with the family in drafting the notice. This will entail knowing the local standards for submission (word-counts, pictures, deadlines, costs, etc.). Such standards can usually be obtained with a phone call or on-line and should go into the appropriate committee's files for future reference.
3. **Memorial Minute.** Monthly meetings are expected to prepare a memorial minute to forward to the yearly meeting for presentation at the annual sessions. Deciding who will write this on behalf of the meeting should be made as soon after the death as possible. While the memorial minute bears some similarity to the obituary/death notice, it differs in that it need not be composed as quickly and is intended for Friends rather than for the general public. Information the departed person might have provided, particularly with respect to their Quaker activities, can be helpful in preparing this, as can the obituary itself.
4. **Arrangements for a venue other than the Meetinghouse.** Consideration of the memorial service should begin by assessing the likelihood of attenders filling or overflowing the space the meeting has to offer. Most alternative locations will either charge a fee or expect a contribution. Regardless of the space selected for the memorial service, the following matters need to be clarified in advance: access to a kitchen; availability of tables, chairs, and serving ware; who sets up, takes down, and cleans up; proper parking space for family and guests; etc. Nothing should be taken for granted.

5. **Getting the word out.** There are at least three groups who need to know about the memorial meeting: family and friends, the meeting community, and the local community. The obituary may serve the last group, and a meeting email list may cover the meeting community. The meeting should offer help to the family in notifying far-flung friends and family, particularly if the deceased was alone or local survivor(s) are elderly. Friends and family should be given notice before a general announcement is made concerning the memorial service. Printing up a postcard with information on the memorial on one side is one easy way to get word out to a large number of folks quickly.
6. **Overnight hospitality.** If there are people coming to the memorial service from out of town, it is very helpful to offer hospitality. The meeting should let the family know who will coordinate hospitality. If there will not be enough sleeping space in homes, it may be possible to arrange a group rate at a local motel.
7. **Participation by family.** Don't forget the young people! While some children will be able to sit through the memorial service, it may be necessary to provide childcare, especially for the younger ones. Be sure that parents know about this when they arrive and that they can bring their children to the childcare site at any time during the memorial.
8. **Flowers.** These are usually part of the memorial—whether available in and around the worship space, or on a separate table—and can be very simple (from people's gardens) or more elaborate arrangements obtained from a florist. Check with the family on their preferences. Family members may have had floral tributes sent to a funeral home that they can bring (or allow someone else to pick up) and which can be added to the service. Choosing where these go after the service should be part of the planning.
9. **Displays.** Often, a meaningful part of a funeral, memorial, or visitation is a space where photographs, awards/citations/certificates, and personal mementos can be shown and appreciated, as people are arriving, after the service itself, or both. Accumulating and deciding on a mode of display for

such mementos – possibly including electronic projection – can be a meaningful way that a family member can contribute, but it shouldn't be expected of them. Make advance arrangements so that tables or easels are available.

10. **Memorial Handout.** This is completely optional, but it is something that families often choose to have available. Even though Friends' worship is unprogrammed, the order of service can be outlined, with names and functions of those agreeing to participate in particular roles. If a flyer is handed to those coming in, this may include the obituary and/or the memorial minute. Organizing and producing this requires planning—there are a number of elements going into it, and clear responsibility should be assigned. Check with the family regarding inclusion of a photo or other graphics, as well as paper stock, color, etc. Allow enough time for compiling, laying out, duplicating, and arranging for people to hand out copies at the doors.
11. **Some other possible considerations in planning for the memorial service:**
  - ❖ Traffic controllers to direct cars in parking.
  - ❖ A greeter(s) to welcome people at the door, pointing out the guest book if there is one, and handing out the memorial flyer if there is one.
  - ❖ At least one basket for condolence cards.
  - ❖ Ushers to seat people, especially latecomers.
  - ❖ A microphone runner if needed.
  - ❖ A musical offering, before, during, or at the end of the worship, at the family's discretion.
  - ❖ Advance designation of someone to read the obituary or memorial minute, if this will be done during the memorial service.
  - ❖ Information about any organizations designated as recipients of memorial contributions. It isn't necessary to have the addresses -- just the name that should go on a check, and then have the committee take charge of mailing them in.

12. **Opening and Closing Worship.** Prior to the service, make sure that someone (often the clerk of the meeting or a family member) is designated to open the service with a brief explanation of a Quaker Memorial, including how the hour will proceed, how the conclusion will be signaled, and where refreshments/visitation will take place. Attenders should be told about the nature of Quaker worship and encouraged to offer ministry in as spirit-led a manner as possible, keeping in mind that some attenders are unlikely to have ever set foot in a Quaker meeting house before this service. An example of an initial announcement is given below. It is also helpful if this information is provided in written form to people as they enter. The person who makes the initial announcement should also conclude the worship service.
13. **Refreshments.** This is an important opportunity for people to continue the memorial process after the conclusion of the service. Refreshments can consist of finger foods, a light meal, a potluck, or whatever suits the needs of the family. A food coordinator, perhaps a member of the meeting's Hospitality Committee, should take charge of this well in advance of the date of the service.
14. **Death Certificate.** Be sure to get multiple certified copies of the death certificate, both for claiming survivor and insurance benefits and for those who have traveled from a distance and can claim a bereavement fare.

The needs of the family of the deceased will continue after the memorial service. Friends will need to be especially sensitive to how much those who are grieving need continuing support, and how much they wish to be left alone. Friends' experience shows that a well-handled and well-attended memorial service can be a very important step in the process of consoling the bereaved and bonding the meeting community.

## *A Sample Introduction for A Quaker Memorial Service*

Quakers gather for worship in silent expectation. We believe that in the silence all people can experience God directly. We have no minister, no altar, no sermon, and no choir. Any ministry that occurs comes from those in attendance, including you, who feel led to speak or share a song or a reading.

Today, we encourage you to share any thoughts or stories you have about **[name]** that are especially meaningful to you. It is helpful if you stand to speak so that others can hear you better. Please leave a few moments between messages so that all have the opportunity to reflect on the previous message.

The memorial service will last approximately an hour, or until all who wish to speak have had a chance to do so. Meeting will be closed with a handshake. There will be an opportunity for informal visitation afterwards **[specify location and whether there will be food]**.