

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Overseers, Ministry and Counsel,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends meetings*

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Preparing for Memorial Services

by Sue Heath

Over the years I have taken part in many Friends memorial services, and the hand of God can be seen in these meaningful times. They are often true miracles, as people come even when not expected and share wonderful celebrations of the person's life. There is that of God in each of us, and memorial services bring out the very best.

The role of Overseers

The death of a member is a time for Overseers to minister to the family and friends of the deceased and to the meeting membership as a whole. When Overseers assist with some of the routine details, family and friends can concentrate on their feelings, on other mourners, and on the way the deceased wanted to be remembered and memorialized.

Overseers will find it very helpful to be prepared in advance with information about local funeral homes, burial grounds, cremation, funds available to assist families with funeral expenses, and so on. They should know state laws and local regulations regarding embalming, burial, scattering of ashes, etc., as well as local funeral directors' understanding of Quaker simplicity. In most states, a mortuary needs to be involved no matter how simple the desired arrangement may be.

In some meetings Overseers encourage Friends to plan in advance what they would want for themselves or loved ones regarding the disposition of their body, what to include in a memorial service, and facts to be included in an obituary. We need to help Friends record facts about schooling, progress of a career, volunteer work and outside interests, which will document their lives. It is also helpful to have Friends compile in advance a list of friends and relatives who should be informed in case of death.

Some meetings keep this information on file for their members. [See page 6]

When the meeting learns of a death

The meeting is usually informed by a family member soon after a death. It is helpful for meetings to designate someone as the contact person in times of death or other emergencies. This often is the clerk of the meeting, clerk of Overseers, or a member of Overseers. This person can make the necessary contacts to put into motion the meeting's process for support and for preparing for the memorial service.

One of the first things to do is to listen closely to what the family wants and needs and then to explain what the meeting is prepared to do for the family. This is usually a time of grief and shock for those close to the dead person, and often the Friend dealing with them needs to be sensitive to feelings of sadness



Sue Heath

and tremendous new responsibility. The Friend working with the family needs to avoid overwhelming the survivors with too much information, and to listen for what is actually being asked. In one situation, a member had died suddenly far away from home. The spouse could not even begin to deal with what kind of memorial service there should be – she was totally engrossed in the mountain of details of getting the body brought across the country. The overseer could only join in that concern and begin taking steps to help.

When it is time to discuss a memorial service, the overseer may find that the caller has very little idea what a Friends memorial service actually is. Your yearly meeting's *Faith and Practice* may be useful in explaining Friends process. A Friends memorial service is typically held in the manner of Friends unprogrammed worship but sometimes includes an introduction, readings, meditations, music, and other prepared material as requested by the family and friends.

Once the family decides a memorial service is appropriate, the date and time need to be settled. Sometimes the family wishes to have the memorial service within a few days. In other cases they prefer to hold the service weeks, or even a month or two, later at a time convenient for family and friends who live at a distance. Overseers or memorial committee members will be able to advise the family about convenient times to use the meetinghouse. In some cases, meetinghouses are located near Friends schools, or in busy parts of a city or town, and traffic considerations can be important. If light or heat are insufficient in the meetinghouse, a daylight service may be advisable, or the overseer may need to recommend alternate sites for the service.

In some cases Overseers may find it appropriate to offer to help with telephone calls to friends and acquaintances. Some meetings send postcards out to inform members and others about the death, and to announce plans for the service. The family provides additional names of persons to receive the notice.

Many meetings encourage families to suggest memorial gifts instead of flowers. Overseers may be helpful to the family in identifying causes that were important to the person being memorialized. An announcement of where to direct memorial gifts is usually included in the death notice or obituary. If the meeting sends out a postcard announcement, it can also include information about memorial gifts, flowers, etc.

Sometimes people ask about the obituary or notices in the newspapers. Local newspapers have different policies about accepting death notices from private parties, and Overseers will need to know the requirements of area newspapers. It is helpful if information for obituaries has been gathered in advance.

Planning the Memorial Service

In planning for the memorial service, Overseers will consult the family about their wishes and refer to any wishes expressed in advance by the deceased person. In most Friends services, the casket is not present and the service does not coincide with the burial or cremation, but these are matters of individual preference.

In some services, especially if many of those attending may not be Friends, a Friend is asked to explain the memorial service to the guests. The family may want to be consulted about who this Friend should be and what will be said. Usually the

Our New Look

As PCN begins our sixth year, we have a new appearance. It was designed for us by Barbara Benton, art director for *Friends Journal*, in collaboration with our editor. We hope that the new look makes PCN easier and more pleasant to read. Let us know how you like it and about any suggestions you might have.

New Name, too?

As we considered sprucing up, we wondered if the title "*Pastoral Care Newsletter*" best communicates what

the newsletter is and who it is for. We have heard from some people that their first reaction to the term "pastoral care" is "that doesn't apply to us, our meeting doesn't have a pastor." Would a title such as "*Care of Members*" or "*Under the Care of the Meeting*" say it better? Let us know what you think of these potential new titles. Or give us your suggestions.

E-mail us at steveg@pym.org or write to *Pastoral Care Newsletter*, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102.

same person breaks the meeting. He or she may also explain that the family will leave and the meeting continue for a short time after which the family will be available to speak to their friends. [See sidebar, at right]

Close friends of the person who has died are often asked to sit on the facing bench, and Overseers can help contact those people. If the family has no preferences for the facing benches, the members of Overseers or Worship and Ministry can be asked.

The family usually waits until almost the time scheduled to begin before they enter together, and often they also leave before the very end of the meeting for worship. Find out if the family wishes to do this, and designate a place in the meetinghouse where they can wait before the memorial service.

If the family wants music before or during the memorial service, the memorial committee can inform them of what is available in terms of piano or electronic equipment including amplifiers and microphones. If the meeting does not have the necessary equipment, someone from Overseers may be helpful in identifying local sources. Some meetings have equipment to record memorial services, and this can be especially meaningful to a family with distant members who cannot attend.

Will the family want a printed program or short sketch of the person's life? Overseers can help them find printers and give guidance about programs, remembering that time may be limited and there may be a lot of information to compile. If programs are provided, decide if they will be distributed at the door or put on the seats in the meetinghouse.

Practical arrangements

Often, the family will be very unrealistic about how many people will attend the service, and experience shows that often more people come than were expected. It is better to plan for more rather than fewer.

Overseers will want to have ushers to seat people, especially late-comers. Find out if the family wishes to designate a special place for family to sit. Be sure to have an idea of how many family members are expected, so enough seats are saved. Simple weighted white ribbons can be laid across the benches to be saved for family, so that the ushers will not have to ask people to move from those special seats.

It is very helpful to designate a family member or someone who knows the family to be at the doors with the ushers, to guide other relatives to their

Introductory Words for a Memorial Service

The sample remarks below are compiled from the experience of two Friends. Feel free to expand and modify them to suit the needs of your meeting and of the family.

When the family has entered the room and is seated, the person who has care of the memorial service rises and speaks as follows:

This is a called meeting of [name of meeting]
Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends to
celebrate the life of our member [name].

[You may insert some comments about the life of
the member and his or her contributions to the meeting.]

For those of you who are not familiar with the
Quaker memorial service, we sit in silence opening
ourselves to the movements of the Divine within us.
Anyone who feels so led may rise in place and speak
to the meeting. Share with us some facet of [name's]
life which has touched your life or give some words of
comfort to those of us who are left behind.

*At the appropriate time, the person who has care of
the service rises and says: This would seem a suitable
time for the family to withdraw. After the family
withdraws, the Meeting will continue until broken by
the shaking of hands.*

*After the meeting has broken: The family will be in
[name of room] to receive Friends. Please visit with
them and join us for refreshments. In [room] there is
a guest book which the family would like each of you
to sign before leaving.*

gathering place before the service or to seat them in
the family section. If many of the guests are likely to
be hard of hearing, ushers can direct them to the
sections of the meetinghouse where it is easiest to
hear or to listening devices if they are available.

The memorial committee should determine if
child care is likely to be needed during the service or
the reception. They can suggest names of teens or
other people in the meeting who do child care and
help arrange a place for small children –
perhaps a First Day School room or a near-by
playground.

Are there enough places to put coats, or do you expect people to keep coats with them? For a memorial service, where a meeting may expect many more people than usually come on a First Day, a simple rented coat rack will free up seats and people's arms and make the experience more pleasant for all.

You may expect flowers to arrive at the meetinghouse. Plan how you will place arrangements and how you will handle overflow. Be sure the family takes the flowers with them when they go, or provides for their disposal. If no flowers are to be sent, Overseers may decide some flowers are needed and arrange to have them contributed or ordered.

Many families like to have a guest book which helps them to remember the friends who were present. Sometimes the funeral home will provide books and pens. If there will be a guest book, plan where to place it. If it is at the entrance, people will line up to sign it and cause some delay in getting seated. Guests may be asked to sign the book at the rise of meeting or directed to sign at the reception if there is to be one. A member of the memorial committee should be placed in charge of the book to encourage people to sign it and to be sure the family receives it. If needed, plans should be made for designating parking areas and to have someone in

Friends Counseling Service

Professionally-trained counselors, who are active Friends and whose spiritual lives are integral to their approach to counseling, provide confidential services to individuals, couples, and families. Service is not denied because of a person's lack of means. A complete list of counselors can be found in the September 1997 issue of PCN. **For referral, contact Deborah Cooper, Counseling Service Consultant, at (215)988-0140.**

front of the meetinghouse to direct people to the parking area.

The reception

Many meetings provide a reception following a memorial service, and it is important to establish at the beginning whether the family wants a reception and whether they have any preference about food, beverage, arrangement of the room, etc. Memorial committees often provide hot or cold drinks and either light refreshment like cookies, or more substantial fare including sandwiches, finger food or a hot buffet. Sometimes the family will prefer to hire a caterer and will look to the Overseers for advice about local caterers.


Often the memorial committee takes full responsibility for setting up and cleaning up a reception. If a meeting does not have a ready crew of volunteers available during the day, they may need to contact members who will be coming to the service and ask if they will be willing to help out.

Some families will want a table of pictures and other remembrances, and Overseers can help set that up beforehand, supplying a table or other place for a display. Someone should be assigned to keep track at the end to make sure that these precious items are returned to the family.

During the reception the family often has an informal receiving line. Overseers should think of the family at this time, by bringing a drink or possibly a plate of food for them and being sure that they can sit down if they wish.

On the day of the memorial service

A memorial service attracts people who have never been to a meetinghouse before, so they are unsure how to proceed and what to expect. We want to do all we can to make them comfortable. This includes attending to basic physical details such as:



Pendle Hill

Strengthening Meetings

Seeking the Seed:
The Spiritual Journeys of Isaac & Mary Penington
Doug Gurnl November 13-15

Inquirers' Weekend: Basic Quakerism
Elaine Crauderrueff and Brian Drayton/November 20-22
Leaders to be announced/ July 17-19, 1999

**Strengthening & Nurturing
Enduring Relationships**
Arlene Kelly/ January 22-24, 1999

Clerking
Katherine Smith/ February 5-7, 1999

Nurturing New, Small & Isolated Meetings
Betty Polster and Linda Chidsey/ February 19-21, 1999

For more information on these and other programs contact
Bobbi Kelly, ext. 137 at (610) 566-4507 or (800) 742-3150
Box FR - 338 Plush Mill Road - Wallingford, PA 19086

Upcoming Events

QUAKER SWEAT & WILDERNESS WALK

October 9-11, 1998

at Snipes Farm, Morrisville, PA

Through experiences in nature, this weekend for young men in their mid-to late teens will address the question of how to find one's path through the teens to young adulthood. Sponsored by the Family Relations Concerns Group of PYM, the weekend will be led by George Price who has lead Quaker sweats for Young Friends and Brad Sheeks who leads retreats for men. For information and registration, call George at (215) 295-1560.

HEALING OUR LIVES:

A QUAKER MEN'S GATHERING

November 6-8, 1998

at Temenos, near West Chester, PA

This retreat will be a time for personal healing and spiritual renewal. Participants focus on our own areas of growth including our fathers, our work, our hopes, and our fears. Through a process of understanding and compassion we walk the path to place of peace and joy in our lives.

Sponsored by the Family Relations Concerns Group of PYM, the weekend will be led by Brad Sheeks. For information, call Brad at (215) 349-6959.

TRI-QUARTER CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS FOR OVERSEERS

Camp Ockanickon, Medford, NJ

September 19-21, 1998

At this year's Tri-Quarter Conference Family Relations Concerns Group will present workshops of interest to Overseers on: Arlene Kelly on Dealing With Difficult Situations, Barry & Dianne Sloane on Introduction to Couples Enrichment, Harriet Heath on Integrating Quaker Values into Family Life, Rit Squailia on Nurturing the Spirit in Recovery, and Judy Owens on Building Community.

For information contact: Tri-Quarter, PO Box 55, Woodstown, NJ 08098.

COUPLE ENRICHMENT WEEKEND

October 23-25, 1998, At Camp Onas

There are still a few spaces in this retreat which was announced in the June *PCN*. The weekend, which will be led by Gretta and Jacob Stone of Doylestown meeting, is open to any committed couple regardless of age, marital status, gender orientation, or membership in the Society of Friends. The cost for the weekend is \$150 per couple including tuition, room, and meals. For information calls Gretta and Jacob Stone at (215)345-0575.

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- Has the building been cleaned and is the room set up for the reception?
 - If the family plans a display of pictures or other mementos, are they in place?
 - What lights will be used?
 - Will the heat or air conditioning be needed?
 - Are the rest rooms open and fully supplied with paper, soap, cups, etc.?
 - Are the doors open so guests can enter the building? Are there enough seats, both in the room where the service will be held and in the room for the reception afterward? Keep in mind the needs of persons who are infirm and may not be able to stand for extended periods.
 - Have arrangements been made for where coats should be put?

- Ushers, people helping with parking, and those setting up the reception should arrive at least one hour before the appointed time of the memorial service.

Friends are notoriously early, and even more so for memorial services. I have had more than one experience of all the seats being filled 15 minutes before the service was set to begin.

Ushers should be asked to seat early arrivals toward front of the meetinghouse, leaving seats in the back for those who arrive late so that they won't disrupt the meeting by walking to the front of the room.

People who come from far away may need some refreshment before the service begins, so ushers should be ready to help them find rest rooms and a

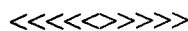
place to get a drink of water if needed. In a large meetinghouse, signs to the rest rooms are helpful. Ushers should inform those with children about the child care arrangements.

At one time, a person in our meeting who died was very old, with no friends and almost no family remaining; he had also been rather difficult in the years that I had known him. I remember worrying that nothing would be said, or, worse, that people's messages would be too candid and perhaps hurtful. The miracle occurred! Meaningful messages were shared from people who remembered what their parents had said about the deceased, people who remembered him from their schooldays, and Friends who could see beyond his testy exterior to the warm and loving spirit within. There has never been a Friends memorial service that failed to inspire me and make me a true believer.

Sue Heath is a member of Moorestown, NJ, Meeting and is clerk of the oversight committee for Pastoral Care Newsletter. This article is largely based on a recent revision of long-standing guidelines used in Moorestown, a large monthly meeting outside Philadelphia.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can our meeting prepare itself to be sensitively responsive at the time of the death of a member?
2. Has our meeting designated someone to be the contact person in case of death in the meeting? If not, whom should we designate? How can we make sure that members know whom to contact?
3. Are we prepared with up-to-date information about funeral directors in our area? Do we know the basic requirements of the state regarding embalming, cremation, and disposal of remains?
4. Are we knowledgeable about requirements of the local papers regarding obituaries? What is our meeting's practice regarding preparing obituaries for local papers, *Friends Journal*, or other publications?
5. Does our meeting keep on file information about a member's wishes at the time of death? How could we establish such a system that would not be cumbersome to maintain?



Sample Form for Members' Wishes for Their Memorial

The meeting asks each of our members to complete this information and update it from time to time. Since we know not when death might visit, having this information will help the meeting to provide support to your loved ones.

1. If the meeting is the first to learn of your death, whom should we notify? Who should be contacted to learn of your wishes or to make decisions respecting arrangements? Please give full name, address, and telephone number.
2. Do you have a will or other document that speaks to the matters of funeral, burial, or memorial meeting? If so, where is this document kept?
3. Do you have death benefits (veteran, insurance, etc.) meant to pay funeral expenses? If so, where is this document kept?
4. Do you wish to have a memorial meeting under the care of the monthly meeting?
5. Do you have any special requests of, or instructions for, the monthly meeting at the time of your death? Do you want flowers at your memorial? Any special music or readings?
6. If persons desire to make memorial gifts, to whom or what group should such gifts be made?
7. Please provide basic information that can be used in preparing an obituary: date and place of birth, when you became a Friend, when you joined this meeting, education, profession, volunteer and professional accomplishments, names of parents and closest relatives.

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