

# *Creative Life Passages*

## Funeral & Memorial Services



*Being now forever taken from my sight, though nothing  
can bring back the hour of splendor in the grass  
and glory in the flower. We will grieve not, but rather  
find strength in what remains behind.*

-- William Wordsworth

### **Basic Resources**

Service Template  
Sample Service  
with options

### **Gail C. McCabe PHD**

HUMANIST OFFICIANT  
ONTARIO HUMANIST SOCIETY

HUMANIST CHAPLAIN  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO HUMANIST CHAPLAINCY  
CAMPUS CHAPLAINS ASSOCIATION  
MULTIFAITH CENTRE, KOFFLER HOUSE  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

SERVING THE GREATER TORONTO AREA AND THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE

#### **CONTACT**

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# Elements of the Service



Music Optional

Opening Words & Introduction

Reading  
*Optional*

Personal Remarks

*This is a tribute or eulogy to the person who has died that may be provided by family members and friends who are invited to speak about the person.*

*Biographical information, family memories, and significant events in the life of the person may be included.*

*If preferred, the Officiant will create an original eulogy based on notes from the family on request.*

Musical Interlude  
*Optional*

Silent Reflection

Reflections on Life and Death

Concluding Words

*Provides closure to the service and includes announcements and directions to the gathering regarding the committal or fellowship after the service.*



Service of Committal  
*As required*

***Suggested fee for service is \$350.00***

Gail McCabe PhD RSSW  
Humanist Officiant, Ontario Humanist Society  
Humanist Chaplain, Campus Chaplains Association  
Multifaith Centre, Koffler House  
University of Toronto

#### OPENING WORDS

We are gathered here today to celebrate the life and to honour the memory of \_\_\_\_\_ . It is the death of our friend that has brought us together but his/her life that we wish to remember. We are drawn here by our common love, our common respect and our common grief. This is certainly an occasion for sorrow but may it also be an occasion for thanksgiving because we are thankful for the gift of life and we are thankful that \_\_\_\_\_ lived among us.

OR

We have come together today to honour the life of \_\_\_\_\_ , to remember her/him and to make our farewells.

This is not a religious ceremony: that would not have been in accord with \_\_\_\_\_'s view of life. I am here instead to speak for the human community of which (s)he was a part.

OR

Today we honour the memory of \_\_\_\_\_ and once again we know how keenly the passing of friends and loved ones affects us, and how deeply our own eventual passing enters into all that we are and do. A person's days have been described as like the grass of the field in their brevity, but they also represent the flowering of some great cosmic urge that brings forth intelligence, a sense of law and order, of love and duty and responsibility, and a sense of creative beauty. Our comings and goings are the pulsations of eternity. Though our days be brief they represent and reflect for each of us our own individual eternities. As one by one loved ones die, we are reminded that the years of our lives are few and fleeting. Even the longest life is but a moment between two eternities. Oh, but, how we wish that \_\_\_\_\_, few and fleeting years might have been longer.

OR

Welcome to everyone. I am Gail McCabe, and I will be conducting this memorial ceremony today. Earlier this morning, \_\_\_\_\_'s immediate family came here and placed her ashes in the ground and said their own private farewells.

So at this time, we are gathered here to celebrate the life and to honour the memory of \_\_\_\_\_. It is \_\_\_\_\_'s death that has brought us together but her life that we wish to remember. We are drawn here by our common love, our common respect and our common grief. This is certainly an occasion for sorrow but may it also be an occasion for thanksgiving because we are thankful for the gift of life and we are thankful that \_\_\_\_\_ lived among us.

We will have here today a mosaic: happy thoughts, sad thoughts, seeking to paint the best picture we can of our emotions and our loss. I hope to set an initial tone by reading a short poem from James Cavanaugh:

#### READING

*James Cavanaugh*

( may be selected from a variety of sources)

and may be read by the officiant or a relative or friend

In a complex and oft-confusing world  
When life's details get in the way of living,  
And mounting worries crowd out simple beauty  
Of snow and silence, fresh water and flowers.

When tragedy strikes without warning  
And suffering arrives unannounced,  
Then most of all must we cling to what is truly beautiful:  
Children, love, laughter, dreams,  
Wisdom, wonder, all that friendship means,  
Rearranging priorities, and taking time  
To discover what is alien, what is really mine.

'Tis then confusion softens, storms cease,  
'Tis then descends the gift of private peace.

## TRIBUTE ~ ELEGY ~ PERSONAL REMARKS

**MUSICAL INTERLUDE** ( optional )  
(This provides an opportunity for quiet thought.)

### REFLECTIONS ON LIFE AND DEATH

#### PASSAGE ONE

Death is a very personal matter for those who know it in someone close to them. But we are all concerned, directly or indirectly, with the death of any individual, for we are all members of one human community, and no one of us is independent or separate. Though some of the connections are strong and some are tenuous, each of us is joined to all others in bonds of kinship, love, friendship, by living in the same neighbourhood or town or country, or simply by our own common humanity. No one who encountered \_\_\_\_\_ failed to be warmed by her /his zest for the adventures of life, and her /his capacity for affection and friendship. And no one who knows of her /his sad death will remain untouched by it, nor fail to ask themselves if they could have done anything to prevent it.

No-one should be afraid of death itself: it is as natural as life. Only Nature is permanent. All that has life has its beginning and end ... and life exists in the time span between birth and death. Or those of us who do not have a religious faith, and who believe that death brings the end of individual existence, life's significance lies in the experiences and satisfactions we achieve in that span of time; its permanence lies in the memories of those who knew us, and any influence we have left behind. The delight and laughter which were part of \_\_\_\_\_ life will live in the memories of her / his family and friends much longer than the bewilderment over the choice she made at the end.

We will respect her/him for her/his courage and her/his determination and be daring enough to remember her/him with happiness.

Joyce Grenfell's poem (or an alternate reading) speaks for us:

**If I should go before the rest of you,  
Break not a flower, nor inscribe a stone,  
Nor, when I'm gone, speak in a Sunday voice,  
But be the usual selves that I have known.  
Weep if you must:  
Parting is hell,  
But life goes on  
So ... sing as well!**

OR

## PASSAGE TWO

When death occurs we become aware of the fragility of life and we realize that death is the common destiny of all living creatures. As human beings we are a part of the eternal world of nature. This dynamic nature is characterized by change : every existing thing is transformed through a process of birth, growth and death. Transience and death are natural and understandable in our universe. Life and death are different but essential aspects of the same creative process. It is nature's law that living organisms should eventually retire from the scene and make room for newborn generations. In this sense then life affirms itself through death. Each one of us "must die for the sake of life; for the flow of the stream is too great to be dammed in any pool, for the growth of the seed is too strong to stay in one shape. Because our bodies must perish we are greater than we know". As rational people we accept as inevitable the eventual extinction of our bodies and their return to nature. In death as in life we belong to nature.

However when death does occur it is bound to be a shock to the survivors. No religion or no philosophy can prevent the sorrow which is the natural reaction to the death of a loved one.

When we are emotionally involved in the lives of other people we will grieve at our loss. Grief is an inevitable part of the life of any normal person. When we marry we invite the possibility of grief ; when we have children we invite the possibility of grief. Life means grief and love means grief - in time. The only way to avoid grief is not to live. In the normal course of grief there will be feelings of pain, disbelief and loneliness , feelings of emptiness and insecurity. There will be negative feelings which seem irrational and overwhelming in their intensity: feelings of anger, guilt and depression. To facilitate grief's work (and it is work) let there be tears. Tears are not a sign of weakness. And let there be talk. Talk about \_\_\_\_\_'s life and talk about his/her death. This helps in accepting the reality of the tragedy and grief's work is being done.

When death occurs we know that those whom we have lost are now at peace. Be thankful for the friendship you had with \_\_\_\_\_. Nothing can change the experiences that you shared with him/her. The past is secure and cannot be changed by time or circumstance.

Be thankful that \_\_\_\_\_ was and still is a part of your lives. He/she lives on his/her children and grandchildren. He/she lives on in the hearts and memories of those who knew and loved him/her. He/she leaves family, friends and colleagues.

## CONCLUDING WORDS

**These will be quite unique depending on the circumstances. The examples provide some ideas only.**

### EXAMPLE ONE

There is no answer to death but to live and to live vigorously and beautifully. We give respect and dignity to the one we mourn only when we respect and dignify life and when we live life to the fullest. The best of all answers to death is the continuing affirmation of life. Now, for us, the living, may the love of friends, the joy of memory and our hopes for the future give us strength and peace that we may go forward together.

Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes our service for \_\_\_\_\_. His family extends their warmest invitation to you all to join them in the reception room for some refreshment, fellowship and cheer.

Let us all stand now while the family takes their leave and then we'll follow along.  
Thank you.

### EXAMPLE TWO

Friends and family, This concludes our service. Now, I ask \_\_\_\_\_ pallbearers to come forward. We'll listen to the lovely old song, " 'Til We Meet Again" as he is carried away. It was \_\_\_\_\_'s favourite and what a fine way to bid him/her farewell."

### EXAMPLE THREE

Friends and family, I ask you to stand now for the committal service. Here, in this last act, immune now to the changes and chance of our mortal lot, we commit the body of \_\_\_\_\_ to its natural end.

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## SERVICE OF COMMITTAL

( for cremation )

In cremating the body of our friend we do so with respect for that body which during life was a unique and much-loved person and we are reminded of the words of Socrates that "no evil can befall a good person either in life or after death".

( for burial )

In placing the body of our friend in the gentle earth we do so with respect for that body which during life was a unique and much-loved person. We dedicate this simple plot, under the wide and open sky, to his/her memory. We are reminded of the words of Socrates that "no evil can befall a good person either in life or after death".

OR

Here, in this last act, immune now to the changes and chance of our mortal lot, we commit the body of \_\_\_\_\_ to its natural end.

OR

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn and a time to dance.  
a time to keep silence and a time to speak.

As we prepare to leave, let us entrust \_\_\_\_\_'s body to the earth from which he came. All life is formed of earth and returns to the bosom of Mother Nature: earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. We commend him and the memory we have of him to this ceaseless round, knowing that in time, we too shall join this circle.

## READING

An ancient poem – Talmudic in origin - about the brevity of our individual lives goes something like this:

We are like beautiful pottery that breaks,  
The grass that withers,  
The flower that fades,  
The shadow that passes,  
The cloud that vanishes,  
The breeze that blows,  
The dust that floats,  
The dream that flies away.

## CLOSING WORDS

There is no answer to death but to live and to live vigorously and beautifully. We give respect and dignity to the one we mourn only when we respect and dignify life and when we live life to the fullest. The best of all answers to death is the continuing affirmation of life.

Now, for us , the living, may the love of friends, the joy of memory and our hopes for the future give us strength and peace that we may go forward together until a new day breaks and the shadows disappear.

OR

In sadness for his/her death, but with appreciation for his/her life, we remember \_\_\_\_\_ and his talent for joy and love. Finally, as we leave to continue our own voyage of discover in the world, let us listen to these lines of hope by the poet C. Day Lewis:

His/her laughter was better than birds in the morning, his/her smile  
Turned the edge of the wind, his/her memory  
Disarms death and charms the surly grave.  
Early (s)he went to bed, too early we  
Saw his/her light put out; yet we could not grieve  
More than a little while,  
For (s)he lives in the earth around us, laughs from the sky.

For additional readings, please consult the readings file sent under separate cover.