

A Template for Preparing a Ritual for Loss and Grief at School

By Pat Lavercombe BCE 2012

Step 1:

- Listen to friends/family for key elements of the person's life to celebrate, or which offer hope and positive memories.

e.g. personality, skills, interests- music, art, books, film, creative, academic, relational

- Identify symbols, significant images, objects, words which encapsulate elements of personality, skills, contribution to community
- Gather words, images, people (role models), poems, music, hymns, scripture passages etc. that were special to the person.
- How religious was the person? How much religious symbolism, imagery, content is appropriate and not imposing?

Step 2:

Consider the needs of the community attending the Ritual. (Grief Rituals are as much for the living as the dead)

- What message/s do you, the family, the community need to hear/take away from the ceremony? (e.g. hope; forgiveness, positive memories; trust in God's love and compassion; the need to support each other in good times and bad; assurances about fear)
- Are there cultural expectations/behaviours/protocols to be considered and planned for?
- You monitor and exercise judgement over suggestions by friends, family and others as to content. Keep within bounds of religious ritual and the difference between what may be said/ done at a family ritual and a ritual with, for example, the whole school community. Melodrama and excessive emotional displays causing upset and fear in others are usually not helpful, though in some cultures such public displays are traditional. In a school setting, it could be suggested this is for private, family funerals.

Step 3:

Based on this information, select symbols, images, readings, songs and hymns for the ceremony.

Consider who will have parts in the ceremony. Consider the emotional states of potential participants- will they be able to read/sing/eulogise?

Who wants a part? Family members? Friends? Peers?

In a school setting, key adult school leaders should be involved at key points to help contain overwhelming grief or emotion through their involvement.

Step 4:

Creating the Ritual. In our Catholic Christian tradition, the template for Rituals and Liturgies is ; **Gather** and Prepare Ourselves, **Listen** and Respond, **Share** and Give Thanks; **Go** and Tell.

We Gather:

Opening Song/Hymn Should be one all can join in.

Welcome and Greeting

Placing of /Reference to/explanation of Symbols, Photograph etc. A photograph is helpful, especially for younger members of the community.

Introductory Comments/Eulogy Focus on hope and God's loving care.

Sprinkling /Blessing of all gathered (optional)

Opening Prayer

We Listen:

Usually from the Christian Scriptures. May only be a Gospel reading. Focus on hope, promises of Jesus/God. Sometimes helps for family and friends to choose.

Response could be a hymn.

Homily: Reflection on the Scriptures, not a Eulogy.

We Share:

We share prayers for the person, the family, ourselves, friends, those involved in the person's treatment.

There could be a ritual action at this time: perhaps the bringing up of wreaths or cards prepared by significant groups.

The Lord's Prayer helps unite all Christians in their grief.

A shared sign of peace is also appropriate here.

Possibly a PowerPoint Dedication, but should be brief. Many students may not know the person: is it appropriate for this celebration?

We Go:

A Closing Prayer

A blessing for all.

Dismissal.

A Closing Song. (Uplifting, hope filled.)

The ritual Action may take place after the ceremony, especially if it involves nature and large group action. Please consider the destructive impact on the environment and animals if thinking about releasing balloons. One larger balloon may be better and more effective symbolically.