

## Candlelight vigils

Community candlelight vigils offer people an opportunity to come together after loss, especially when it's a high-profile loss or mass casualty event. It gives them a safe place to express sadness, support one another, create a united setting, and take the first steps forward together.

An effective vigil is coordinated in a fashion that makes it memorable for all the right reasons. While informal or impromptu vigils are often held by well-meaning people, one coordinated by a Certified Aftercare Specialist™ will provide a higher level of community representation and result in a more powerful ritual of remembrance.

In general, it includes speakers, music, some sort of symbolic release such as a balloon or sky lantern release, and a candlelight vigil. It's helpful to create a team of coordinators to oversee important elements and volunteers. Use the following instructions and templates to coordinate a vigil for your community, and modify as needed.

### PLAN

1. Determine who will serve as the overall facilitator and act as the main contact person.
2. Set vigil date, time and location. Make sure it's easy for people to find and has adequate parking, bathroom facilities, garbage receptacles, etc. Consider a well-lit public square or waterfront park, or any well-lit public place with plenty of free parking and bathrooms.
3. Send vigil details to local radio and TV stations, and ask them to share.
4. Notify local officials that you're coordinating a vigil. Provide the date, time and location. Invite and confirm 5 of the officials to speak at the vigil. Each speaker can decide what they want to say (short speech, words of comfort, read a poem, etc).
 

<input type="checkbox"/> City mayor	<input type="checkbox"/> School principal
<input type="checkbox"/> Police chief	<input type="checkbox"/> Family representative
<input type="checkbox"/> Fire chief	<input type="checkbox"/> Community pastor
<input type="checkbox"/> School superintendent	
5. Identify and confirm volunteers to serve as team leads. See duties on following page.
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Community facilitator	<input type="checkbox"/> Candle team lead
<input type="checkbox"/> Balloon team lead	<input type="checkbox"/> Music team lead
6. Invite and confirm choir or singers.
7. Invite and confirm one individual who is willing to light the first candle when the time comes. Ask them to come with two lighters in case one doesn't work.
8. Once the schedule and speakers are set, distribute schedule (see suggested schedule below) to each speaker, team leads, choir/singer(s).
9. If using sky lanterns, secure permit from fire department.

## PREPARE

1. Purchase or find donated helium balloons, sky lanterns or butterflies.
2. Purchase or find donated candles with wax catchers (ask a church).
3. Secure use of mic and speakers.
4. Purchase or find donated cookies and bottled water to serve to community.
5. Secure 5-gallon buckets of water for people to drop candles in after candlelighting.

## CANDLE LEAD DUTIES:

- Find volunteers to serve on the candle team.
- Coordinate donation of candles and wax catchers from store or church. If donors aren't available, they can be purchased from religious stores and arts & craft stores.
- Have volunteers assemble candles inside wax catchers prior to vigil.
- At the appropriate time in the schedule, have volunteers quietly distribute candles among crowd prior to the candlelighting. Another option is to hand them out as people arrive.

## MUSIC LEAD DUTIES:

- Find choir or singer(s) to perform during vigil.
- Coordinate one symbolic song to sing during balloon release.
- Coordinate one symbolic song to sing during candle lighting.
- Ensure that choir and/or singer(s) are prepared to perform enough songs to accommodate length of time needed to light all the candles.
- Song suggestions:
  - a. Somewhere Over the Rainbow (good for balloon releasing)
  - b. I Will Always Love You, by Whitney Houston (good for candle lighting)
  - c. Amazing Grace
  - d. To Where You Are, by Josh Groban
  - e. Wind Beneath my Wings, by Bette Midler
  - f. Go Light Your World, by C. Rice

## BALLOON LEAD DUTIES: (MODIFY AS NEEDED IF USING SKY LANTERNS OR BUTTERFLIES)

- Find volunteers and multiple vehicles to deliver balloons from store to vigil.
- If donor can't inflate balloons, find a party store who can. Do not inflate balloons at vigil as it's too distracting and it's difficult to keep people from taking balloons.
- Have volunteers secure balloons at vigil so wind doesn't blow them away. Consider tying groups of 10 balloons at a time to chairs or railings. Make sure they're easy to release from chairs when it's time to distribute among the vigil crowd.
- Have volunteers distribute balloons among crowd at the appropriate time in the schedule. Tell volunteers to instruct people to hold their balloon until everybody can release them at the same time when the time comes.

## SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

### PART 1: COMMENTS

1. Opening comments by community facilitator (3-5 minutes):
  - a. Welcomes community
  - b. Recognizes donors and volunteers
  - c. Mentions and encourages use of local grief resources and/or suicide hot line
  - d. Introduces each speaker as they take the mic
2. Opening prayer by pastor (2-3 minutes)
3. School principal speaks (2-3 minutes)
4. School superintendent speaks (2-3 minutes)
5. City mayor or city official speaks (2-3 minutes)
6. Police chief, fire chief, or family representative speaks (2-3 minutes)

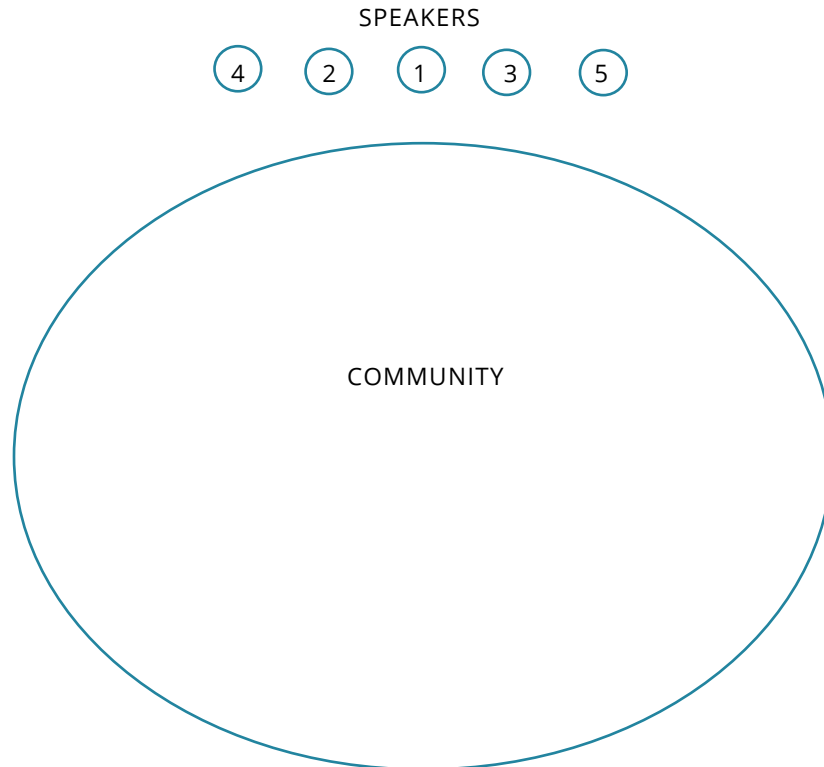
### PART 2: CANDLE LIGHTING

7. Choir or singers perform in the background while all 5 speakers assemble on a raised platform or benches so they can be seen by everyone (see diagram on following page). Speakers should be close enough together so they can safely dip their candlewick into the flame of the speaker next to them.
8. Once the speakers are in position and choir/singers are performing, begin candle lighting as follows.
  - a. City mayor or other prominent community leader stands center (position #1) and is the first candle to be lit. Make sure the person who lights the mayor's candle has 2 cigarette/campfire lighters on hand in case one doesn't work. Once the mayor's candle has been lit, s/he holds the lit candle.
  - b. Speakers in positions #2 and #3 dip their candles simultaneously into the flame of the mayor's candle and then hold their candles.
  - c. Speaker in position #4 dips his/her candle into the flame of speaker #2 at the same time speaker in position #5 dips his/her candle into the flame of #3.
9. Once all 5 candles have been lit, speakers should momentarily raise their candles in solidarity, pause briefly, and then lower and hold the candles so surrounding people can use the flames to light their own candle. They then offer their flame to those around them, creating a wave of candlelighting (and preventing people from mobbing the 5 speakers). People continue lighting one another's candles until all are lit. Choir continues to sing until all candles are lit.
10. After all candles are lit, allow singers to finish current song, and then ask for a moment of silence.

### PART 3: BALLOON RELEASE

12. At the end of the candlelighting, during the moment of silence, balloon team quietly distribute balloons among crowd.
13. After moment of silence, one speaker reads a poem or two (see recommended poems on following pages). If needed, read second poem until everyone has a balloon.
14. Once everyone has a balloon, choir/singers perform one song such as Somewhere Over the Rainbow. When song begins, all 5 speakers simultaneously raise their balloons, pause for a moment and then release their balloons. The community will follow the gesture as the choir sings Somewhere Over the Rainbow.
15. If desired, closing prayer by Pastor (2-3 minutes).

### DIAGRAM OF SUGGESTED LAYOUT



## SUGGESTED POEMS TO BE READ DURING BALLOON RELEASE

### POEM #1

As the strings slip through my hand  
I think of the beauty you brought to this land  
I watch as the balloons float away  
Just like when you left me that day

They float into the beautiful clouds  
I hear you laughing out loud  
Up to the heavens above  
Carrying a note from me with love

The life you lived celebrated this day  
That is what the balloons are meant to say  
Receive the balloons with gentle care  
They symbolize the love that will  
always be there

Balloons, I release you to float away  
Make sure you get up to our loved ones this day  
We release you into the sky  
We watch you float, we watch you fly

Loved ones, catch these balloons  
on this bittersweet day  
Read the notes and then go play  
Keep us in your hearts  
You may be gone but we shall not part

So flat in the heavens and play in the clouds  
Releasing the balloons from  
our hearts so proud.

### POEM #2

by Vicki Hansen

Floating freely in the air,  
is a special balloon with all my care,  
That I have released to the skies above.  
It's really important, it carries my love.

So please be watching for it to come by;  
this special balloon, I released to the sky.  
Sent to my Angel in heavenly flight,  
to let my Angel know I am alright.

I don't really like to be without you.  
And many a day, I have been blue!  
I know you're in Heaven  
and that gives me peace.  
So it's with all my love,  
this balloon I release.



## SUGGESTED POEMS FOR CANDLE LIGHTING

### FIVE CANDLES

unknown author

The first candle represents our grief.  
The pain of losing you is intense.  
It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

This second candle represents our courage.  
To confront our sorrow,  
To comfort each other,  
To change our lives.

This third candle we light in your memory.  
For the times we laughed,  
The times we cried,  
The times we were angry with each other,  
The silly things you did,  
The caring and joy you gave us.

This fourth candle we light for our love.  
We light this candle that your light will always shine.  
As we enter this season and share this night of remembrance  
with our family and friends.  
We cherish the special place in our hearts  
that will always be reserved for you.

This fifth candle we light to thank you for the gift  
your living brought to each of us.

We love you.

We remember you.

E03/COMMUNITY VIGIL

### TIME WILL EASE THE HURT

by Bruce B. Wilmer

The sadness of the present days  
is locked and set in time.  
And moving to the future  
is a slow and painful climb.

But all the feelings that  
are now so vivid and real  
can't hold their fresh intensity  
as time begins to heal.

No wound so deep will  
ever go entirely away,  
yet every hurt becomes  
a little less each day.

Nothing can erase the painful  
imprints on your mind.  
But there are softer memories  
that time will let you find.

Though your heart won't let  
the sadness simply slide away,  
the echoes will diminish  
even though the memories stay.