

## Notes to the Leader for M103 – When a Member Has Died

Someone in your group has died. This is probably the most painful experience you will share as a group. It's important to acknowledge the loss felt by each individual as well as the loss to the group as a whole. This session will help you do that. You may wish to design your own session, or revise this one, and that's fine, too.

### Ask for support

Sometimes the leader experiences the greatest sense of loss when a member dies. It's also very difficult to lead a session like this. It might feel like more than you want to be responsible for, and that's OK. But because it's so important to the group, we hope you'll consider making it happen somehow. To take the burden from your shoulders, you might ask a minister or a member of the SGM council to take on the tasks of hosting, setting up, and/or leading. What is best for you? It might also be helpful to the rest of the group to have ministerial support during this session. What is best for them?

### Be clear about the purpose

Your group's session is not a memorial for the member who has died. It should primarily be a space and time in which members can freely share their personal feelings about the loss. That's the focus of the Deep Listening portion. We did include a section on reflections about the member who has died, but that is a much shorter period of time.

### Advice about leading

You can expect this session to evoke strong emotions—though, as it says in the Preparation, everyone grieves differently, so don't be surprised if some members don't appear to have strong feelings at this time.

Certainly your experience as the group's leader and your own intuition can guide you in handling difficult moments, but here are a few suggestions:

- We hardly need to tell you to have plenty of tissues handy in case of tears.
- During the session, if someone is overcome, quietly ask the group to hold that person in silent support. After a few moments, ask if they would like to continue or perhaps finish sharing later.
- It may be difficult to keep to the schedule, but it's important that everyone has equal time. Try to be as flexible as possible but use your best judgment about when to gently ask a member to finish if he or she is taking too long.
- This loss will naturally bring up memories of other losses. Be prepared to gently guide members back to talking about this particular loss.
- Try to be aware of strong negative emotions or confusion. If you sense that anyone in the group needs individual counseling because of this loss, please ask a minister to contact him/her as soon as possible.
- This session may not be the only activity your group needs during the grieving process. You may decide on other activities together, perhaps even a second session or another kind of ritual. If there is anything further the content team can do to help you, just contact Julia Rodriguez ([quixoposto@ix.netcom.com](mailto:quixoposto@ix.netcom.com)).

### Plan ahead

Please read the session carefully so that you are familiar with the readings, songs, and the simple ritual. You might decide ahead of time whom you would like to ask to read or lead certain parts if you aren't having a minister or SGM council member do it. If anything is confusing or you'd like help revising part of the session, contact Julia Rodriguez ([quixoposto@ix.netcom.com](mailto:quixoposto@ix.netcom.com)) or Claire Wagner ([cwagner21@earthlink.net](mailto:cwagner21@earthlink.net)).

### How to handle the preliminaries

During the preliminaries, it would be a good idea to remind members that this is not a memorial service, but a place to share their personal feelings. Remind them again to respect different types of responses to that loss.

You might also ask members if they have any questions or concerns before the session starts. Some might be feeling particularly anxious and/or vulnerable and might want a little more explanation about how the session is supposed to go, or reassurance that emotional responses are expected and OK.

### **How to set up**

Here's how to set up the room if you follow our Order of Worship:

- Place an empty chair in the circle and put a picture, memento, or some other object on the chair to show it represents a place for the member who has died.
- Put a vase of flowers in the center of the table.
- Around the flowers, place a small bowl of soil (earth), a bowl of water, a large stone or rock (or bowl of stones), and your group's chalice. Don't fill up the bowls to capacity, as you will raise them up during a ritual.

Any other "altar" items would be nice. You might ask members to bring their own mementos or pictures.

### **Approximate timing**

These times are approximate. Parts of the session might require more time.

Preliminaries	5-10 minutes
Opening/Chalice Lighting	2 minutes
Singing	3 minutes
Silence	5 minutes
Ritual	10 minutes (take your time with this)
Deep Listening / Silent Support	45-60 minutes
Reading	3 minutes
Reflections / Flower Communion	20-30 minutes
Singing	3 minutes (unless you want to repeat it or sing as a round)
Closing	3-5 minutes
Total	about 100-130 minutes