

Hospice Sabbath

A Service of Reflection and Remembrance

Many hospice organizations across the country host a Hospice Sabbath service annually. Hospice Sabbath honors the spirituality integral to care at the end of life. It is usually an interfaith service in nature and provides an opportunity for reflection and remembrance.

In the past, Hospice Sabbath was often celebrated the third weekend in November. Now, hospices across the nation hold special services at various times throughout the year. For those organizations that have established a Hospice Sabbath tradition, we encourage you to continue sponsoring these important events. For those who have not held such an event, the third weekend in November, which falls during National Hospice Month, is an excellent time to host a service for your staff, families, and community.

Consider partnering with other organizations or faith communities in your area. While many groups have held these events in neighborhood churches and synagogues, any space that would allow participants to gather and reflect would be suitable.

There is not an “official” Hospice Sabbath service. However, at one of NHPCO’s Clinical Team Conferences, a memorial service was held that resonated strongly with attendees. The structure and assorted readings that were collected for this service provide an excellent template a Hospice Sabbath program.

Additional Ideas for Hospice Sabbath:

- ❑ Place candles at the front of the room in memory of those you have cared for or in honor of professional and family caregivers in your community.
- ❑ Hand out memory stones as participants enter. They can be small river stones with a sentiment or word of reflection painted in freehand. This can be a wonderful task for a volunteer committee to take on.
- ❑ Music for the service can be provided by a local musician, sung by a choir or attendees, or even taken from CDs or tapes.
- ❑ Invite participants to bring a photo of someone they wish to remember. Attach the photos to poster board and place on easels at the front of the room.
- ❑ Have a memory book at the entrance of the space and allow people to write in the names of those who have died. Read these names during the service.
- ❑ Set up a memory tree and allow people to hang ornaments in honor of their loved ones. (Many organizations have used this as a successful fundraising tool.)
- ❑ Set up a table with books, brochures, or information about your services or other bereavement resources available to those in your community.
- ❑ Use one of the ads included with your NHM Planning Guide to create a flyer or program insert for your service.

Hospice Sabbath
A Service of Reflection and Remembrance

- Music
- Welcome
- Invocation
- Song/Music to set the mood for reflection
- Readings and Remembrances:
 - Belief
An Affirmation for Those Who Have Lost – James E. Miller
 - Hope
Hope – Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat
 - Peace
Morning Prayer – Ella Sysfers Schenck
 - Love
Touched by an Angel – Maya Angelou
 - Faith
The Prayer – Carol Bayer Sager
 - Family
Our Homes – Brandy Gregory
- Music
- Continued Readings and Remembrances:
 - Nature
God's World – Edna St. Vincent Millay
 - Harmony
Peace with Nature – Sophie Jakowska
 - Trust
Prayer of Faith – Author unknown
 - Comfort
Comforting the Comforters – Anonymous
 - Dream
The Word of Mine – Rabbi Simcha Kling
 - Friends
We Remember Them – Rabbi Kling
- Song/Music for contemplation
- Summary or final remarks
- Closing Prayer

Hospice Sabbath
Suggested Readings and Remembrances

The following readings have been compiled from a number of different sources. They are only suggestions. Please feel free to substitute other readings, prayers, or poems that may reflect thoughts and feelings you wish to share with you Hospice Sabbath participants. You may want to photocopy each reading on a separate page for each reader.

• **BELIEF**

An Affirmation for Those Who Have Lost

- James E. Miller

I believe there is no denying it: it hurts to lose.
It hurts to lose a cherished relationship with another,
 Or a significant part of one's own self.
It can hurt to lose that which has united one with the past
 Or that which has beckoned one into the future.
It is painful to feel diminished or abandoned,
 To be left behind or left alone.
Yet I believe there is more to losing than just the hurt and the pain.
For there are other experiences that loss can call forth.
I believe that courage often appears,
 However quietly it is expressed,
 However easily it goes unnoticed by others:
 The courage to be strong enough to surrender,
 The fortitude to be firm enough to be flexible.
I believe a time of loss can be a time of learning unlike any other,
 And that it can teach some of life's most valuable lessons.

In the act of losing there is something to be found.
In the act of letting go, there is something to be grasped.
In the act of saying "goodbye", there is a "hello" to be heard.
For I believe living with loss is about beginnings as well as endings.
And grieving is a matter of life more than death.
And growing is a matter of mind and heart and soul more than of body.
And loving is a matter of eternity more than of time.
Finally, I believe in the promising paradoxes of loss.

In the midst of darkness, there can come great Light.
At the bottom of despair, there can appear a great Hope.
And deep within loneliness, there can dwell a great Love.
I believe these things because others have shown the way –
 Others who have lost and have then grown through their losing,
 Others who have suffered and then found new meaning.
So I know I am not alone:
 I am accompanied, day after night, night after day.

- **HOPE**

Hope

- **Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat**

Hope is the basic ingredient of optimism, a tendency to dwell on the best possibilities. It is a frequent companion of another spiritual practice—enthusiasm. It, too, is energizing. The greeting “Be of good cheer” puts it well.

But a more common—and very telling expression—is “Hope for the best, but expect the worst.” The more likely outcome, it implies, is the worst. When we are without hope, we easily fall victim to such negativism. When the light of hope is absent, we are overcome by gloom and doom, despair and defeatism.

In terms of person style, without hope, we find it difficult to be patient and are easily frustrated. We may lack the courage to continue struggling against adversity. We are faint-hearted and quickly discouraged. We really do expect the worst.



Hope is a positive and potent spiritual practice with the power to pull us through difficult times. It is usually described with light metaphors — a ray, a beam, a glimmer of hope; the break in the clouds; the light at the end of the dark tunnel. It is often discovered in unexpected places.

Hope can be learned with practice. Certain attitudes support it. One is patience, an ability to tolerate delays, a willingness to let events unfold in their own time. The other is courage, an attitude of confidence even when facing the unknown. A third is persistence, the determination to keep going no matter what happens. We have hope when we can say, all will be well, and we mean it.

- **PEACE**

Morning Prayer
- Ella Sysfers Schenck

Lord, in the quiet of this morning hour
I come to Thee for peace, for wisdom, power
To view the world today through love-filled eyes;
Be patient, understanding, gentle, wise;
To see beyond what seems to be, and know
Thy children as Thou knowest them; and so
Naught but the good in anyone behold;
Make deaf ears to slander that is told;
Silence my tongue to aught that is unkind;
Let only thoughts that bless dwell in my mind.
Let me so kindly be, so full of cheer,
That all I meet may feel Thy presence near.
O clothe me in thy beauty, this I pray,
Let me reveal Thee, Lord, through all the day.

- **LOVE**

Touched by an Angel
- Maya Angelou

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
in the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
and suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

- **FAITH**

The Prayer
- Carol Bayer Sager

I pray you'll be our eyes, and watch us where we go
And help us to be wise in times when we don't know.
Let this be our prayer, when we lose our way
Lead us to the place, guide us with your grace
To a place where we'll be safe

I pray we'll find your light, and hold it in our hearts
When stars go out each night, remind us where you are
Let this be our prayer, when shadows fill our day
Help us find a place, guide us with your grace
Give us faith so we'll be safe

A world where pain and sorrow will be ended
And every heart that's broken will be mended
And we'll remember we are all God's children
Reaching out to touch you
Reaching to the sky

We ask that life be kind, and watch us from above
We hope each soul will find another soul to love
Let this be our prayer, just like every child

Who needs to find a place, guide us with your grace
Give us faith so we'll be safe.

- **FAMILY**

Our Homes
- Brandy Gregory

Our homes are miles away,
a distance so far,
our feet cannot walk
nor run to your door.

There are enormous mountains
and small foothills
between our doors.

The trees are vast
and the flowers too many to smell.

Rivers and lakes all in the way.

Freeway and back roads
all leading miles apart
from our yards.

But our hearts are,
our real homes,
and they are only
a heartbeat away.

There are no mountains,
lakes or trees,
between them.

The road only leads
right to our souls.

So no matter what
the miles may be,
you are always right here in my home.

- **NATURE**

God's World

- **Edna St. Vincent Millay**

Oh world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
Thy mists, that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
and all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart, -- Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me, -- let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

- **HARMONY**

Peace with Nature -- A prayer from the Dominican Republic
- Sophie Jakowska Ph.D.

LORD, you gave us this planet on which we live with all it contains as a common inheritance to share with other creatures and other human beings.

Help us understand the mysteries of nature in order to respect your Creation and to use your creatures according to your laws.

Help us use your gifts wisely and justly, thinking not only of ourselves but also of other people in other parts of the world who have the right to share them.

Do not permit that through our greed or negligence the earth become poorer in forests and rivers, in plants and animals, and other wonders of nature that glorify you with their presence.

Help us love your Creation in every form of matter and in every form of life, but especially in our human brothers and sisters.

Help us serve one another as other creatures do according to your will, using wisely what we may use of your gifts and sharing them with all the living creatures of our planet.

Help us preserve our environment clean and healthy for all and make the right decisions to restore what has been destroyed. So that we may serve you better in harmony and peace with nature.

Amen.

- **TRUST**

Prayer of Faith

- (Author unknown)

We trust that beyond absence there is a presence.

That beyond the pain there can be healing.

That beyond the brokenness there can be wholeness.

That beyond anger there may be peace.

That beyond hurting there may be forgiveness.

That beyond the silence there may be the word.

That beyond the word there may be understanding.

That through understanding there is love.

- **COMFORT**

Comforting the Comforters

- (Anonymous)

You who give counsel to others must give counsel to yourself.
You to whom many turn for wisdom must turn to yourself.
You to whom others come for comfort must comfort yourself.

The comforters and consolers, the healers of others
Need comfort and consolation and healing themselves.
In sickness, in death, in tragedy, we are the same.

Let not the last hours eclipse the entire life
Let not the pain, the forgetfulness, the suffering
Negate the joy, the memory, the exaltation of life.

Nothing decent, nothing noble, no gesture of love,
No smile of encouragement is swallowed up by death.

In memory there is a resurrection of the life of the spirit
Memory is our hold on the past
Our solace in the present, our hope for the future.

Memory has a life of its own, an after-life,
A transfusion of meaning from one life to others.

You who have given heart and soul to others
You who have sheltered others from wind and storms
Guard yourselves from melancholy.

You who given wisdom to others
Open yourself to your hard-earned knowledge.

Know that the wound does not heal at once
But slowly forms protective layers.

You who have known grief and pain have also known
Deep friendships, relationships of respect and trust.

You have taught others how to survive the affliction of sorrow
You have taught others how to transcend the tragic moment.

The beloved who gave you life passed on to you a miraculous spark
May it illumine your path and brighten your way.

- **DREAM**

Dream

- **Rabbi Simcha Kling**

I dream of days gone by
But not on them alone.
On days to come, I also dream;
The Book of Life has another theme.

I know how full well that all things have their end
Though joy and pain may seem to have no bounds.
Of this good world of mine I am still [a] part
And on the morrow, this thought will lift my heart.

Oh, 'tis so good to bless what is
And to sigh o'er what is not.
To accept the verdict I am prepared,
Hoping the good will transcend the bad.

- **FRIENDS**

We Remember Them
- Rabbi Simcha Kling

At the rising of the sun and its going down we remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter we remember them.

At the opening of the buds and the rebirth of spring we remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer we remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart we remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make we remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs we remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.

Hospice Sabbath
Additional Suggested Readings that may be used

Optional Reading 1

We never know where God has hidden His streams. We see a large stone and have no idea that it covers the source of a spring. We see a rocky area and never imagine that it is hiding a fountain.

I said, "The desert is so wide!"
I said, "The desert is so bare!"
What springs to quench my thirst are there?
Where will I from the tempest hide?

I said, "The desert is so lone!
No gentle voice, nor loving face
To brighten any smallest space."
I paused before my cry was done!

I heard the flow of hidden springs;
Before me palms rose green and fair;
The birds were singing; all the air
Was filled and stirred with angels' wings!
And One asked so softly, "Why, indeed,
Take overanxious thought for what
Tomorrow brings you? See you not
The Father knows just what you need?"

God leads me into hard and difficult places, and it is there I realize I am where eternal streams abide.

Optional Reading 2

Believe and trust; through stars and suns,
Through life and death, through soul and sense,
His wise, paternal purpose runs;
The darkness of His Providence
Is starlit with Divine intents.

When nothing on which to lean remains,
When strongholds crumble to dust;
When nothing is sure but that God still reigns,
That is just the time to trust.

It's better to walk by faith than sight,
In this path of yours and mine;
And the darkest night, when there's no outer light
Is the time for faith to shine.

--L.B. Cowman

Optional Reading 3

The Uneven Path

--Rabbi Dr. Earl A. Grollman

Don't try to destroy a beautiful
part of your life because
remembering hurts.

As children of today and tomorrow,
we are also children of yesterday.

The past still travels with us
and what is has been
makes us what we are.

Optional Reading 4

In Memoriam

Our loved ones . . .
are the saints among us . . .
whose memory we share . . .
whose absence we mourn . . .
whose new life we celebrate.

Young...old...just beginning life . . .
and in the prime of life
when they left us,
They had spouses...and children
to love . . .
Boyfriends...and grandchildren . . .
they adored . . .
Dreams...hopes...plans...

Caught up in a greater plan, they rest now in the silent
heart of God . . .
and in a parting act of trust, leave the ones they love
To us . . .

We remember . . .We mourn . . .We keep
Their love alive...as we journey on our way

Optional Reading 5

A Gaelic Blessing

Deep peace of the running wave to you;
Deep peace of the flowing air to you;
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you;
Deep peace of the shining stars to you;
Deep peace of the gentle night to you,
Moon and stars pour out their healing light on you;
Deep peace to you, the light of the world to you,
Deep peace to you.