

Memorial Service Ideas

The passing of a loved one marks a time of transition for family and friends. Sometimes it's difficult to know how to mark that transition; there are lots of emotions involved, be it grief, anger, sadness, relief, peace, or some combination of all of those and more. Planting a Legacy Tree is one way you can honor this transition and memorialize a loved one. Whether you want to plant the Legacy Tree at the graveside funeral service, hold a more structured memorial service at a later time and place, or simply gather with family and friends to plant a tree together and say a poem, we have put together a few different resources and examples for how that might look.

The traditions or religion of the person who has passed will help you decide how to structure a memorial service. If the person had a particular faith they practiced, consider involving a religious leader from that tradition to help plan or hold a service. In general, the typical flow of a memorial service is a welcoming of some kind, a reading or two, a eulogy or sharing time, a memorial activity (planting your Legacy Tree), and a closing. The Legacy Tree planting can be as formal or informal as you would like and is a good opportunity to involve family and friends who would like to say a few words or participate in something meaningful outside of a traditional funeral service.

We've included some examples for different readings, poems, and scriptures that may provide inspiration for you. Try to include aspects of the person into the service - did they have a favorite author, scripture verse, or song? What was unique about your loved one that you want to highlight and share? This is a special time to remember and share in the life and legacy of your loved one together. We've also included a sample of what a full Legacy Tree planting service looks like. Last year, our Aunt Suzi passed away unexpectedly and our family came together to hold a memorial service and tree planting at the cemetery. We started with a welcome time and included writings that our Aunt had written over the years. It was a special way to hear her voice coming through. We then moved into a time of sharing where her sisters each wrote a short eulogy and opened it up for others to share if they wanted to. After the sharing time had come to a natural close, we read a few more poems that our Aunt had written and planted her tree. Our family has lots of kids of different ages so this was a great time for them to be included in something hands-on. Each kid took a turn with the shovel and was able to participate. Once the tree was planted we closed with another poem and then went to have a funeral lunch together.

These are all just some examples to help you get thinking of what you would like to do when planting a Legacy Tree. Feel free to use these or include your own - there's no wrong way to memorialize your loved one. If you have any questions you can let us know - we would be more than happy to help you!



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Readings

When Death Comes - Mary Oliver

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
If I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,

Or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

Wild Geese - Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.



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Readings

In Blackwater Woods - Mary Oliver

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars

of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders

of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is

nameless now.
Every year
everything
I have ever learned


in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side

is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.
To live in this world

you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it

against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it
go,
to let it go.



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Readings

A Thousand-Mile Walk To the Gulf - John Muir

“Let children walk with nature, let them see the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and they will learn that death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life, and that the grave has no victory, for it never fights. All is divine harmony.”

John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir

“Myriads of rejoicing living creatures, daily, hourly, perhaps every moment sink into death’s arms, dust to dust, spirit to spirit—waited on, watched over, noticed only by their maker, each arriving at its own Heaven-dealt destiny. All the merry dwellers of the trees and streams, and the myriad swarms of the air, called into life by the sunbeam of a summer morning, go home through death, wings folded perhaps in the last red rays of sunset of the day they were first tried. Trees towering in the sky, braving storms of centuries, flowers turning faces to the light for a single day or hour, having enjoyed their share of life’s feast—all alike pass on and away under the law of death and love. Yet all are our brothers and they enjoy life as we do, share Heaven’s blessings with us, die and are buried in hallowed ground, come with us out of eternity and return into eternity. Our lives are rounded with a sleep.”

May The Road Rise Up To Meet You - Traditional Gaelic Blessing

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields
and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of God’s hand.



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Readings

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, CEB Translation

1 There's a season for everything

and a time for every matter under the heavens:

2 a time for giving birth and a time for dying,

a time for planting and a time for uprooting what was planted,

3 a time for killing and a time for healing,

a time for tearing down and a time for building up,

4 a time for crying and a time for laughing,

a time for mourning and a time for dancing,

5 a time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,

a time for embracing and a time for avoiding embraces,

6 a time for searching and a time for losing,

a time for keeping and a time for throwing away,

7 a time for tearing and a time for repairing,

a time for keeping silent and a time for speaking,

8 a time for loving and a time for hating,

a time for war and a time for peace.

9 What do workers gain from all their hard work? 10 I have observed the task that God has given human beings. 11 God has made everything fitting in its time, but has also placed eternity in their hearts, without enabling them to discover what God has done from beginning to end.

12 I know that there's nothing better for them but to enjoy themselves and do what's good while they live. 13 Moreover, this is the gift of God: that all people should eat, drink, and enjoy the results of their hard work. 14 I know that whatever God does will last forever; it's impossible to add to it or take away from it. God has done this so that people are reverent before him. 15 Whatever happens has already happened, and whatever will happen has already happened before. And God looks after what is driven away.



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Readings

Psalm 23, CEB Translation

1 The Lord is my shepherd.

I lack nothing.

2 He lets me rest in grassy meadows;

he leads me to restful waters;

3 he keeps me alive.

He guides me in proper paths

for the sake of his good name.

4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no danger because you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—

they protect me.

5 You set a table for me

right in front of my enemies.

You bathe my head in oil;

my cup is so full it spills over!


6 Yes, goodness and faithful love

will pursue me all the days of my life,

and I will live in the Lord's house


as long as I live.



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Example Service

Welcome

Good morning everyone! Thank you for taking time to gather together here today as we're recognizing and honoring the life of Susan Harford. Suzi was my great aunt, and while she played many different roles in each of our lives, at her core, Suzi was an artist. She believed that we all have the innate ability to be creative, and to have the creative energy of the universe flow through us. She demonstrated her creative flow in every facet and stage of her life.

As a young girl growing up on our family farm, Suzi channeled her creative side through sewing and designing with her Mom, playing the piano, spending weeks with her Aunt Katy in the big city, and exploring one of her favorite spots among the bluebells, the timber.

Over these last few weeks we've had the privilege of going through some of her writings, poetry, and artistic musings. Suzi wrote "The History of My Life" in 2016, around her 70th birthday. She recounted the different decades of her life and the memories of times spent with her loved ones. She wrote, "As I embark on my 70th year in life, I have to say that I have had an amazing life so far. Full of adventures, full of opportunities, full of love, full of life! I have been so blessed to have been born into a family of such love and entrepreneurial spirit. My parents were the most loving and nurturing parents - I felt their love and support every day and they fully participated in my life's adventures."

Suzi shared about her high school years writing, "my real love was designing and making clothes with Mom. She was a seamstress and an artist! We both enjoyed this so much - we would go shopping for fabrics, then I would come up with a design and a sketch, and mom would make it. She loved sewing and I loved designing so we were a match made in heaven!" In the decade of her 20's she writes, "I had majored in art in college at Depauw University and had taught Dad how to do pottery. He and I both loved doing pottery. That was such a satisfying time for me. With an entire gorgeous woods on the grounds of our home, we had picnics on a regular basis with Mom, Dad, Ginny and Allen, Doug and Deb, Nina and Greg and all their families.



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Example Service

The kids enjoyed romping in the woods and we all enjoyed the beautiful setting.” She shared her love of nature, art, and the creative process with everyone she met, especially her family and her art students over the years.

One of the other writings of hers that we found was describing the themes of her life as tapestries. It’s so fitting for Suzi to think of life this way, because a tapestry weaves together individual threads to create a beautiful work of art. Some of the threads in her tapestry that she mentioned were Art, Teaching, Inspiring, Innovation, Creativity, and Abundance. Her words paint a beautiful picture of gratitude for her life as an artist, a teacher, an entrepreneur, a loving companion, and a creative spirit.

Family and legacy were important to Suzi. They were common themes in her writings, and it’s what brought us together today. We’re going to take some time now to reflect on Suzi and her role in your tapestry. We want to invite anyone to share their thoughts or favorite memories with Suzi. Her sisters, Nina and Ginny, will start off this time-

Time of Sharing

As we come together to lay Suzi to rest, let’s close with a few prayers in Suzi’s own words:

“Dance of Life”

“Thank You God”

Suzi has brought us all here together today. Let’s enjoy this time, make new connections with each other and learn what we can from her life. Please join us now to plant a tree in her honor, and then for lunch afterwards at Maria’s.

Tree Planting

Closing Poem



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