

Creating and Using Rituals in the 21st Century

Questions to Ponder

1. How can we create rituals that speak to and for persons in times of endings and beginnings?
2. How can we draw on resources from the past and present to help us do and say what will offer healing and hope to all?
3. How can we involve persons from other faith communities and/or from no faith community to share with us in creating and celebrating rituals that have integrity for all?
4. How can our rituals be holistic and offer opportunities for participants to honor and express their many emotions—anger, loss, fear, hope ... ?
5. How do the following guidelines (a work in process) help us? What would you change or add?

Guidelines for Designing Rituals that Speak to and for Persons in Times of Endings and Beginnings

- Offer yourself in a ministry of presence.
- Listen deeply to the stories people share.
- Ask questions that will help persons gain clarity in their own minds and hearts (not to satisfy our own curiosity).
- Be mutual and invitational in the ritual planning process.
- Do not assume or impose theological language or prayer; rather, when it seems appropriate ask if this psalm or that prayer might be helpful.
- Find ways to invite all persons to give voice to their own experiences and love and pain.
- Build on symbols and symbolic acts that connect with the person for whom or about whom the ritual is being planned and with those who will participate.
- Be open about when and where the ritual/celebration/lament is to take place.

A learning from our grandson's memorial service after he was killed in a motorcycle accident:

- Remember that when we honor other's ritual acts (e.g., the color guard and presentation of the flag; the 21 pistol salute, the motorcycle procession), others will honor our own expressions of faith and commitment as well.
- Avoid doing anything that violates our sense of integrity and never ask others to do anything that violates their sense of integrity.
- Use invitational language.
- Create safe and open spaces.
- Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work always in the lives of all who participate.
- Be open to receive surprising gifts as you seek to share God's inclusive love and compassion with those of another faith or of no faith.
- Be aware of the universal power of music, story and silence.
- Let scripture and biblical stories speak for themselves when they seem right to use.
- Proclaim God's compassion and love by embodying it as you relate with persons who are different or who come from different communities and traditions.

We offer these guidelines as a beginning point for reflection and discussion.

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