

# How to plan a Celebration of Life ceremony

## Check List

- Location
- Ceremony
- Decorations and Memories
- Flowers
- Food
- Music
- Activities
- Take Home Gifts

You are faced with the death of a loved one. All the emotion of the loss can cloud your thoughts or overwhelm you as to all you need to do to plan this celebration of their life. What is the first step? It is best to decide what type of budget you have to work with. This will be a determining factor in your decisions on what you will include. Then you may want to start making a checklist of things you want to include in your celebration. Once you know what you want to do,

some find it helpful to hire a professional party planner to take care of some of the details so they can concentrate on other important matters that must be done at this time. With the date set, it is time to create your checklist. What are some items you want to put on your checklist?

### **Location**

Once again your budget will be a determining factor in this, but another factor would be the amount of friends you think will attend. Some have held these in their home or the home of a friend, but if you think those attending would be over 100 or more you may want to consider renting a community center, or banquet hall. Others have held their celebration at park, on the beach, or at a favorite spot with some significance to the loved one whose life you are celebrating.

### **Ceremony**

You need to answer some important questions before you can plan the actual program. Who will officiate? What family members and friends will want to speak? What will be said? What will you include? Here are some key things many of the celebrations include.

Video: A presentation with pictures, video and music that presents the important aspects of the person and their life.

Eulogy: The person's life story. This will be used in the ceremony, but can also be used in the program, the website, and submitted to the local paper. It can also be used as an outline for the video.

Poem Readings: Either favorite poems of the person you are celebrating, or poems that describe their life or the type of person they were. These could also be poems written about or by the celebrant.

Scripture Readings: Favorite scriptures, or scriptures that give hope.

Memories or Stories: Told by friends and family to give you a clear picture of the type of life this person led and why they were important.

Here is a sample outline we found for a celebration of life ceremony:

Outline for presentation

- Musical Prelude
- A reading of Scripture Verses from the Old and New Testament
- Eulogy
- Message of Hope
- Choir or musical selection
- Reading of the Obituary
- Sharing Time from family and friends
- Video
- Closing Words

Some decide to videotape or video stream the ceremony on the Internet. This is a great addition for family or friends who would like to attend, but cannot be there

on that day for one reason or another, but would still like to be a part of the celebration. It also helps if you have a limited capacity, and cannot include all the friends.

### **Decoration and Memories**

There are many things you can include as decoration at your celebration. When people first enter the door you can have a picture memory poster to greet them. This is a poster created with key pictures from their life. You may even want to include a couple of these on themes like family, friends, or maybe a favorite sport or hobby.

Next to the posters you can have a table set up with a guest book for family and friends to sign. You can get creative with this by making a guest book that includes personal items about the person, such as stories, pictures, or their family tree. Creating a digital book to include all this will give the family a keepsake they can enjoy for years to come. Besides their names, you may want to request emails as well so you can send out a digital group thank you card after the event.

Next to the book you may want to put a basket or box where friends and family can place cards. Also next to this can be some index note cards and pens. If friends care to write a message to the family or a memory of the loved one they can take a card, write it and then bring it back and put it in the basket. It may be good to have someone there to watch over the guest book, explain about the cards, and they can also pass out the programs.

The program is a take home keepsake for each guest. It includes pictures, the life story or eulogy of the person, a list of the day's activities or ceremony presentation, and on the back can be a favorite poem, a scripture or a song.

Somewhere in the main part of the room you can place a memory table. The memory table is filled with personal items of the loved one that has some significance. You could include pictures of special events, awards, items that meant something to them, letters, a diary, recipes, or other items written in their handwriting. Pieces of clothing that would distinguish them to others, items from

their hobbies. Any items that tell about your loved ones personality would be ideal for the memory table.

## **Flowers**

Flowers arrangements are an important part of any celebration. With celebration of life celebrations, many people choose to have arrangements that are more personal. They may have flowers that spell out the person's name, or some florists have created arrangements with pictures as part of the arrangement. When choosing the flowers you may consider the type of flower or colors that were favorites of your loved one. Arrangements can be placed at entrance, on stage and as table decorations on the food table.

## **Food**

Most receptions serve food buffet style. So pick foods that are easy for people to eat while standing, or eating off their laps. If your loved one liked a particular type of food, you may want that to be on the menu. In most cases its best to cater the event, since preparing food for a crowd can be stressful on top of everything else that is planned. If you have a limited budget you may want to keep it simple and serve a snack.

Today cakes and cupcakes may be created in a variety of shapes to depict an item of significance. Example: say your loved one loved football; you could create cupcakes in the shape of footballs. Another popular thing to do is have a sheet cake made with a picture of your loved on the top of the cake.

## **Music**

Background music can be done in various ways. Some hire professional musicians to play instruments like guitar, violin or harp before the ceremony, or afterwards while family and friends are visiting. Others have created a collection of songs that had special significance to the loved one and played this during these times. Others may hire a DJ and request a number of songs or artist the DJ can put together to play as background music.

## **Activities**

After the service many wonder if they should have planned activities for their guest. Here are a few things you may want to include.

Release-Many people have found releasing a item can help in mentally and emotionally releasing the loved one from their life. Because of that the following have become popular additions to celebrations of life.

Balloon Release-guest write note to the loved one directly on the helium balloon and then as a group they release them as a way of saying good-bye

Dove Release-another symbol of letting go

Butterfly release- A symbol of releasing your loved one.

Revolving video-You may want to create two versions of the video.

1. A short video to play in the ceremony
2. A long version to play afterwards revolving on a television somewhere in the room, throughout the reception, for guest to watch.

Using music may be a nice way to entertain your guest throughout the evening. Friends or family members with nice singing voices may want to perform a song that had some meaning to the loved one. You may even set up Karaoke with all your loved ones favorite songs and encourage your guest to sing along.

Consider creating an activity at the reception for your guest to do that was important to your loved one. Did your loved one like board games like scrabble or chess? Why not set up some areas with these games set up for family and friends to play during the reception? Was your loved one into golf, why not create an indoor putting green. Was your loved one a wine connoisseur, you could arrange for a personal wine tasting at your reception. Did they love to cook? Maybe you could have a cooking demonstration with one of their favorite recipes. Be creative; think of ideas that could help your friends and family relive the experience of being with your loved one again.

Another idea is creating a craft table to create a take home gift for your guest.

## Seed Card Craft Table

One popular item for Celebration of life ceremonies is Seed cards. The cards have some a saying, poem or memory of the loved one written on the card and inside are flower seeds friends and family can plant at their home. When they bloom it will help them remember their loved one. You could create a table with construction paper, scissors, pens, glue, maybe copies of a picture made on paper that can be cut out for the card, and then packages of seeds. Have your guest create their own cards, write a memory about your loved one and glue the seed packages inside. They can take their own crafted card home as a memory. You may want to station someone at the table with a camera so they can catch photographs of each of the cards created for the family to see what was created.

## Candle Making

Many people like to light a candle to remember a loved one. Create a candle craft table. Be sure to have someone experienced in candle making to be in charge of the table. Guest can come up and pick their candle colors, and scents and help create their own candle. If made in glass containers you could create stickers to place on containers with pictures and you're loved ones name. The candles could be taken home as a memory of the celebration.

## **Take Home Gifts**

Many people like to have gifts for family and friends to take home to remember their friend or family member. We have already mentioned a few, but here is a list of items you could include.

Program: A keepsake with pictures and life story of your loved on and also used in reviewing the activities in the ceremony.

CD of music-You created a CD of your loved ones favorite songs as background music for the reception. You can have copies of this made and give out to your guest.

Copies of the video-The video played at the ceremony or reception can be created in multiple copies and handed out to guest.

Candles-Either you can create these at a craft table, or you can have them made with your loved ones picture and name placed on it and given out as gifts

Seed Cards-Either this can be created at a craft table or you can order these already made up to pass out to your friends and family.

This gives you a list of some of the things you can include in your “Celebration of Life”, but the series will continue with some of the items Tears of Joy video creates in our “Celebration of Life Packages” and why these items are so important to your celebration.