

## Vigil Resource Sheet

**Interfaith vigils:** can provide a meaningful spectrum across religious traditions. Such services can also include poetry and other literature, liturgical rituals and music.

**Ecumenical Vigils:** offered in the framework of the Christian faith, yet sensitive to varied denominational affiliations, historical differences and interpretations concerning liturgy and sacrament; such services can also include poetry, literature, rituals and music.

**Community Vigils:** addresses a far wider audience. May include sacred readings while including poetry and other literature, ritual and music.

**Audience:** Potentially a vigil could include immediate and extended family members of the deceased, neighbors, religious and civic leaders, teachers and school administrators, police, firefighter and other first responders, politicians, blue collar workers, white collar professionals, local and national media.

**A Word About First Responders:** The first ones on the scene be it a shooting, train derailment, airplane crash, bombing, tornado or earthquake, First Responders have a unique but intensely demanding role. Questions as to gauging who has survived, determining who needs immediate medical attention, relocating victims to a more secure location, not interfering with potential evidence at a crime scene and determining if the area is secure are one of the many responsibilities they may need to carry out. Acknowledging the costliness of the duties they shoulder and the cumulative trauma they might be contending with should be considered during vigil planning and preparation.

**Pastoral Considerations:** It is likely that a cross section of people attending will be experiencing some form of trauma. Trauma isn't confined to those in the immediacy of the disaster or violence. Trauma can be inflicted through seeing visual images, or experiencing repeated incidents of heightened unrest/violence/upheaval. There is also the matter of pre-existing tensions in our current geo-political environment - those fueled by despair, distrust and anger. It may be helpful to see those attending (even if unaware) as engaged in a human struggle, a human endeavor to resolve underlying anxiety and fear about annihilation and deaths. What distinguishes us from each other then, *is what we do with it*. Do we cope by numbing ourselves, become consumed by hatred, or do we turn inward to despair? Or do we embark on a different path?

### **A well-prepared vigil then:**

- 1) Provides the means to safely acknowledge devastating loss within the context of remembrance (be it a lost child or a home or a deeply held value),
- 2) Acknowledges that hope does not negate the tragedy but audaciously affirms loss against the cacophony of other voices who want us to forget and...
- 3) Just as God cannot forget the losses and suffering of God's people, when remembrance is linked with hope it opens the road towards restorative justice.

**A Good Starting Question:** When whom or what we loved (or held dear, valued, looked to) is lost what is left?

### **Other Resources (includes interfaith, ecumenical and wider audiences):**

#### **Possible Opening Words (at the start of a vigil):**

We are here in the wake of what has happened to openly witness to this horrific tragedy's impact upon us [as parents, neighbors, co-workers, teachers, community, etc.] Though words alone are insufficient in the wake of such unbearable loss, to remain silent is the greater breach. (JM)

**Other Musical Resources:**

**(Following violence) Let Speeches Fall Silent**

<http://adammltice.blogspot.com/2016/06/letspeeches-fall-silent-hymn-after.html>

**Selection of newer hymns using familiar congregational tunes**

<http://www.carolynshymns.com>

**Some possible rituals/mementos/other:** Using the theme of hope, rocks could be put into a basin of water to dispense with fears, and/or flowers could be floated on top as evidence of hope and a continuation of the loved one's essence remaining even in the wake of their death.

Other rituals would be to name people through lighting candles, putting names on a paper leaf attached to a tree of life, etc.

A memento (when words cannot suffice) might be providing a piece of ribbon for each participant to depart with as a symbol of remembrance, Or a bookmark with the names of those who lost their lives, or a smooth rock to place in their homes or gardens.

Resource sheets could be provided at the end of the vigil, short but impactful. Perhaps echoing the theme of the vigil itself, suggested words of comfort or family wishes concerning a memorial offering that would be sent to a designated organization.

**Recommended scripture selections:**

Psalm 46: 1-3

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Psalm 90: 1, 2

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalm 91: 1-4a

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust. For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.

Isaiah 54: 10

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Psalm 57: 1-3

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by. Cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me, he will put to shame those who trample on me. God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness.

Psalm 130: 1-6

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD, Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

Psalm 10: 1, 12-18

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? . . . Rise up, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed. Why do the wicked renounce God, and say in their hearts, You will not call us to account But you do see! Indeed you note

trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan. Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers; seek out their wickedness until you find none. The Lord is king forever and ever; the nations shall perish from his land. O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

John 14: 1-3

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

Lamentations 3: 22-24

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in him.

Romans 8: 22-25

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

2 Corinthians 1: 3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.

Revelation 21: 1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more; for the first things have passed away.

Matthew 5:2-4

Then [Jesus] began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 An anthropologist and existentialist, the late Ernest Becker's groundbreaking work, *The Denial of Death*, provides a lens of understanding concerning humankind's deep anxiety around death and the psychology of religion itself.