



# Social Distance Rituals, Memorials, and Legacy Building

- The health concerns and social distancing requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the end of life experience worldwide
  - Friends and family have limited or no physical access to people dying in care facilities, hospices, and hospitals, leaving many patients and beloveds isolated from traditional means of support and care
  - People are connecting digitally for healthcare needs, end of life coordination, and communication with family and loved ones. Although useful in many ways, electronic connection falls short of fulfilling basic human need for community and physical interaction to both grieve and celebrate at the end of life
  - Gatherings in Maryland, including funerals, burials, and memorial services, are limited to 10 or fewer people, leaving many unable to participate directly in traditional mourning rituals with families
  
- Social Distance Rituals
  - Although physical interaction is currently limited, people can continue to connect with each other through meaningful rituals at the end of life and in remembrance of loved ones
  - There are similarities within our homes and experiences that can help us to connect with each other in powerful ways. Collectively sharing and celebrating these commonalities can help us to express and receive care at a distance
  - Social distance rituals can include: Gathering separately but at the same time to share a sunrise or sunset, circulate old photographs, create a current yearbook of friends, cook or eat special family recipes together, sing or teach old songs, reenact childhood movie classics, share family stories, write collective poetry, share a common prayer. Any meaningful expression can be a healing ritual when attention and care are brought to the moment
  - Create sacred space and spend time there. This space can be anywhere and requires only the designation that the space, and the moments spent there, will be used to connect with what is sacred to each of us. Even a hospital room can become sacred space. Physical sacred spaces can contain photographs, plants, flowers, important items, and mementos and are useful places for meditation and prayer. Taking the time to routinely connect with what is sacred can remind us how we are a part of a greater mystery and help us feel closer to each other
  - Get creative! Meaningful rituals can be simple and brief. Explore new ways to share what is discovered with friends and family. Utilize the mail for family letters or journals, recite quotes or poems over the phone, sing collective lullabies to children, record each other's voices, light a candle at the same time, plant the same garden flowers, participants all wear a hat, pin, or color in honor of a beloved, designate a date or days for communal rituals...
  - Share cherished and meaningful symbols with those at a distance, such as butterflies, hearts, bees, stars, religious symbols, or whatever inspires love. Connect with thought and imagination. Focusing on the same symbol at the same time of day can be uniting

## ➤ Social Distance Memorials

- Due to COVID-19, most memorial services are limited 10 or fewer people or have been postponed
- Many funeral establishments are broadcasting services and have created virtual memorial walls for families to post on and digital memorials, such as Lifeposts, are being used
- Social Distancing requirements of 10 or fewer people have birthed staggered memorial services, where friends and family visit the viewing or burial site individually or in their “pods” over a period of time
- Postponing memorials for when families can connect in-person again, makes sense. However, people grieving a loss, may find it helpful to create a simple memorial event or monument for beloveds at the time of death

## ➤ Legacy Building

- Legacy work affirms our living and dying experience
- Legacy work helps to clarify what is meaningful and important to each of us
- Explore and share ancestral information that can be discovered electronically and from rekindling old connections. Begin building a family tree
- Write down or record family stories, names of loved ones, important dates and moves
- Request and gather family letters to or from certain participants
- Write letters to living or future family members with dreams, lessons, and stories
- Journal thoughts and experiences during COVID-19 to share with future generations

## ➤ Useful Sites and Articles:

- **Digital Memorials:** [www.lifeposts.com](http://www.lifeposts.com)
- **COVID-19 Specific Memorials:** <https://diedfamo.us/covid19-memorials>
- **Alternative Mourning Rituals Offer Comfort And Closure During An Outbreak – NPR**  
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/04/02/793951420/new-mourning-rituals-offer-comfort-and-closure-during-an-outbreak?fbclid=IwAR3QFD9pdkjDNT79WoTRe0PQrGaYH08tOtSHEMApTLIKTyETKmq0i-YE9g>
- **Funerals & Dying in Absentia: Inspiration & Tips During COVID-19 – The Order of the Good Death:** [http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/funerals-dying-in-absentia-inspiration-tips-during-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR2v6en4Bt7VqwBTsiF4d8atbd3WKWn5T03m0mINp7Zcr6KQn7V\\_8NBOD5g](http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/funerals-dying-in-absentia-inspiration-tips-during-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR2v6en4Bt7VqwBTsiF4d8atbd3WKWn5T03m0mINp7Zcr6KQn7V_8NBOD5g)
- **Threshold Support Circle:** [www.thresholdsupportcircle.org](http://www.thresholdsupportcircle.org)