

How to coordinate a community vigil

What you need:

- Community facilitator to serve as contact person and main coordinator
- Five community speakers
- Choir or singers
- Balloons or sky lanterns
- Candles with wax catchers
- Mic and speakers
- Cookies and bottled water to serve to community
- One person with cigarette/campfire lighter to light the first candle

Identify team leads.

- Community facilitator
- Balloon team lead
- Candle team lead
- Music team lead

Invite community officials to speak. Five are needed for candle lighting.

- City mayor
- Police chief or fire chief
- School superintendent
- School principal
- Family representative
- Community pastor

FLOW OF EVENTS: (see page 3)

- Community Facilitator: Welcomes crowd, introduces individual speakers, mentions donors and volunteers.
- Pastor: Opening prayer.
- School principal: Words of comfort and/or poem.
- School district superintendent: Words of comfort and/or poem.
- City Mayor: Words of comfort and/or poem.
- Family representatives (if desired).
- Candlelighting.
- Balloon or sky lantern release.
- Pastor: Closing prayer (if desired).



Team Lead Duties

COMMUNITY FACILITATOR DUTIES:

- Coordinates all aspects of vigil and all people involved including team leads, speakers, media, city officials, school reps, family reps (if desired) and any donors who have contributed to the vigil.
- Serve as main contact person and spokesperson.
- Set vigil time and location. Make sure it's easy for people to find and has adequate parking, bathroom facilities, garbage receptacles, etc.
- Invite and confirm speakers. Each speaker can decide what to say (short speech, words of comfort, read a poem, etc). Ensure no poems are duplicated.
- Find 3 volunteers who are willing to serve as team leads (balloon, candle, music).
- Set vigil schedule and distribute to all involved.
- Distribute press release that include vigil details to local media and social media.
- Secure use of portable speakers and mic(s). Check for power outlets at site. If no power, check to see if mic and speakers can be battery operated.
- Designate one person to light the mayor's candle when the time comes. Make sure this person has two cigarette/campfire lighters in case one malfunctions.

BALLOON LEAD DUTIES:

- Find volunteers to deliver balloons to vigil. Need multiple vehicles to transport all the balloons.
- If donor can't inflate balloons, find a party store who can. Do not inflate balloons at vigil as it's too distracting and it's difficult to keep people from taking balloons.
- Have volunteers secure balloons at vigil so wind doesn't blow them away. Consider tying groups of 10 balloons at a time to chairs. Make sure they're easy to release from chairs when it's time to distribute among the vigil crowd.
- Have volunteers distribute balloons among crowd when the time comes. Ask volunteers to instruct people to hold their balloon until everybody can release them at the same time when the time comes.
- If using sky lanterns, check with fire department for restrictions or permits.

CANDLE LEAD DUTIES:

- Find volunteers to serve on the Candle Team.
- Coordinate donation of candles and wax catchers from store or church. Candles and wax catchers can also be purchased on Amazon or from religious organizations.
- Have volunteers assemble candles inside wax catchers prior to vigil.
- Have volunteers quietly distribute candles among crowd prior to the candlelighting, or people can get one when they arrive.

MUSIC LEAD DUTIES:

- Find choir or singer(s) to perform during vigil.
- Coordinate one symbolic song to sing during balloon release (i.e. Somewhere Over the Rainbow).
- Coordinate one symbolic song to sing during candle lighting.
- Ensure that choir and/or singer(s) are prepared to perform enough songs to accommodate length of time needed to light all the candles.

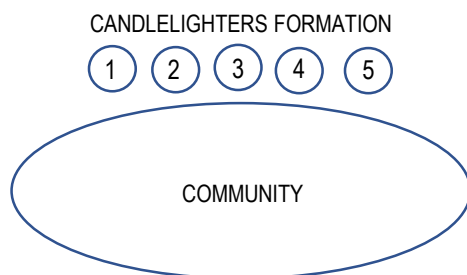
Suggested Schedule

PART 1: Comments

1. Opening comments by community facilitator (3-5 minutes):
 - Welcomes community
 - Recognizes donors and volunteers
 - Mentions and encourages use of local grief resources and/or suicide hot line
 - Introduces each speaker as they take the mic
2. Opening prayer by pastor (2-3 minutes)
3. School principal speaks (2-3 minutes)
4. School superintendent speaks (2-3 minutes)
5. City mayor or city official speaks (2-3 minutes)
6. Police chief, fire chief, or family representative speaks (2-3 minutes)

PART 2: Candle lighting

7. Have choir sing one song while 5 speakers assemble on bench or raised platform so they can be seen by everyone (see diagram below).
 - Once the speakers are in position, begin candle lighting as follows. City mayor stands center (position #3) and is the first candle to be lit. Make sure the person who light's the mayor's candle has 2 cigarette/campfire lighters on hand in case one doesn't work.
 - Once the mayor's candle has been lit, s/he holds the lit candle out in front of his body.
 - Speakers in positions #2 and #4 simultaneously dip their candles into the flame of the mayor's candle. Speakers in positions #2 and #4 then hold their lit candles upright.
 - Speaker in position #1 dips his/her candle into the flame of speaker #2 at the same time speaker in position #5 dips his/her candle into the flame of #4.
 - All 5 speakers pause for a moment with candles raised, and then lower them and invite people to use the flames to light their own. People continue lighting one another's candles until all are lit.



PART 3: Balloon Release

8. After all candles are lit, allow singers to finish current song, and then ask for a moment of silence.
9. During the moment of silence, balloon team quietly distribute balloons among crowd.
10. After moment of silence, one speaker reads poem (see recommended poems below). If needed, read second poem until everyone has a balloon.
11. Once everyone has a balloon, choir/singers perform one song such as Somewhere Over the Rainbow as all 5 speakers simultaneously release their balloon. The community will follow the gesture.
12. If desired, closing prayer by Pastor (2-3 minutes).

Suggested Poems and songs

Song Suggestions:

- Somewhere Over the Rainbow
- I Will Always Love You, by Whitney Houston
- Amazing Grace
- To Where You Are, by Josh Groban
- Wind Beneath my Wings, by Bette Midler
- Go Light Your World, by C. Rice

Candle lighting poem (suggested):

FIVE CANDLES, by unknown author

The first candle represents our grief.
The pain of losing you is intense.
It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

This second candle represents our courage.
To confront our sorrow,
To comfort each other,
To change our lives.

This third candle we light in your memory.
For the times we laughed,
The times we cried,
The times we were angry with each other,
The silly things you did,
The caring and joy you gave us.

This fourth candle we light for our love.
We light this candle that your light will always shine.
As we enter this season and share this night of remembrance
with our family and friends.
We cherish the special place in our hearts
that will always be reserved for you.

This fifth candle we light to thank you for the gift
your living brought to each of us.

We love you.

We remember you.

Poem for a speaker (suggested)

TIME WILL EASE THE HURT, by Bruce B. Wilmer

The sadness of the present days
is locked and set in time.
And moving to the future
is a slow and painful climb.

But all the feelings that
are now so vivid and real
can't hold their fresh intensity
as time begins to heal.

No wound so deep will
ever go entirely away,
yet every hurt becomes
a little less each day.

Nothing can erase the painful
imprints on your mind.
But there are softer memories
that time will let you find.

Though your heart won't let
the sadness simply slide away,
the echoes will diminish
even though the memories stay.

Balloon release poems (suggested)

POEM #1

As the strings slip through my hand
I think of the beauty you brought to this land
I watch as the balloons float away
Just like when you left me that day

They float into the beautiful clouds
I hear you laughing out loud
Up to the heavens above
Carrying a note from me with love

The life you lived celebrated this day
That is what the balloons are meant to say
Receive the balloons with gentle care
They symbolize the love that will always be there

Balloons, I release you to float away
Make sure you get up to our loved ones this day
We release you into the sky
We watch you float, we watch you fly

Loved ones, catch these balloons
on this bittersweet day
Read the notes and then go play
Keep us in your hearts
You may be gone but we shall not part

So flat in the heavens and play in the clouds
Releasing the balloons from our hearts so proud.

POEM #2, by Vicki Hansen

Floating freely in the air,
is a special balloon with all my care,
That I have released to the skies above.
It's really important, it carries my love.

So please be watching for it to come by;
this special balloon, I released to the sky.
Sent to my Angel in heavenly flight,
to let my Angel know I am alright.

I don't really like to be without you.
And many a day, I have been blue!
I know you're in Heaven and that gives me peace.
So it's with all my love, this balloon I release.