



THE MASONIC MEMORIAL SERVICES

Prepared by the Grand Lodge Protocol & Etiquette Committee

SIGNIFICANCE

1. The importance of the Memorial Service to the Craft cannot be over-emphasised. It is the only time that Masons appear clothed in regalia to perform Masonic Ritual in public. For many people, it is the first and only time they will see a Masonic Lodge in action and experience Masonic principles in practice. The image of Masonry in the community will be well served when the Memorial Service is conducted with sincerity, competence and dignity.
2. Many sons and grandsons have joined the Craft as a result of the impression made upon them by a well-conducted Memorial Service, when their father or grandfather died.
3. While the Service is conducted primarily for the benefit of the family and friends of the departed brother, it is also an opportunity for us to say goodbye to him and to acknowledge his contributions to our Lodge.
4. Every effort should be made to make the family feel a part of the Service. Under no circumstances should their view of the Service be impeded.
5. Take your responsibilities seriously. Do the best you can to leave a lasting impression upon the family, and to honour the memory and accomplishments of our departed brother.
6. The family's (and the public's) perception of the Service will depend upon how well you conduct it. Remember – it doesn't matter what you INTENDED to do, but how well you actually did it. *(As illustrated by the newspaper article on Pages 16 - 17 of this guide.)*
7. Also bear in mind that when you appear in public in your regalia, every pair of eyes in the room will be watching you. Anything you do, (good or bad), will be noticed and remembered. Every cough, every scratch, every inappropriate remark, every laugh; and whether you conducted the service in a confident, or a confused, manner.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

8. Masons in other Jurisdictions have been conducting Memorial Services for departed brethren since at least from 1632. Our Grand Lodge first prescribed such a Service in

1856. It has been revised and shortened over the years, with the basic Service as we know it today being approved in 1938.

9. A Graveside Service was discontinued by our Grand Lodge in 1972.
10. For further background information, please refer to *Whence Come We?*, pages 203-204, 1980.

REVIEW

11. There are three Services outlined in the latest edition of the G.L. booklet entitled "*The Memorial Services*":
 - One is the Service which is normally performed in a funeral home.
 - The second is the same Service, which can be held in a Lodge Room instead of a funeral home. It is identical to the first, except for the omission of four words – "*the mortal remains of*". Family and friends may be invited. The Lodge is either not opened, or it is called from labour to refreshment.
 - The third is a special Service to be held in a tyled and opened Lodge Room, at which **only** Masons can be present. This non-public Service is usually performed once a year in remembrance of all the brethren of the Lodge who have passed to the G.L.A. during the preceding twelve months.
12. A Masonic Memorial Service is normally conducted in a funeral home but it could be held in another suitable place, such as a church or chapel, a church hall, or even in a private home. For the purpose of this guide, let's assume the Service is being conducted in a funeral home.
13. A Memorial Service may be held without a casket being present. In these circumstances, a small table at the front of the room may be draped appropriately. The deceased brother's regalia, a photograph of him, a basket for the acacia, and possibly a plant or flowers – even an urn from a cremation – can be placed on the table.
14. A Masonic Memorial Service may be held on a Sunday, (Section 273, *Book of Constitution*). Dispensation is not required.
15. The latest version of the Masonic Memorial Services booklet is still the 1999 edition. It can be obtained from our Grand Lodge Office and costs \$1. All Masons should obtain a copy and keep it with their regalia. You never know when you are going to need it.
16. The various parts of the Service MAY be read responsively, or one brother could read them all. (Sometimes there could be a greater impact on the family if a brother who is exceptionally good with ritual conducts the entire Service.)
17. Incidentally, there are two pages of guidelines, procedures and explanations in the 1999 edition, (see pages 11 and 12 of that booklet), which will be a big help to brethren who have not participated in many Memorial Services.

18. Whenever you are involved with a Masonic Memorial Service, the first question you should ask yourself is: **“Why are we conducting this Service?”**
19. It’s not just to pay our respects and to say goodbye to a departed brother.
20. We are doing it **FOR HIS FAMILY** and his friends. So don’t exclude them from the Service.
 - Face them.
 - Don’t turn your back to them.
 - Don’t block their view.
 - Speak up so they can hear you.
 - Deliver the Service in such a manner that the family will remember it always.
21. The family could be given a COPY of the public Memorial Service, so they may follow along. (See the example on pages 18-21 of this material.) (Note: Do NOT give the family the actual Grand Lodge booklet containing all three Services, as one of the Services is RITUAL.)
22. It would be quite in order to prepare an extra copy of the Sacred Roll, which could be given to the family to keep. (See page 22 for an example of an attractive Sacred Roll.)
23. A Masonic Memorial Service is not done automatically. It is **ONLY** carried out if the family requests one.
24. The family may not be aware that **they** have to request the Lodge to conduct a Memorial Service. A close family friend, (or the Worshipful Master, or the Lodge Secretary), could discretely inform them of this necessity – either directly, or through the Funeral Director.
25. We can only enquire, or possibly suggest. We never impose.
26. It is solely the family’s decision whether they would like to have a Masonic Memorial Service. Therefore, if it is **your** personal wish to have such a Service, when YOU ascend to the G.L.A., make sure your family and/or executor are aware of this, and that they know who they have to call in your Lodge, to request a Service.
27. Unlike some Jurisdictions, in our Grand Jurisdiction all Masons – regardless of their rank – whether an E.A. or a Grand Master – are entitled to a Masonic Memorial Service.
28. The status of the deceased brother is usually not relevant. Prior to his death, he could have been suspended for non-payment of dues – but the family may not know that.
29. If there is any question as to whether it would be appropriate to conduct a Masonic Service, contact your D.D.G.M. (e.g. the brother may have been expelled for a heinous crime). Under such circumstances, let the D.D.G.M and the Grand Master make the decision.

30. A Lodge never involves any other organization or body in conducting a Memorial Service, (except another Lodge). If both a Memorial Service and a formal church service are to take place consecutively, the Masonic Service always precedes the church service.
31. It is normally the **responsibility of the deceased brother's "mother" Lodge to conduct the Memorial Service** – it is not the District's, nor Grand Lodge's responsibility. However, the brother may have moved and now resided in another area, in which case you may have to ask a local Lodge to conduct the Service there. (Should the circumstances be reversed, it is also possible that YOUR Lodge may be requested to conduct a Service for a brother from another area who was not a member of, and perhaps was not even known by, your Lodge.)
32. The D.D.G.M. should be informed immediately about the death of any brother in the District. The D.D.G.M. should also be invited to participate in the Service.
33. If the deceased brother is a Past or Present Grand Lodge Officer, (or a William Mercer Wilson Medal recipient), also report his passing to the Grand Secretary.
34. When participating in the Service, familiarize yourself beforehand with your assigned part. Be very precise with your terminology, e.g.:
 - It is a "Masonic **Memorial Service**", not a "Masonic Funeral Service".
 - It is called a "Sacred **Roll**", not a "Scroll";
 - The words "**immortal**" and "**immortality**" are used six times in the Service. Do not pronounce them as "immoral", or "immorality"!

PLANNING – LONG RANGE

35. A Memorial Service is the only occasion when Masons typically don't get any prior notice of the parts assigned to them.
36. One of the first duties of a Lodge's new Officers could be to conduct a Masonic Service. They need to plan for this. Encourage your Officers to prepare for this eventuality.
37. There are many Wardens who have never even attended a Memorial Service, yet they will soon become the Worshipful Master and will then be expected to conduct one.
38. There won't be a lot of time to prepare for a Service, once one is requested by the family. At best, you will only have a couple of days to get all the arrangements ready.
39. Prior preparation and rehearsal is therefore very important. A Worshipful Master and a Senior Warden should be prepared to conduct a Memorial Service at any time, even if they have just assumed those Officer positions.

40. A rehearsal can be structured very formally and replicate an actual Service. It could also be informal in nature, with each Lodge Officer taking turns reading a part from the Services booklet.
41. Consider having some brethren conduct an exemplification of a Masonic Memorial Service at a Lodge meeting one evening, as Masonic Education.
42. It is important to practice reading the Service aloud, speaking slowly and clearly. Place emphasis on certain words to add meaning. Check any pronunciations of which you are unsure.
43. A Worshipful Master will need to establish a system to quickly communicate with all Lodge members and to encourage their attendance at the Service.
44. **Think of a Masonic Memorial Service as an unscheduled Lodge Meeting**, held outside of the Lodge Room. Every Officer has a role to play and they should wear their collars – especially when participating in the Service. Members need to attend and support their Officers.

OFFICERS' DUTIES

45. Here is a brief outline of the duties for each Officer:

- W.M.: Contact the funeral home as early as possible and review your requirements. Arrange for them to provide a lectern, the acacia, a basket for the acacia, a small stand in front of the coffin on which to place the basket, and an assembly-room for the Masons. Liaise with the family. Assign parts to those participating in the service. Arrive early before the Service, greet the family, and handle last-minute preparations.
- Secretary: Prepare the Sacred Roll (with perhaps an extra copy for the family), bring some plain sheets of paper to serve as an attendance register for the Masonic brethren (these sheets can subsequently be attached to the official Lodge Register with a notation that a Service was held at a certain date, place, etc.), the large print Memorial Service book for the lectern, some small Memorial Service booklets for the brethren, copies of the Service for the family, an E.A. apron, and the Officers' collars.

The Secretary should also ensure that all Lodge property, (the apron, collars, Service books, and the attendance sheets), are returned to the Lodge after the Service.

- D of C: Attend to all brethren. Direct them where to assemble, hang their coats, and leave their regalia bags. Distribute the acacia and copies of the Service (or the Service booklets), and help maintain dignity and decorum. Before the ceremony, he should demonstrate the Funeral Honours and how to deposit the acacia, line up the brethren who are participating in the service, direct the remaining brethren where to stand/sit, and ensure the family is not excluded from the ceremony. After the ceremony, collect

the Service booklets and make sure the brethren maintain quiet dignity as they leave the building.

- S.W.: Assist the Worshipful Master. Be prepared to replace him.
- J.W.: Assist the Senior Warden.

- Deacons: Assist the Director of Ceremonies, direct the brethren, help keep noise levels down, and act as ushers when there is a large attendance.
- Senior Deacon: Delivers a lambskin apron to the Worshipful Master at the appropriate moment in the Service.

- Stewards: Assist the Deacons.

DRESS CODE

46. The appropriate dress code for every Mason who attends a Masonic Memorial Service in a funeral home is a **dark business suit**. (Not a tuxedo, nor a sports jacket and slacks.) Regalia is worn. As mentioned above, the Officers of the deceased member's Lodge should wear their collars. Past and present Grand Lodge Officers wear their **dress** regalia. The wearing of jewels is normal – but optional.

PLANNING – THE DAY OF THE SERVICE

47. The Secretary should ensure the attendance sheets (and the acacia) are accessible to the brethren at least 30 minutes prior to the Service.

48. VERY IMPORTANT. Much activity takes place prior to the start of the Service (e.g. the Service is being organized, brethren are arriving and welcoming each other), but try to keep the noise level down. Be respectful of your surroundings. As far as your demeanor is concerned, you should show respect from the moment you enter the funeral home, until you leave.

49. The facilities of each funeral home typically differ from one to the next. Their physical layouts can sometimes pose a challenge for us to conduct a Service in accordance with these guidelines. The Worshipful Master should arrive early to evaluate the room where the Service is to be held. If there are no chairs in the room for the family to sit upon, consider asking the Funeral Director to provide a few. Sometimes rearranging the seating already in the room may be necessary, (with the approval of the funeral home, of course).

50. We are accustomed to regularity in our meetings and to the physical layout of our Lodge meeting rooms. We know what to expect. They are predictable. In contrast, just as layout of funeral homes differ, rarely are two Masonic Memorial Services the same. Circumstances change from one to the next. If you are the Worshipful Master, expect the unexpected. Be flexible – and, above all – be calm.

51. While it can occasionally be a challenge to conduct the Service as described herein, do your best to adapt to the circumstances.
52. Refer to page 13 of this document for a depiction of where the brethren should stand while the Service is being conducted. Basically, those brethren who are actually PARTICIPATING in the Service should stand in the "S/E" corner of the room, (with the location of the coffin or urn being considered as the "East"). The remainder of the brethren should stand at the back (i.e. in the "West") and/or sides of the room.
53. There should be a lectern, usually placed at the foot of the casket, for the use of the Worshipful Master and the other brethren participating in the service.
54. In the case of a large turnout, consider asking two (or more) brethren (e.g. the Lodge Deacons and/or Stewards), to act as ushers, to escort non-Masonic and Masonic guests to their seats. (When space in a chapel permits some of the brethren to be seated, they should always sit in the back rows of the chapel, behind the family and friends.)
55. The mandatory introductory comments in the Memorial Services booklet are designed to make the family and friends feel welcome and part of the Service.
56. As part of these comments, the family is asked to remain throughout the Service. They are also given a brief explanation about the symbolism which the sprig of acacia has to us.
57. The Worshipful Master should assign parts of the Service in advance, either to members of his Lodge who he knows will be present, or to brethren from other Lodges. Assigning parts at the funeral home is sometimes inevitable, though not ideal.
58. The Service could be divided into several parts, involving as many as twelve brethren or, if need be, the Worshipful Master could do it all himself. (See pages 14-15 of this document for a worksheet that could be used to assign the various parts.)
59. A large-print copy of the Service, in 8.5" by 11" book format, spiral bound and paginated conveniently for use on a lectern, is available from Grand Lodge.
60. Ensure that a nice new, clean, white, leathern E.A. apron is put aside for use in a Masonic Memorial Service. You do not want to display a yellow, frayed, tattered old cotton apron in public.
61. Note: The deceased brother's apron is not used during the Service. However, it may be on display in the room.

THE SERVICE

62. The family and friends of the deceased brother are seated, or assembled, prior to the procession of Masons into the room where the Service is to be conducted.

63. All Masons should enter the room together. It makes for an impressive sight.
64. The brethren line up in two columns for the procession – the Worshipful Master leading the left, and the D.D.G.M., (or another past or present Grand Lodge Officer), leading the right.
65. Only the twelve brethren who will be reading parts of the Service need to be at the front of the room, (in the “S/E”, to the right of the casket).
66. While those participating in the Service are walking to the front of the room, the remainder of the brethren can divert to stand at the back and the sides of the room, being very careful not to block the view of the family and non-Masonic friends. If there is ample seating at the back of the chapel, the brethren not participating in the Service could sit there.
67. The actual Service is usually completed within 15 minutes. When circumstances permit, the brethren should stand throughout – without blocking anyone’s view. (Elderly, frail, or infirm brethren should certainly be seated.)
68. At the appropriate time, each brother will step to the lectern, read his part from the large-print book on the lectern, turn the page on completion, and return to the BACK of the line in which he was previously standing.
69. Every effort should be made to have the reading of the verses from the *Wisdom of Solomon* done responsively, with the brethren taking an enthusiastic part. All brethren who are to be seated should stand while participating in these readings.
70. The brother who is assigned the part which explains the significance of the lambskin apron should hold up the apron, so everyone can see it. Continue holding up the apron with **two** hands until you complete the explanation. (**Tip:** You can hold a small copy of the Ceremony booklet BEHIND the apron, out of view of those seated in front of you, and simply read the part while you are holding up the apron.)
71. At the conclusion of the part describing the lambskin apron, place it:
 - For an open casket: On the closed portion of the lid of the coffin.
 - For a closed casket: On the bottom segment of the lid, (i.e. where it would be placed if it was an open casket).
72. Important:
 - If it is an open casket, do **NOT** place the apron on the body. Nor should the acacia be dropped into the casket.
 - For a closed casket, be careful to place everything to the right of the line where the two portions of the lid touch. (The head of the body is on your left; the feet on your

right.) You do not want anyone to take exception to having anything placed on the lid over the head.

73. A small basket should be used in which to collect the acacia/evergreen. The basket could be placed on the casket, adjacent to (or even on) the lambskin apron. Ideally, though, the basket should be placed on a stand in front of the casket. (However, do place the apron on the casket, as described above).
74. There are two prayers in the Service. (Both are on page 3 of the 1999 edition of the booklet.) The first prayer starts with the words, "Let us pray". The second prayer immediately follows the first. If you are seated, please note:
- Masons should **always stand** for a prayer (and when giving the Funeral Honours); and
 - As you are wearing regalia, assume the **Sign of Fidelity** during each of these prayers;
 - You should stand for the responsive reading of the *Wisdom of Solomon*;
 - You should stand for the Closing Benediction.
75. As Masons are required to stand for these parts of the Service anyway, this is a good reason for standing throughout the entire Service, at the back or sides of the room.
76. When it is time to give the Funeral Honours, the brother who is leading everyone should **NOT** do so behind the lectern – move out in front, where you can be seen.
77. As is the case with the Grand Honours, all brethren, (including the brother who is leading everyone), would face the recipient, (i.e. the casket, or the urn) while giving the Funeral Honours.
78. Much of the impact of the Funeral Honours is lost if the brother leading everyone is trying to read from the booklet at the same time. To be effective, he must do the Funeral Honours from memory.
79. The Ritual Committee has authorized a change in the printed ritual, on page 4. The Worshipful Master will now say: "The brethren will copy my example and say **AFTER** me".
80. Another reason why we should all be using the 1999 edition of the Service is that the first four words of the Funeral Honours were changed when that edition was released.
- 81.** We now say: "**We celebrate his life**", (instead of "We commit his body to the earth").

(Move out from behind the Lectern in full view when leading the brethren in the Funeral Honours – and face the casket.)

W.M. says: "The brethren will copy my example and say after me:

(Hands extended, palms downward)

"WE CELEBRATE HIS LIFE." (. . . pause)

(Hands crossed over breast)

“We cherish his memory in our hearts.” (. . . pause)

(Hands raised over the head, as if in supplication)

“We commend his spirit to God, who gave it.”

82. The brother leading the Funeral Honours should not rush through them. They should be carried out in a dignified manner. Be clear and distinct in each of the movements. Pause momentarily between each, to add to their impact.

83. At the close of the service, the brethren file past the casket, (*in two or more lines, if there is a large turnout*), **moving counter-clockwise**, to deposit their acacia as they retire.

(Moving counter-clockwise recalls the symbolic direction followed by the Fellowcraft when he ascended the Winding Stair leading to the Middle Chamber of the Temple.)

84. It is recommended that the D.D.G.M. be the last to deposit the acacia, and the last to leave the room.

85. A small basket should have initially been placed on the casket, (or preferably on a stand in front of the casket), to receive the sprigs of acacia.

86. *The Memorial Services booklet uses the more encompassing term “evergreen” instead of “acacia”. An evergreen is a plant with foliage that persists and remains green throughout the year. Acacia is an evergreen tree commonly found in the Middle East. We normally use cedar sprigs as a substitute for acacia.*

87. *In the Bible, acacia is known as shittah (singular), or shittim (plural). The wood was used extensively to construct the Tabernacle of Moses. In Canada, the acacia is known as the Honey-Locust, the Three-Thorned Acacia, or the Sweet Locust. Although not native to Canada, it is now fairly common in Southern Ontario. For Freemasons, following ancient tradition, acacia is a symbol of immortality.*

88. The proper form for depositing the sprig of acacia, is:

- With the acacia in your right hand, (or jammed into the top of your breast pocket, so it can be easily removed), assume the Sign of Fidelity.
- Grasping the acacia with the fingers of your right hand, now extend your right arm parallel to the floor, palm downward, so that your hand is over the receptacle.
- Lower your arm/hand and deposit the sprig in the basket. (Don't just drop the acacia.)
- Give the sign, by raising your right arm over your head and pointing up, with your index finger extended.

(This gesture signifies our belief in One Supreme Being.)



89. The D.D.G.M. and the Worshipful Master, (with perhaps any senior G.L. Officer present, i.e. the G.M., a P.G.M., or the D.G.M), should stand off to the side, beside the head of the casket, remaining there until all the brethren have deposited their acacia. They could then be the last to deposit their acacia (the W.M. first, then the D.D.G.M.) *(This assumes neither previously deposited their acacia DURING the Service, i.e. following Part #7, which explains the significance of the evergreen.)*
90. As they leave the room, the W.M. and the D.D.G.M. should offer condolences to the family on behalf of all the brethren.
91. After depositing their sprigs, the brethren should proceed **counter-clockwise**, directly out of the room.
92. Do not overwhelm the widow and family by everyone offering their condolences. A long line of unfamiliar greeters, however well-intentioned, can prove an unnecessary ordeal. Let the Worshipful Master and the D.D.G.M. offer condolences on behalf of all Masons. The rest of the brethren need not do more than nod courteously when passing the family.
93. If a church service is to follow the Masonic Memorial Service, or if you are a close personal friend of the family and wish to speak privately with them, you can re-enter the room after taking off your regalia.
94. Retiring down the hall, back to the room to reclaim your regalia bag, deserves the continuation of the solemnity of the Service. Brethren have been known to break out with cheerful chatter and loud laughter, shattering the benefit intended for the bereaved.
95. Continue to maintain quiet dignity as you leave the building. Again, be respectful of your surroundings. Save any discussions for the parking lot.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT TO PONDER

96. Have you ever met a brother who said he didn't want a Masonic Memorial Service when **he** passed to the G.L.A., because he was tired of seeing so many Services conducted so poorly? I have.

A Memorial Service should be an inspiration, not something to be avoided. Conducted properly, it can be the most meaningful indication the grieving family has ever had of our Order's caring purpose.

The impact of the Service on the family, friends – and the other brethren – will be directly proportional to the effort you expend on practicing and preparing for it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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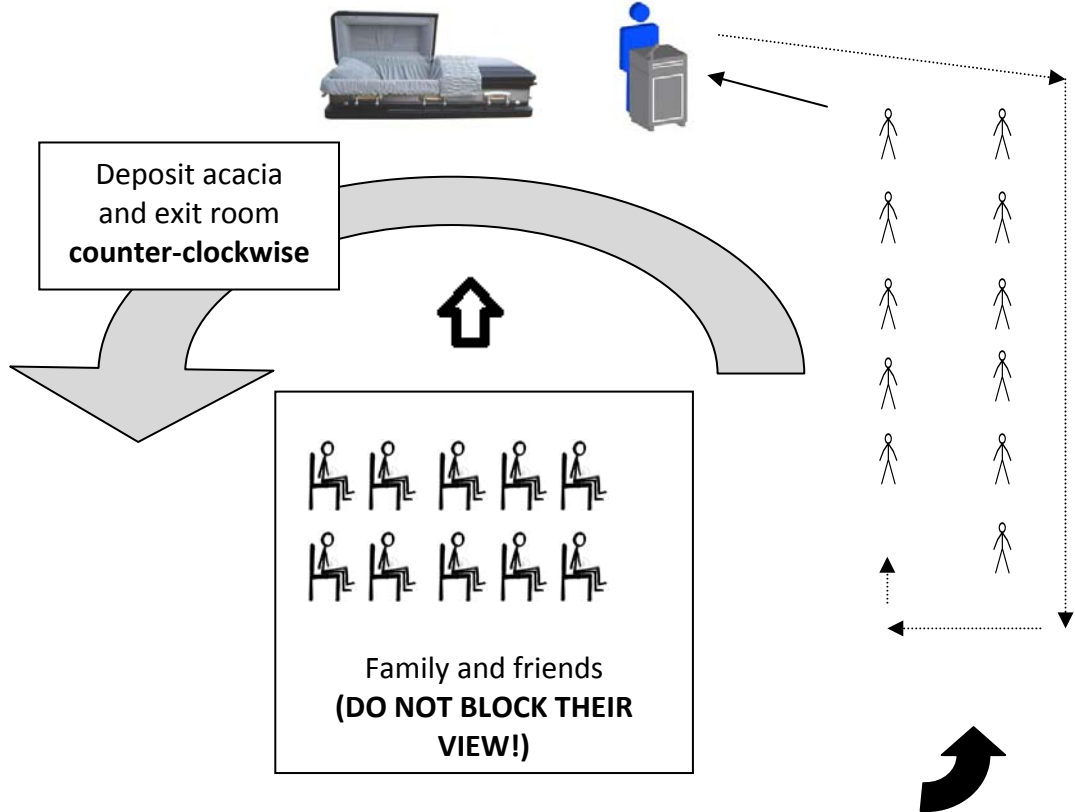
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RECOMMENDED POSITIONING OF PARTICIPANTS AT A MASONIC MEMORIAL SERVICE



After each participant at the head of the line has completed his part, he moves to the back of the line in which he was in.



THE MASONIC BRETHREN

(at the back of the room)

(When seating is limited, stand if you are able.
The Service only takes about 15 minutes.)

NOTE: When there is a large turnout, the brethren can form two (or more) lines to deposit their acacia.

The Memorial Service

The Memorial Service may be conveniently divided into twelve parts, to be assigned by the Worshipful Master to twelve Brethren, thereby enabling the Director of Ceremonies to arrange the participating Brethren in order before entering the room where the Service will be conducted.

1. Family and Friends – (Introduction and explanation, usually read by the Worshipful Master.)
2. 5 Verses – (May be read alternatively with the Brethren.)
3. Reading of the Sacred Roll.
4. Exhortation
“My brethren, we are again called upon . . . in His light we shall see light.”
5. “While we sorrow for our loss . . . into the Light that cannot die.”
6. Apron
“The lambskin apron of a Mason . . . and they shall see His face.”
7. Evergreen
“This evergreen is an emblem . . . over which death has no dominion.”
8. Prayer – Let us pray.
“Almighty and Most Merciful God . . . when the hour of departure is at hand.”
9. “Vouchsafe, O Gracious Father, we pray Thee . . . eternal in the heavens. Amen.”
Response – So mote it be.
10. “O Lord, support us all the day long . . . and peace at the last. Amen.”
Response – So mote it be.
11. The Funeral Honours.
12. Closing Benediction. (If the DDGM is present, the WM may ask him to read this Benediction.)

“May the blessings of the Most High . . . now and forever more. Amen.”
Response – So mote it be.



	Brother		Brother
1		1	
2		2	
3		3	
4		4	
5		5	
6		6	
7		7	
8		8	
9		9	
10		10	
11		11	
12		12	

Record the names of the Brethren participating
as a ready reference for the next time
a Memorial Service must be performed

	Brother		Brother
1		1	
2		2	
3		3	
4		4	
5		5	
6		6	
7		7	
8		8	
9		9	
10		10	
11		11	
12		12	

**THIS ARTICLE ILLUSTRATES THE IMPACT A MASONIC
MEMORIAL SERVICE CAN HAVE ON A FAMILY.
IF THE SERVICE IS CONDUCTED WELL,
IT CAN LEAVE A LASTING IMPRESSION!**

**FIFTH
COLUMN**

Masons and men's tears:
Jennifer Stewart finds
meaning in death's rituals

It is a stifling hot night in late summer and once again I am reminded of the strange sound men make when they cry.

The night before we buried my mother's father was the ninth of September and hot. We had stood all afternoon in the new church hall, shaking the line of extended hands and greeting the endless stream of people who came to mourn. It was the first official wake to be held in the hall that jutted sideways from the tiny church in rural Prince Edward Island. There was comfort somehow in the pale blue carpet and in the familiarity of the church proper, glimpsed through the connecting door beyond.

The receiving-line atmosphere had been more like what one expected at a wedding – laughter mixed with tears and a tinge of hysteria. I stood in my best dress, sweating, and admiring the dignity and composure of my grandmother, who refused to sit down as she exchanged words with each visitor. Some of them had waited patiently for up to an hour to speak with my grandmother and pass my grandfather's open casket. Doggedly, I continued my smile, trying to ignore the heat and situation. Even at the age of 27, death was alien. I had yet to look beyond my grandmother at the form which lay preserved in the casket, disguised as the man I knew as my grandfather.

We returned to the church that evening. The line of visitors already stretched out of the driveway and down the highway. I was emotionally frayed and exhausted from suppressed grieving. I envied my sisters' easy familiarity with the names of people claiming to be relatives for whom I had no recognition. We appeared as a family in full that evening, cousins, aunts and uncles ensconced in what my father dubbed the "amen corner". I stood next to my mother and felt strange to be so close to the climactic endpoint of this pilgrimage of mourning.

As the final half hour at last began to pass, I noticed that after paying their respects, fewer people were actually leaving the hall and that the “amen corner” overflowed with the male peers of my grandfather. I began to hear whispers about the Masonic service that would follow the wake and my stomach contracted in anxiety and distress. I frantically searched for any excuse to leave immediately.

Finally the end came. My grandmother asked for the doors to be closed and sat down at last. We shed a few tears in private as a family (my brother in the doorway, inconsolable against the stars, with my father standing awkwardly beside), even as the Masons emerged and I realized that any thoughts of escape were futile.

We formed a half-circle that was strangely reminiscent of the figure we had formed at the start of the day, but the choreography was altered now. The Masons all stood with their right eyes acknowledging us, their left toward my quiet grandfather. I prayed that the wonderful, bittersweet sadness present now at the end of the day would not be ruined by this mysterious ceremony. I could only guess at what sort of weird male ritual I would have to squirm through. I cringed at their costumes: satin banners, medallions and mad hats.

Finally the silence developed into true silence. One man began to speak from the centre. Startlingly unassuming in appearance, he carried no book or notes, and he radiated neither energy nor aura that may have prepared us for the brilliance of his voice, and the wonders of which he spoke. It was a glorious monotone carrying King James and poetry, ethics, morals, stars and dragons. We – all of us, believers and cynics – sat mesmerized and cradled by the powerful beauty of the composition of sentence and word, meaning and myth.

I was neither bored nor tired, embarrassed nor tense. I was floating on the lilt, finally able to gaze at these farmers and fishermen, businessmen and bankers who stood in such undisguised grief. They had wiry faces and big hands and they were so woebegone that I was again overcome with emotion and buried myself in my white handkerchief, wondering why it is that a man’s tears are so very powerful.

As the speaker spoke of new life and growth, my eyes at last found some meaning in the sprigs of evergreen glimpsed in the hands and pockets of all these men. The speaker walked up to the casket and laid his piece of evergreen on my grandfather’s heart. He did not wish him well or speak of everlasting life. He drew back with his hand on his own heart and whispered, “Alas, brother”.

Each of these old, gnarled, stern men laid green springs on my grandfather’s heart and whispered and cried their grief. Alas, brother.

Jennifer Stewart is a Halifax-based designer.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

Wednesday, November 24, 1993

EXAMPLE OF A HANDOUT THAT COULD BE GIVEN TO THE FAMILY



You have been invited to take part in the Memorial Service.
A large print copy is on the lectern.

Memorial Service for Bro. John Smith Example Lodge No. 123



ONE

Family and Friends:

We are gathered here to hold a Masonic Memorial Service for our late Brother John Smith.

It has been a custom, through the ages, for Masons to meet to pay our respects to a departed Brother.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this time of loss, and we invite family and friends to remain for this service.

We will deposit a sprig of evergreen, the universal symbol of perpetuity, to signify our faith in the immortality of the soul.

Near the end of the service we will give the “Funeral Honours” to our departed brother; while acknowledging the inevitable termination of all human life, we cherish his memory and commend his spirit unto God who gave it.

We invite family and friends to remain seated throughout the service and by your presence, participate with us as we bid farewell to our brother.

(These verses may be read alternately, with the brethren.)

TWO

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.

In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery.

And their going from us to be utter destruction, but they are in peace.

For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.

And having been a little chastened, they shall be greatly rewarded, for God proved them, and found them worthy for Himself. (Wisdom of Solomon, Ch. 3: 1-5)

THREE

Here the W.M. will take the Sacred Roll on which have been inscribed the name, age, date of initiation or affiliation, date of death, and any other relevant matter, and, reading the same aloud, shall deliver the Roll to the Secretary to be deposited in the archives of the lodge.

He shall then exhort the brethren as follows:

FOUR

My brethren, we are again called upon by the most solemn admonition to regard the uncertainty of human life, and the inevitable termination of all earthly pursuits; for we meet to pay a last farewell to (*the mortal remains of*) a brother.

Those last offices paid to the dead provide an opportunity to express our sense of loss and to offer a tribute to the memory of the departed, while they enable us likewise to bear witness to our belief in the immortality of the soul.

In particular they remind us that our lives are to be lived in accordance with the Divine plan, that we are diligently to work while it is yet day, so that when the call comes to lay down our tools, we may be found ready to enter the inner chamber, where in His light we shall see light.

FIVE

While we sorrow for our loss, let us lift up hearts of thanksgiving for a life well spent, for work well done; and let us humbly pray that we may be given grace and strength and wisdom to enable us to perform our duty in the pathway of life's service.

By the light of the Divine countenance we shall then pass without fear through the Valley of the Shadow, and at last shall receive the reward of true virtue, and acquire the possession of an immortal inheritance. For death cannot keep us from the face of God, Whose strong grip will free us and lift us out of shadows into the light that cannot die.

The Sr. Deacon then delivers to the W.M. a lambskin apron.

SIX

The lambskin apron of a Mason is an ancient symbol of service, a badge of innocence and a bond of friendship. We deposit this emblem to signify that death is the final release from earthly toil and strife; yet beyond the grave there awaits a new unveiling of truth, and a nobler life of service, for there God's servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face.

The WM. holding the evergreen in his hand continues:

SEVEN

This evergreen is an emblem of our faith in the immortality of the soul. By it we are reminded of our high and glorious destiny beyond the world of shadows, and that there dwells within our tabernacle of clay an imperishable and immortal spirit which the grave shall never receive, and over which death has no dominion.

The W.M. raises his hand to his left breast, and then extending it palm downwards over the casket, deposits the sprig of evergreen, and points upward.

EIGHT

Let us pray.

Almighty and Most Merciful God, in Whom we live and move and have our being, and before Whom all men must hereafter appear to render an account of the deeds done in the body, we do most earnestly beseech Thee, to impress upon our minds the solemnities of this day.

May we ever remember that in the midst of life we are in death, and so live and act our separate parts that we may have no cause for sorrow when the hour of departure is at hand.

NINE

Vouchsafe, O Gracious Father, we pray Thee, Thy Divine assistance to amend our lives and redeem the time; so that, in the discharge of the duties Thou hast assigned to us in the erection of our moral edifice, we may have wisdom from on high to direct us, strength commensurate with our task to support us, and the beauty of holiness to adorn and render all our performances acceptable in Thy sight; and at last, when the gavel of death shall call us from our earthly labours, may we obtain a blessed and everlasting abode in that spiritual edifice not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Amen.

So mote it be.

TEN

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life; until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in Thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

So mote it be.

Here are given the Funeral Honours:

ELEVEN

The brethren will copy my example, and say after me:

Hands extended, palms downwards.

We celebrate his life.

Hands crossed over breast.

We cherish his memory in our hearts.

Hands raised over the head, as if in supplication.

And we commend his spirit to God who gave it.

Closing Benediction

TWELVE

May the blessing of the Most High rest upon us and upon all our work and worship done in His name. May He give us Light to guide us, Courage to support us, and Love to unite us, now and forevermore. Amen

So mote it be.



Here endeth the Service.

At the close of the Service the Brethren will file past the casket, moving counterclockwise, and deposit the evergreen as they retire. The Worshipful Master and the District Deputy Grand Master may convey private condolences to the members of the family.

EXAMPLE OF A SACRED ROLL



V.W. Bro. Wayne Adrian Lackey

Born: 16 April 1938

Keene Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 374 G.R.C.

Initiated: 19 October 1989 (age 51)

Passed: 21 June 1990

Raised: 15 November 1990

W. Master: May 2004 - May 2005

Peterborough District Grand Steward: 2005

*Member of Peterborough Chapter No. 161, District 12, Order of
the Eastern Star*

*32° Member of Scottish Rite, Peterborough Valley
and Moore Sovereign Consistory, Hamilton*

Passed to the Grand Lodge Above

29 March 2009

Age 70 years, 11 months, 5 days