

# Dying, Death, and Bereavement

Presented at the 2019 NEYM Annual Sessions

Given Preliminary Approval August 7, 2019

1) One rarely knows how death will arrive, either for a loved one or for oneself. Will death come through injury, illness, old age? Will it come quickly or slowly? Will there be warning? Each death is unique, and may not come at the end of a long life. Yet, each life, whether short or long, is whole and precious.

2) Early Friends recognized the passage into death as a liminal space in which a person might be particularly conscious of the Eternal. It was common for friends and family to gather to hear the testimony of the dying person. While this rarely happens in a formal way now, many still find deep openings sitting with a dying person whether in silence or in conversation, and even when they are with a person who is unconscious, distressed, or wrestling with great pain.

3) Keeping a sense of sanctity and care around death may present a challenge. Many aspects of the modern world distance us from death. Deaths are often outside the home, or far away geographically from loved ones. Certain aspects of death, such as medical care or funeral arrangements, are usually handled by others, leading to less engagement with the physical reality of death than in former times. At the same time, the still common experience of mass deaths from war, or other violence, may lead one to objectify death as remote and unreal.

4) What happens beyond life is a mystery, but Friends trust it is part of a universe sustained by Divine Love. Friends' witness is that one may live in God's realm in the present. As such, life choices are made not in hopes of heaven in an after-life, but on how one can embody that realm in the present.

5) Birth and death are parts of the natural order of creation. A given life span is only one fleeting but precious part of the life of the universe. What precedes and follows it becomes part of a larger spiritual context. Birth, life, and death are complementary parts of the cycle of life anchored in the Spirit.

## Dying

6) Dying may happen in an instant or may be prolonged, but anticipation of dying may affect anyone. Until one directly faces death for oneself or for loved ones, there is much

39 that is unknown. Sharing experiences of being with someone who is dying may help  
40 confront and allay some fears. It also offers the chance to explore spiritual questions  
41 together and to offer comfort to each other.

42

43 7) For those who are in the process of dying, it may be important for them to talk about  
44 their fears, regrets, or emotional and financial concerns for those being left behind.  
45 Sometimes there is vital work of forgiveness of oneself or others to be done. One may  
46 mourn what will be left undone, or that which will never now be experienced.

47

48 8) There can be a sense of release from fear when a person relinquishes the fight against  
49 disease and accepts their coming death, a release that leaves room to embrace the  
50 stretch of life that remains. Just as it is common to give thought to the birthing  
51 experience, some people give thought to the experiences surrounding death such as  
52 who might be present or choosing comforting music or readings.

53

54 9) When one is a patient, there may be medical choices that affect one's dying and  
55 death. Not only are there choices of what course of treatment to accept, there are also  
56 choices to be made about whether to receive pain management only without looking for  
57 a cure<sup>1</sup>, whether to enter hospice care<sup>2</sup>, to refuse food and drink<sup>3</sup>, or to choose physician  
58 assisted death in states where it is legal<sup>4</sup>. In making these decisions, it is valuable to  
59 include family and friends, and perhaps a clearness process with members of the  
60 meeting. Any decision made by the patient inevitably affects others who are close.

61

62 10) When dying happens over a period of time, support for caregivers is as important as  
63 care for the one who is dying. Those providing care are likely to have major  
64 responsibilities for physical needs, overseeing medical and financial decision-making,

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<sup>1</sup> *Palliative Care - Care that focuses on relieving the symptoms, pain and stress of serious illness. A patient does not need to be terminal to receive palliative care. Palliative care patients often continue full treatment for their illness while in a palliative care program.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hospice Care - Terminal illness care at home or in a hospice facility. Care is focused on alleviating pain and helping patients prepare for the end of life. Instead of treating the illness, hospice nurses and other medical professionals work to ensure the patient's physical comfort and emotional peace. Hospice is designed to minimize medical intrusion and maximize a patient's ability to enjoy what time he or she has left.*

<sup>3</sup> *VSED – Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking – an intentional decision to stop drinking liquids and eating food—for the specific purpose of causing death. It causes death by dehydration, usually within seven to 14 days. While it may not require governmental action or physicians' authorization, care should be taken to consult the specific laws of one's state.*

<sup>4</sup> *PAD – Physician Assisted Death - The practice where a physician prescribes a potentially lethal medication to a terminally ill, suffering patient at their request that they can take (or not) at a time of their own choosing to end their life.*

65 coordinating communication with family and friends, and providing emotional  
66 support. All these require much energy and stamina. At the same time the caregivers  
67 may be experiencing emotional turmoil. It is normal to swing between hope and fear as  
68 symptoms change, to feel drained and tired, resentful, scared, angry, overwhelmed or  
69 sad as well as to feel tender and loving. Caregivers may experience frustration, physical  
70 revulsion, and rage against what feels like an injustice. As they provide support,  
71 caregivers, in turn, need to receive support.

72

73 11) While accompanying some people as they die may prove inspiring and reassuring,  
74 that is by no means always the case. Staying present to the person may be challenging  
75 when the manner of death is difficult. There may be anger or even horror, and one may  
76 profoundly disagree with the dying person's choices. Remember the vital importance of  
77 dependence on the Spirit for guidance, comfort, and strength beyond one's own  
78 resources.

79

## 80 **Death**

81

82 12) While it is helpful to all involved to plan and make decisions, death can happen in  
83 unexpected ways over which one has no control, and for which there has been no  
84 preparation<sup>5</sup>. Accidental death, violent death, miscarriage, death of a child at any age,  
85 and death by suicide all challenge one's ability to accept and understand. One's faith as  
86 well may be sorely tested. Not only the individuals involved, but the whole meeting  
87 may need to process and grieve together.

88

89 13) At times there are difficult decisions to make about death: for example, whether or  
90 not to terminate an unplanned or complicated pregnancy, whether to end one's own  
91 medical treatment, or whether to stop a person's life support. Friends may want to  
92 gather with a clearness committee for discernment at such times.

93

94 14) Taking the time for advance planning, including planning for costs, when one is still  
95 in good health is an act of love for those who will be left behind. It allows for careful  
96 consideration of one's own wishes, as well as time for conversation with loved ones  
97 about what they need and want. It also relieves loved ones of worry about details when  
98 grief is fresh and may be overwhelming. Discussing choices surrounding death with  
99 family members helps avoid later struggles and disagreements. Making sure that those

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<sup>5</sup> *If a death occurs outside of a hospice or medical setting, particularly if unexpected or unattended, it needs to be reported immediately.*

100 responsible know the whereabouts of important information will facilitate what they  
101 need to do. Meetings may offer to keep copies of members' final choices on file at the  
102 meetinghouse.

103  
104 15) Formal documentation may include advance directives, a will, a list of important  
105 contacts, the location of personal documents and passwords, a draft obituary, plans for  
106 a memorial service, and choices concerning type of burial, organ donation, possible  
107 donation of the body for research, and other specifics about treatment of the body.  
108 Organizing one's papers and possessions while one is able is a gift to all concerned. In  
109 addition, Friends may wish to consider writing ethical wills to leave a legacy of those  
110 non-material things that were important to their lives, such as their spiritual beliefs,  
111 guiding principles, and cherished family stories. (See Appendices 7A and 7B.)

112  
113 **Bereavement**

114  
115 16) When death is anticipated, grief begins early as those who love and care for  
116 someone watch the progress of the illness, perhaps witness pain and suffering, and  
117 realize their loss has already begun. While death involves grieving by family and  
118 friends, depending on circumstances, the grief may be mixed with gratitude, a sense of  
119 completion and rightness, or a sense that something sacramental has happened. It is  
120 also possible that the dying and the death will be traumatic, and there will be need for  
121 loving friends and family to actively support the bereaved. Sudden or violent death can  
122 pose further challenges, beginning with a period of shock during which the bereaved  
123 person's basic needs must be addressed.

124  
125 17) Whatever the circumstances, death can be a complex and stressful time for families,  
126 and negotiating family expectations and sensitivities can benefit from spiritual support.  
127 This is especially important when a bereaved person has been unable to celebrate the  
128 life of their loved one with others, either because of geographical distance,  
129 estrangement, or the decision not to hold any kind of funeral or memorial service.

130  
131 18) Grief is a process of healing. It is not linear, even though it has stages, and it has no  
132 time limit. The acute pain may dissipate, but it may resurface at unexpected intervals.  
133 Other feelings may arise: anger, regrets, and unresolved issues. Loss of a loved one  
134 changes the shape of one's world, even when the loss has been foreseen and comes at  
135 an expected time. There may be a permanent sense of absence. Not only one's feelings,  
136 but one's very sense of identity and one's roles in life may change. There is an alchemy  
137 involved in entering fully into grief, a process whereby feelings of despair and sorrow  
138 are accepted, fully experienced and transformed.

139

140 **Meeting Responsibilities**

141

142 19) Preparing for the eventuality of illness, aging, dying, and death of oneself or one's  
143 loved ones is eased by an open flow of communication and exploration of these topics  
144 before such events occur. The meeting, or a memorial committee, can encourage  
145 advance decision-making by holding discussions on such topics as durable power of  
146 attorney, advance directives, eldercare, hospice, wills, and burial options, and by  
147 keeping a file of Friends' final wishes as described above. This helps to relieve much  
148 stress when death occurs. When the meeting community is prepared and engaged, it  
149 can be a meaningful source of solace, comfort, and strength for a dying person,  
150 caregivers, and others affected by a death. As members of the meeting share this  
151 experience, they may grow in their own spiritual understandings of death and in their  
152 capacity to meet difficult experiences with love. Many meetings have regularly  
153 scheduled times to share the joys and sorrows of the community, inviting prayer and  
154 practical assistance. Meetings can also offer support to the dying as well as the bereaved  
155 with a clearness or support committee. (See Pastoral Care section.) As with all pastoral  
156 care, it is important for the meeting to gauge the scope of its ability to provide  
157 assistance.

158

159 20) Should a cause of death present particular challenges to the meeting, such as a death  
160 by violence, additional support for the community may be needed from Friends beyond  
161 the monthly meeting. At times, a number of meetings may need to uphold one another  
162 through times of grief following tragedies in the wider world, such as mass shootings or  
163 catastrophic events such as earthquakes. They may wish to join with other faith  
164 communities in mourning such events.

165

166 21) At the time of death, Friends should assist the family in whatever ways they can,  
167 such as help with children, with food or housework, or with hospitality for visiting  
168 relatives. If prior planning has not been done, the meeting may be asked to assist a  
169 family in making decisions regarding disposition of their loved one's body and, if there  
170 is no family, consider doing this service for the deceased Friend. When choosing an  
171 alternative to the services of a professional funeral director (in states where this is legal)  
172 it is very helpful to have the support and assistance of one's community.

173

174 22) If the meeting has a memorial or burial committee, it should be familiar with the  
175 legal requirements, which vary from state to state, and be ready to help Friends follow  
176 the burial protocols with simplicity and dignity, and to assist in filing the appropriate  
177 paperwork.

178 **Memorial Minutes and Memorial Meetings**

179  
180 23) Memorial minutes and memorial meetings are valued spiritual practices of Friends.  
181 The memorial minute testifies to the grace of God as revealed in the life of a Friend,  
182 while the memorial meeting for worship is a time to give thanks for that grace. The  
183 minute recounts the life, distinctive qualities and contributions of the Friend who has  
184 died. It may include excerpts from an individual's pre-written spiritual autobiography  
185 or other writings. When there is time for it to be written before the memorial meeting,  
186 parts of it may be read aloud during the worship. Often it is written later and may  
187 reflect ministry that has arisen in the memorial meeting.

188  
189 24) While early Friends remembered the deceased during a regular meeting for  
190 worship, it is more common now to schedule a separate time. It is important to be  
191 aware of the needs both of the family and of the meeting, especially if the family is not  
192 acquainted with Quaker forms of worship. In some instances two services may be held  
193 to accommodate both the family and the meeting. Members are encouraged to attend a  
194 memorial meeting whether or not the person who died is someone they knew well.  
195 Honoring a life in this way may help family members and the meeting through this  
196 difficult time of transition. (See Appendices 7C, 7D, and 7E for guidance on writing  
197 memorial minutes and conducting memorial meetings.)

## 198 **Burial**

199  
200  
201 25) Early Friends followed simple burial practices and often had no grave  
202 markers. Many options are available today with or without the services of a funeral  
203 industry professional. Some meetings have a burial ground, or a memorial garden for  
204 cremated remains, and some have a standing burial committee to help guide families  
205 through the burial and memorial process.

206

## 207 **Extracts**

208  
209 1) I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor powers, nor  
210 principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any  
211 other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus  
212 our Lord.

213 **Epistle to the Romans 8: 38-39**

214 2) ... (D)eath is no more than a turning of us over from time to eternity. Death then,  
215 being the way and condition of life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die.

216 They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what  
217 never dies. Nor can spirits ever be divided, that love and live in the same divine  
218 principle, the root and record of their friendship. If absence be not death, neither is  
219 theirs. Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another  
220 still. For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is omnipresent. In  
221 this divine glass they see face to face; and their converse is free, as well as pure. This is  
222 the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and  
223 society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal.”

224 **William Penn, 1693**

225  
226 3) *The following experience relates to the death of his son Lowell at the age of 11, while Rufus*  
227 *Jones was on a visit to England in 1903.*

228 The night before landing in Liverpool I awoke in my berth with a strange sense of  
229 trouble and sadness. As I lay wondering what it meant, I felt myself invaded by a  
230 Presence and held in Everlasting Arms. It was the most extraordinary experience I had  
231 ever had. But I had no intimation that anything was happening to Lowell. When we  
232 landed in Liverpool a cable informed me that he was desperately ill, and a second cable,  
233 in answer to one from me, brought the dreadful news that he was gone. When the news  
234 reached my friend John Wilhelm Rowntree, he experienced a profound sense of Divine  
235 Presence enfolding him and me, and his comfort and love were an immense help to me  
236 in my trial...

237  
238 I know now, as I look back across the years, that nothing has carried me up into the life  
239 of God, or done more to open out the infinite meaning of love, than the fact that love  
240 can span this break of separation, can pass beyond the visible and hold right on across  
241 the chasm. The mystic union has not broken and knows no end.

242 **Rufus Jones, 1947**

243 4) ....And so comes the next opening – the sense of being part of a universe, of a  
244 personal relatedness to all life, all growth, all creativity. Suddenly one senses that his  
245 life is not just his own little individual existence but that he is bound in fact to all of life,  
246 from the first splitting off of the planets, through the beginning of animate life and on  
247 through the slow evolution of man. It is all in him and he is but one channel of it. What  
248 has flowed through him, flows on, through children, through works accomplished,  
249 through services rendered; it is not lost. Once given the vision of one’s true place in the  
250 life stream, death is no longer complete or final, but an incident. Death is the way – the  
251 only way – life renews itself. When the individual has served his purpose as a channel,  
252 the flow transfers itself to other channels, but life goes on. And in this great drama of  
253 life renewed, one sees and feels the divine presence, and feels himself one with it.

254

255 Facing the possibility of death, I saw that I did not fear it. Why should I? Since life  
256 carries death with it like a seed, since this is normal, what is there to fear? The gift of life  
257 is inseparably united to the promise of death: on no other terms is life ever given. And  
258 death is a promise rather than a threat, for who would want to continue a life that is  
259 worn out?

260 **Bradford Smith, 1965**

261  
262 5) The time to think about death, most truly to face it creatively, is not when it is near,  
263 but rather when one is at the peak of one's life's energy and creativity. Certainly this  
264 was the attitude of early Friends. Of course they knew death would come, but in the  
265 reading of thousands of the pages of the writings and journals of early Quakers, I have  
266 been impressed by how little concern the journal writer expressed for her or his own  
267 death or for what would happen after death. This is all the more remarkable when one  
268 remembers how common death was in those times, how central it was in most thought,  
269 and that the religions contemporary with Quakerism heavily emphasized the transition  
270 at death from physical life to heaven, hell, or purgatory, and each religion promised the  
271 best road to heaven.

272  
273 Instead, Quakers, quietly placing their faith in the God they worshipped to handle all  
274 that happens after human death, concentrated their energy and their faith on the *living*  
275 of a holy life. For as Fox says repeatedly,... our task, our responsibility is to make this  
276 present life holy, consecrated, a temple of the living God, the indwelling Christ. This  
277 gives to us the power to be the people of our God, to master and conquer temptation, to  
278 order our lives by the divine principles steadily revealed to us.

279 **Cecil E. Hinshaw, 1979**

280  
281 6) However much death has been expected and prepared for, it is still a shock when the  
282 moment comes. This shock produces a numbness at first which is merciful. It may  
283 enable the bereaved person to carry out the practical tasks which follow a death. But it  
284 may not. If we are sensitive we will see what help the bereaved person needs... How  
285 often we hear people say in those early days: 'She is being marvelous'. But this stage  
286 passes, and a period of great inner chaos can follow...

287  
288 [The] loss of one's partner can be one of the severest forms of psychological stress. The  
289 emotions can be quite overwhelming. Some say it feels like insanity...

290  
291 ...Slowly life can be found to have meaning again, and at the heart of that meaning lies  
292 the word 'love'. 'Growth into true life,' wrote one widow, 'lies in love of one another.  
293 We have the choice of letting grief shadow our lives or growing from it.' This healing  
294 love is beyond us and within us and continually seeks us out. Those whose privilege it



295 has been to come right through grief know this in a deep and personal way. They can in  
296 their turn reach out to others in distress. The true meaning of the word 'compassion' is  
297 'suffering together with someone'. Perhaps they have discovered for themselves that  
298 the sense of the absence of God which came with the depression made them know how  
299 much they need God.

300 **Diana Lampen, 1979**

301 7) About a dozen years ago I became critically ill and I have a vivid memory of looking  
302 down on myself on the bed; doctors and nurses worked on that body; and I felt held in  
303 such secureness, joy and contentment, a sense of the utter rightness of things – I was  
304 held in the hands of God. The crisis passed and I was filled with wonder at the newness  
305 of life...

306 Can we face up to the fact of death? Can we prepare ourselves in some measure for  
307 dying? I feel I have to try and tell you of my experience and the understanding it  
308 brought me – however personal and limited. From the closeness of my own dying, I  
309 know *God is*. Death is not a negation of life but complements it: however terrible the  
310 actual dying, life and death are both parts of the whole and that wholeness is in God. I  
311 still fight the conventional words of 'resurrection and life everlasting' but I know that  
312 after Jesus died the overwhelming certainty of his presence released his disciples from  
313 fear. I believe eternal life is in each moment of life, here and now; the real tragedy is not  
314 how or when we die but if we do not live the life we are given to our full potential.

315 **Jenifer Faulkner, 1982**

316  
317 8) One particular evening during Sue's last days was especially striking. A few of us  
318 sat at her bedside, along with her two dogs and her son, who lay red-eyed alongside  
319 her on the bed. In conscious awareness, we of her and she of us, we were together in  
320 our letting go. Together we were packing her bags for the walk between worlds to  
321 whatever might be next for her. There was a telling instant that lifted our tired and  
322 teary eyes. With a soft giggle from her frail and translucent body, she comforted us.  
323 Sue's presence was almost regal as she signaled her acceptance of death. That soft  
324 laugh spoke to a faith and basic trust that clothed her in comfort, while equally  
325 clothing the rest of us. So it is with dying. Someone is leaving, and friends and family  
326 are equally participating in the parting. Conscious separation has always seemed  
327 important to me, and it can be one of love's finest moments. Of all the many kinds of  
328 love, this love may be the kindest of them all. With all of the uncertainties on the  
329 bridge between one world and another, our trusting acceptance is what really allows a  
330 loving and lasting embrace.

331 **Stephen Redding, 2010**

332

333 9) We are used to hearing the term “centering” and I haven’t before had a really good  
334 image for how that feels, just that there is a lightness and a clarity of focus which  
335 doesn’t have words...I was holding a sense of this when a small group of us went to  
336 have worship with Friends I will call Kate and John in their home. Kate had recently  
337 been discharged from the hospital into hospice care at home and was mostly  
338 bedridden... As we sat together in a circle I became aware of so many other concentric  
339 circles of caring beyond us. What surprised me was that Kate was not at the center of  
340 these circles. At the center was a shining entity like a pillar, filled with its own dynamic  
341 movement, and she was one of the people who was tending this central entity. It felt  
342 that this central entity was the beautiful dance of relationship between Kate and  
343 everyone present, but especially with her husband and her daughter and all those  
344 closest to her. They were not primarily tending her; she and they together were all  
345 tending the quality of their relationship and their love for one another. I felt strongly  
346 that Kate still had work to do, the most challenging work she had ever undertaken - to  
347 tend this flame of love together with her loved ones. When I voiced this she expressed  
348 what a sense of relief it was for her to feel that she was still part of the circle actively  
349 holding something more than herself.

350 **Maggie Edmondson, 2016**

351 10) She (my sister) reminded me that Quaker faith was not written down; it was lived,  
352 and I was living it. I was trying to find answers in books and histories that weren’t  
353 meant to provide guidance. The answers would only come from me being present in the  
354 light, and living my faith.

355  
356 So I put the books down. I thought back over the past few days as my father lay dying.  
357 And there I saw my faith. My father was surrounded by his family: his three daughters,  
358 his brother and sister, and his best friend of 37 years. He was never alone. Even as he  
359 began to fade in and out, we were present on his behalf and holding him in the  
360 Light. Some people prayed; others held his hand. It didn’t matter what we did,  
361 because we all loved... and God was with us... This was going to be a sad time,  
362 horribly sad, but it should not be horrible. And it wasn’t; instead, it was filled with a  
363 kind of light I had never experienced before: somber and soft. ... When my father  
364 slipped from this world, the entire family gathered around him. In retrospect, it strikes  
365 me how much this process was like a meeting for worship. In the silence, his brother,  
366 sister, and best friend told stories about his life. We opened ourselves up to our  
367 memories, and our sorrow. We cried but we also laughed. It was our way of holding  
368 him in the light as he began his journey. I also think it was our way of gathering  
369 ourselves and finding the light in our sorrow.

370 **Shannon Zimmerman, 2017**

371

372 11) I sat in a bedside chair and waited. Minutes went by and after a while I didn't hear  
373 Glenn's labored breathing. The sound of machines, monitors, and people in the hallway  
374 evaporated. It felt like being in meeting for worship, when the gathered center down  
375 and it's just us and the Light of God, losing ourselves in a blessed silence. For a moment  
376 it was as if Glenn and I were lifted up and held in peace.

377 **Geoff Knowlton, 2017**

378  
379 12) Grief is a holy madness. It is not a puzzle to be solved, a problem to be overcome, or  
380 a situation to be managed. It is a wilderness we wander in search of the sacred – an  
381 absent other, a missing self. No one can take this wilderness from us, and no one  
382 should. You who grieve, stay away from people who want you to get over it fast. They  
383 don't know that the work you're doing is holy...

384  
385 ..."The Truth must dazzle gradually/Or every man be blind -," Dickinson wrote. Grief  
386 is just as dazzling. It is a madness that makes divinest sense. The truths it reveals cannot  
387 be known all at once; they must be seen on the slant of time.

388  
389 One of the most powerful truths I learned was that the loftiest part of myself was  
390 always on duty. It was present despite the chaos, within the chaos. Present wherever I  
391 wandered, whatever I found: snake or squirrel, bee or bone, rock or razor.

392  
393 In the place I call North, I felt found, rescued, met, known, led, righted, given to,  
394 bestowed upon, inspired – all words claimed by religious tradition. What do *you* call  
395 this place? What is its center? For me, North is the soul's magnetic pole; the divine is its  
396 compass, nothing less.

397 **Patricia McKernon Runkle, 2017**

398  
399 13) Not Knowing What to Expect

400  
401 Not Knowing what to expect  
402 I would never pack light  
403 For trips to the West  
404  
405 Shoes were the worst;  
406 Of course I'd want my work boots  
407 Because that is who I am  
408  
409 But I'd also want my Bean  
410 Boots, in case of mud.  
411 And some slip-ons for around the house

412  
413 I'd want some shoes easy to  
414 Put on and take off in the  
415 Airport (pack my pocketknife in the luggage)  
416  
417 Not knowing what to expect  
418 I'd want to pack my computer and some music  
419 And a book of puzzles in carryon  
420  
421 There's a trip I'll be taking soon  
422 Without an overhead bin I need to  
423 Unpack. I won't be able to take anything with me.  
424  
425 Still, not knowing what to expect  
426 It's hard to pack light  
427 For a trip to the unknown.

428 **Edward Baker, written April 2017, six months before his death**

429 14) "For the last couple [of] years, the phrases often on her lips to describe her  
430 journey were statements of hope and faith: "Welcome what is" and "All will be  
431 well". She lived into these words.

432  
433 Though she lived in a great deal of pain her last year, she was unlikely to mention it  
434 except in passing. She made [an] effort to be present to people and to the Meeting  
435 whenever she could manage it. Brian was her constant and loving help-meet.  
436 Two months before she died, Betty made the decision to enter hospice, and once her  
437 decision was made and shared, she lived into it with openness, humility and grace,  
438 and one could even say hospitality.

439  
440 "Welcome what is" released her into all that life was to her at the moment: all the love  
441 and all the pain, living in what Friend Bill Taber called "The cross of joy".

442 **Excerpt from memorial minute for Elizabeth Poynton, Worcester Meeting, 2019**

443 15) We don't get to control some of the most significant moments in our lives – birth,  
444 death, and events that may be physically and emotionally traumatic. What we do get to  
445 do is say what we need, offer the support we can give, and invite God to sustain us and  
446 help us be present to what is happening.

447  
448 As someone who carried and gave birth to my child, shepherded my mother through  
449 ALS and her death, and has sat with many families grieving the loss of a child to

450 suicide, gun violence, or other sudden deaths, I know there is not always grace, there is  
451 not always mercy, and things don't go as we would want. There is always, however,  
452 our capacity to endure, to be present, and to draw on God's strength when we feel  
453 ourselves past the point of endurance and past our capacity to be present.

454  
455 So many times.... I wanted to stop, to check out, to tune out, to walk away. The pain –  
456 physical and emotional – was too much. In each case, I chose to stay present. It was  
457 hard and I often questioned where God was at all, particularly when a young person I  
458 loved had been gunned down. The anger and horror and all-consuming rage I have felt  
459 at times were bigger, in those moments, for me, than my experiences of God.

460  
461 When I fought to maintain my mother's comfort as her organs were rupturing in a  
462 medical system that had forgotten to treat her like a person, when I tried to pump life  
463 back into the dead body of my student, when I stood over my 3-day old child in the  
464 NICU, willing him to live, the only grace I was given was that I was able to stay present  
465 to my mother, my student, and my child. I felt everything I was feeling *and* stayed  
466 present. Only one of those three people is still alive and I didn't walk out of those  
467 experiences unscathed. To the best of my ability to understand it, God was with me in  
468 supporting me to be present to what was happening, in all its horror, and that that  
469 presence is what allows me to heal after each of these experiences. I have not returned  
470 to the person I was before these moments, but, for the most part, I have been able to  
471 release the all-consuming fear and rage and hold those moments for what they were –  
472 horrible, traumatic, sad, and life-altering.

473  
474 We carry trauma and grief in our bodies, no matter what sense our minds and psyches  
475 make of it. I have worked with enough survivors to know that sometimes the trauma is  
476 so great, that disassociating is the way our beings can best survive the horror we  
477 endure. And I also know that people who can identify even one person with whom they  
478 can talk about their trauma, are far more likely to heal. My understanding of this is also  
479 about presence - that when we bear witness to another's pain, we shift some of that pain  
480 and offer a space for healing.

481  
482 I do not know what of my presence my mother and student could feel or know. We can  
483 not always create the reality we want for each other; we can always be present to the  
484 reality another is facing. This is one of the purest ways I know to 'answer that of God in  
485 everyone.' It is not about having an answer or solution, but simply being there, and  
486 being there fully.

487 **Birth, death, and other big hard things. Lisa Graustein, personal communication,**  
488 **January 2019**

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## Advices and Queries

### Advices for Meetings

1. Encourage one another to acknowledge the reality of death and come to a greater understanding of dying.
2. Remember the power, strength and comfort of both collective and individual prayer for those who are dying or who are bereaved.
3. Support those going through the process of dying, death and grieving. Help them to realize and express their wishes for the memorial meeting. Be sensitive to the needs of family, friends, and the meeting.
4. At times the need of the dying person for privacy conflicts with the caregivers' and the family's need for support. Be mindful of the ways information is shared within the meeting. Use discretion and discernment.
5. Make resources available on the practical, emotional and spiritual aspects of dying, death, and bereavement.
6. Be mindful of the ongoing support needed for those whose needs may be invisible: the very ill who are unable to come to meeting, caregivers, and those grieving.

### Advices for individuals

1. Remember that death is an integral part of the fabric of life rather than an evil to be avoided at all costs. God is ever present.
2. Prepare for the end of life while you are able. Remember that infirmity and death can come unexpectedly. Advance planning is a gift to those left behind.
3. Advance planning is particularly important when care of dependent children needs to be considered.
4. Do not burden your heirs with decisions about possessions that could have been made through thoughtful preparation.
5. Clearly stated wishes regarding dispersal of property, heirlooms, and other family treasures may help to avoid pain and conflict.
6. Be aware that grieving is normal, is painful, and has no defined time limit. Be open to God's love and the love of Friends, knowing that there are those willing to walk with you. When it is another's turn to grieve, remember to support that person in whatever ways are helpful, with imagination and care.
7. Stay close to the Inward Guide as you navigate your own and family expectations and sensibilities around death.
8. Make a regular practice of prayer and dependence on the Divine so that in times of urgent need, you may more easily find your way to the embrace of the Spirit.

- 530 9. When visiting a person who is dying, or a person who is grieving, take care to  
531 keep the focus on that person, rather than on one's own feelings and responses to  
532 the person's condition. Be equally careful when speaking to that person's family  
533 or caregivers.

534

535 *Although Queries may often be answered with a simple affirmative or negative, it is vital to ask*  
536 *corollary questions such as "why", "how", or "when". A qualified answer arising from*  
537 *introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical "yes" or "no"*

538

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 1983

539

#### 540 **Queries for Meetings:**

- 541 1. How does the meeting invite learning about, discussion of, and preparation for  
542 end-of-life issues, at both a practical and a spiritual level?
- 543 2. Does the meeting want to offer a place to file final choices for its members or  
544 biographical material which might be useful in preparing memorial minutes?
- 545 3. How might the meeting support individuals, families, and the meeting as a  
546 whole, as each grieves, not only in the near future, but over time?
- 547 4. When death happens in a disturbing way, is the meeting a place where Friends  
548 know they can express difficult emotions and share together as needed?
- 549 5. Has the meeting considered the need for a burial/memorial committee to stay  
550 current with the state laws and with the choices available? If the meeting has a  
551 burial ground, does it have clear guidelines for its use and an accurate record of  
552 who is interred? (See Appendix 7G)
- 553 6. Has the meeting considered whether it is able to support those considering  
554 options that will hasten death?

555

#### 556 **Queries for Individuals**

- 557 1. Am I fearful of death, or of dying, and how might these fears be faced?
- 558 2. How does my faith inform my understanding of death? Am I living in the  
559 Eternal?
- 560 3. What insight and wisdom do I have to pass on to the next generation?
- 561 4. Do I know what to do when the death of a loved one occurs? Am I prepared to  
562 support the choices they make?
- 563 5. Do I know that I need not be alone in grief, and that I might share it with others?  
564 Am I willing to seek support when I need it?
- 565 6. Am I willing to be present to other Friends when they are grieving, to offer  
566 practical and spiritual support, making myself available as needed or wanted?

567

568

569 **Appendix 7: Dying, Death and Bereavement**

570 7A and 7B: advance planning

571 7C: planning a memorial meeting

572 7D: memorial meeting programs

573 7E: preparing a memorial minute

574 7F: Bequests

575 7G: Burial Grounds

576 Related Chapter:

577 Pastoral Care: means of providing support

578

579 **7A. Health Care Decisions, Legal Documents and Financial Information.**

580 Friends are strongly advised to make their final arrangements well in advance  
581 remembering death does not always wait until we are old. Make sure those close to you  
582 understand your wishes and know where to find the necessary information. Meetings  
583 can help by having packets of the necessary forms available, periodically encouraging  
584 Friends to fill them out and, if desired, providing a lockbox at the meeting house in  
585 which to keep copies of completed forms.

586 The more details are written down ahead of time, the more easily survivors can act  
587 upon your wishes. Do not hesitate to add details to the ones suggested below.

588 Some Suggested Documentation:

- 589 • Health Care Advance Directives: These are available online for each state or from  
590 your local hospital. Are these current and up to date? With whom have you  
591 discussed your wishes?
- 592 • Will or Trust information: List the names and phone numbers of those who have any  
593 written documents, and where the documents are kept.
- 594 • Organ Donation: Have you made the choice to be an organ donor? Do you carry  
595 documentation with you?
- 596 • Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care (DPA/HC): Write down the contact  
597 information of whoever has documents, and where your copy is kept.
- 598 • Durable Power of Attorney for your Estate: contact information
- 599 • Bank Accounts: Information that will allow access
- 600 • Credit Cards: Bank name, account number, card location, contact information
- 601 • Safe Deposit Box: Location of box, location of key
- 602 • Annuities, Life Insurance Policies: Location of these documents, name and phone  
603 number of representative or agent to contact.

604

605



606 **7B. Personal Wishes and Final Arrangements.**

607 **(Some meetings may have their own forms to offer. It is important to have this**  
608 **information collected for the family.)**

609 *Personal Data:* Pertinent documents along with telephone numbers of executor of  
610 will/trust, etc.

611 *Contacts:* List key persons who would be willing to notify networks of other people,  
612 such as an immediate family member, a professional colleague, a close friend, etc.

613 *Instructions for Final Arrangements:* It is advisable to review and update these  
614 decisions regularly.

615 *Funeral Director:* Does your state require you to use a funeral director? If you need or  
616 choose to have a professional funeral director involved, indicate the name, address and  
617 phone number. Have you talked with this funeral director?

618 Consider what your wishes are for disposal of your body or cremated remains: Would  
619 you prefer burial or cremation or donation of your body to medical research/education?

620 *If you choose burial:*

- 621 • Would you choose to be buried in a coffin or other receptacle, and if so what  
622 type? Would you want to purchase it ahead of time?
- 623 • Would you choose a green burial (no embalming; only readily biodegradable  
624 shroud or container), and do you know the associated regulations for your state?
- 625 • You may wish to stay informed of other options for body disposition as they  
626 develop.

627 *If you choose cremation:*

- 628 • Do you plan to have the funeral director transport your body to the  
629 crematorium, or do you prefer to have those close to you do so?
- 630 • Do you have a particular vessel you would like to use for containment of your  
631 cremated remains?
- 632 • Would you like your cremated remains scattered in a particular place? Is this a  
633 legal possibility?

634 *If you chose to donate your body:*

- 635 • Have you contacted the appropriate organization and made the arrangements?

- 636 • Have you communicated an alternative plan in the event your donation cannot  
637 be accepted?  
638

639 *Memorial Service or Funeral:* Do you have a preferred location? Is there someone you  
640 would like to officiate? Is there music you would like? Do you want to have flowers?  
641 Who should be notified, near and far? Do you have any other specific instructions?

642 *Charitable Donations:* Provide names and addresses of organization(s) you wish to  
643 receive memorial donations in your name.

644 *Obituary:* You may wish to write this yourself, or choose someone else to do it. Who has  
645 information about your life?

646 *Care of Dependent Children:* Note the names and phone numbers of those you have  
647 chosen to take responsibility for immediate and long-term care of dependent children  
648 and other instructions concerning their care.

649 *Pets:* Give the name and phone number of whoever will provide care for your pets.

650

## 651 **7C. Planning a Memorial Meeting.**

652 A memorial meeting is a meeting for worship celebrating the movement of the Spirit  
653 and the grace of God in the life of a deceased Friend. It is usually arranged by members  
654 of Ministry and Counsel, another designated committee, and/or the meeting's pastor, in  
655 consultation with the family and in accord with any wishes recorded by the Friend. In  
656 some cases two services may be appropriate to meet both the needs of the family and  
657 the needs of the meeting. Meetings or their pastors may be asked to provide this service  
658 for people who are not part of the meeting community, and need to be clear how to  
659 respond to this request.

660 In an unprogrammed meeting, a designated Friend is appointed to briefly explain how  
661 the meeting will be conducted and to invite participation of the worshippers. A  
662 memorial meeting in the programmed tradition will generally include readings,  
663 prayers, and music in addition to information on the deceased's life and a time of open  
664 worship. Below are considerations when planning a memorial meeting. Meetings are  
665 advised to consider what they can reasonably offer before making a commitment to a  
666 bereaved family.

667 The Memorial Meeting:

- 668 • Welcome and closing: Usually a Friend from the meeting will be appointed to  
669 open and close the meeting.
- 670 • Planned program: Are there any wishes for particular readings, music,  
671 musicians, or persons to speak? If so, what will the family and what will the  
672 meeting organize?
- 673 • A printed program: ascertain whether or not the family would like a printed  
674 program and what their estimate is of the number needed. Are there special  
675 quotations or pictures to include? Would the family like the meeting to handle  
676 this or would they prefer to do it themselves?
- 677 • Refreshments: What can the meeting reasonably provide? Often the refreshments  
678 are provided jointly by the meeting and family members of the deceased.
- 679 • Guest book: Does the family wish to provide one or would they like the meeting  
680 to provide it?
- 681 • Child care during the memorial service: Is the meeting able to provide child care  
682 should it be needed?
- 683 • Memorial display: Would the family like to create a display of mementos and  
684 photos? Where will it be placed?
- 685 • Overnight hospitality needs: Is the meeting able to offer hospitality if it is  
686 needed?
- 687 • Logistical responsibilities: Confirm the chosen date and time with your meeting's  
688 scheduler and make sure arrangements have been made as needed for cleaning,  
689 opening and closing the meetinghouse, snowplowing, flowers, catering, and  
690 setup and clean up people. Consider the capacity of the meeting house in relation  
691 to the expected attendance. Will a sound system be needed?
- 692 • Assign Friends to serve as greeters, to answer the telephone, to help handle  
693 parking issues.

694  
695

#### 696 **7D. Memorial Meeting Printed Programs.**

697 In addition to the person's name, birth and death dates, and the location and date of the  
698 memorial meeting, the printed program may include some facts about the person's life  
699 and/or a photo, picture, or favorite text. In the unprogrammed tradition something like  
700 the following may be added:

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#### A Memorial Service in the Manner of Friends

Welcome family and Friends of \_\_\_\_\_, to the \_\_\_\_\_ Friends Meeting.  
A Friends memorial service is a special meeting for worship in the traditional  
manner of Friends. It is a meeting of thanksgiving for the life of the one we have

706 known and loved and by whose presence we have felt blessed. As Quakers we  
707 gather for worship in listening and expectation: it is our understanding that in the  
708 silence all people can experience God directly. The ministry that occurs comes from  
709 those in attendance, as they listen inwardly to God. Anyone present may speak, or  
710 remain silent, as the Spirit directs. Tears and laughter are both appropriate. It is not  
711 in silence nor in words, but in sincerity of heart that we testify best to the goodness  
712 of God as we have seen it manifest in the life of our friend. We seek, in prayer and  
713 worship, to give thanks to God, the creator of our friend, and of us all.

714

715 If you wish to speak, please stand (*and wait for the microphone*) so that all can hear  
716 you clearly. We encourage you to leave a few moments for silent reflection of the  
717 previous message before you stand to speak. The responsibility for the spiritual  
718 depth of the meeting rests with each attender. Those who keep silence, as well as  
719 those who give a vocal message, do their part when they yield their minds and  
720 hearts to the guidance of the Spirit.

721

722 The close of the service will be signaled with a handshake and greetings passed  
723 among those present.

724

725 In the programmed tradition an order of service may be printed including such  
726 elements as Greeting and Gathering Words, Readings, Music, Prayers, Scriptures,  
727 Overview of the deceased Friend's Life, Open Worship, and Parting Words. The  
728 meeting's pastor or other designated Friend will generally open and close the meeting  
729 and offer words of transition between each element of the service.

730

## 731 **7E. Memorial Minutes.**

732

### 733 *Writing a memorial minute*

734

735 When a member of the Religious Society of Friends has died, it is customary for the  
736 meeting to write a memorial minute. Unlike an obituary, a memorial minute considers  
737 the ways in which the deceased Friend's religious convictions have been expressed  
738 through the Friend's actions, relationships, and spiritual gifts. The memorial minute  
739 becomes a permanent record, for the meeting and the Religious Society of Friends, of  
740 the grace of God as expressed through the life of the deceased Friend. The process of  
741 writing a memorial minute starts in the monthly meeting Ministry and Counsel. The  
742 committee may choose other members of the meeting to do the writing. Small meetings  
743 may wish to write these minutes as a committee of the whole, and large meetings may

744 name a subcommittee specifically organized to fulfill the work. When the draft is  
745 completed Ministry and Counsel ensures the readiness of the work before presenting  
746 the memorial minute for approval to meeting for business. All memorial minutes  
747 approved by a monthly meeting are sent to one's Quarterly meeting and from there to  
748 the Yearly meeting.<sup>6</sup>

749  
750 There is no required length, either short or long, but a memorial minute should be a  
751 truthful and conscientious expression of the distinctive fruits of the Friend's religious  
752 life. Care is taken to honestly reflect the difficulties and the joys of this Friend's life.  
753 Describing the positions the Friend may have held within the Society, or in their secular  
754 life may be less meaningful than describing the quality of presence and commitment  
755 they brought to their service. Some Friends may themselves have written statements  
756 about their life as a Friend. These statements are often a precious record in the Friend's  
757 own voice, and with careful judgment, might be included in the minute. When  
758 considering what to include in a memorial minute the following queries may be helpful:

- 759
- 760 • How does the inclusion of this information in the memorial minute reflect the
  - 761 movement of the Spirit in this Friend's life?
  - 762 • What gifts of the Spirit did this Friend bring to the meeting?
  - 763 • Are there meetings, organizations, or individuals in the Yearly Meeting, or in
  - 764 other Quaker institutions, who should be contacted to bring fuller understanding
  - 765 of the Friend's life and service?
- 766

767 Monthly meetings may send their memorial minute to Quaker organizations in which  
768 the Friend was involved, or to other places the meeting deems appropriate where the  
769 Friend was active, for non-Friends who may not be aware of the death.

770

## 771 **7F. Bequests.**

- 772 1. When making a bequest to a Friends' institution, Friends are asked to be mindful  
773 that restrictions on the gift may impede the needs and leadings of the community in  
774 the future. A gift that is restricted to a specific use, may, over time, become difficult  
775 to access or use given the changing needs of an institution, or the leadings of its  
776 members. Friends should trust those charged with financial care to make careful  
777 corporate decisions concerning the well being of the institution and its members. If  
778 donors have a specific interest they wish to support with their gift, a letter naming

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<sup>6</sup> In 2018, the yearly meeting wrote suggestions for writing memorial minutes. Monthly meetings wishing additional guidance in writing these minutes may request that advice from Permanent Board.

779 the interest is sufficient to guide the institution and its members to support that  
780 interest as they are led. A Friends institution may choose to refuse a bequest if it  
781 finds the terms of the gift are not in keeping with its mission or with their leadings.  
782 2. When making a bequest, donors should be mindful that the funds will be invested  
783 consistent with Friends principles and concerns. This may mean that funds will not  
784 be invested for the highest rate of return.  
785 3. In American society it has become common for educational buildings, philanthropic  
786 funds, and the like, to carry the name of a donor or of a person or family being  
787 memorialized. This is not consistent with Friends principles.  
788

### 789 **7G. Burial Grounds.**

790 Meetings that maintain their own burial grounds should establish policies governing  
791 interments, the marking of graves, and the keeping of records. The meeting should  
792 appoint a committee of two or more Friends to have oversight of the burial grounds and  
793 to insure adherence to the policies. The committee should take care that a plot or  
794 reservation of space in the burial ground does not, in the passage of time, pass from  
795 meeting control or ownership.

796 In establishing regulations as to grave markers, meetings should observe the principles  
797 of moderation and simplicity. Meetings without burial grounds may wish to create and  
798 maintain gardens of remembrance where members' cremated remains may be scattered  
799 or buried.

800 In cases where the maintenance of a burial ground no longer in use has proved  
801 burdensome to the meeting, the possibility of turning it over to the care of others may  
802 be considered, with due regard to the use to which the ground would be put.

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807

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