

Planning an Unforgettable Memorial Service

Detailed Planning Guide

October 15th is Infant and Pregnancy Loss Awareness Day. As a bereavement professional, how are you planning to acknowledge the hundreds of babies who died during the year? What will you do in support of the parents you bonded with during the worst times of their lives? Here is a practical checklist to ensure the most touching tribute possible.

First Steps:

1. Reserve a medium sized chapel for the event. Evening services between 6-7 p.m. usually fit most people's schedules. Plan for a one hour service.
2. Send invitations to everyone on your email list, including your installation's top brass and the FRG channels. Send e-mails 2 weeks out, 1 week out and the day before the memorial service. Don't forget to mention that there will be food afterward!
3. Contact your post newspaper to inform them of the event. Visit www.dynastybookpublishers.com to download free "cookie cutter" templates.
4. Ensure the chapel has candle votives on hand for a candle lighting service. Between 30 - 50 votives should suffice. Parents can light one candle for each child lost.
5. Provide an inexpensive keepsake for those in attendance. Print a touching poem on stationary, present each woman with a single red rose, or offer a delicate silk flower. Stow keepsakes in a wicker basket for attendees to pick up upon exit or entry to the service.
6. Get volunteers to greet, escort attendees to their seat, keep the soft music playing before the service, be ready with tissues and to direct them to sign the guestbook.

Planning the Program:

1. Invite a guest speaker to share words of hope and encouragement. Try to avoid the typical "scripture and a prayer" format. Preferably the guest speaker will be a former bereaved parent. You may have an inspiring speaker in your grief support group or you may ask around in some of the popular ladies groups like Protestant Women of the Chapel (PWOC), Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), Chaplain's Wives Club, Officer's Spouse Club or through the FRG Advisors. Check with Human Services, too. Guest speaker should keep their message hopeful, but no more than 15 minutes long.
2. Invite a talented soloist or group to sing. A gifted individual from a local church, or one of Catholic, Protestant or Gospel services may prove inspiring.
3. Allow room on the program for parents an opportunity to share a few words in remembrance of their angel.
4. Plan then print your programs. Don't forget to leave room in the program for parents to share words.

Executing the Program:

1. Set the mood. Keep lighting dim and music soft. Speak in hushed tones, encourage greeters to be warm and welcoming, with plenty of tissues on hand.
2. Begin the program a few minutes after the start time to allow for stragglers.
3. After the service, turn up the lights and put on more festive music, but not too over-the-top. Usher attendees to the refreshments area for everyone's favorite comfort foods.
4. Don't forget to encourage everyone to sign the guest book with full name and email address, so you can invite them again next year.