

A Simple Candle Lighting Service

We have so many new and emerging Chapters this year that we are running the same article this November as last year:

Is your chapter planning a candle lighting service? If so, let your local newspaper know. I have found that the North Shore News (our community newspaper) is always ready to send a photographer to take a picture of one of us lighting a candle in front of the framed image of our child. The caption in the newspaper gives notice of when our event takes place. Because of this simple publicity, we always have new parents at our ceremony.

Our own chapter newsletter lets regulars and newcomers know that they should bring a framed photo of their deceased child to be displayed and then taken home. In preparation for these photos, we set up a tiered display, made of bricks and boards, covered with large red tablecloths and decorated with poinsettias.

When parents arrive, we invite them to write their child's name on a cardboard star and hang it on a small lighted tree, and to leave their child's photo on one of the red tiers.

After some welcoming words, and the reading of the TCF Credo, we ask parents to introduce themselves in the way we do at regular meetings: "My name is _____. My child _____ died four years ago from a falling accident, at age 18."

Then we light four symbolic candles (before the ceremony begins, the organizer has asked four parents to read a few sentences about the candle's significance, and then to light it.) In the handed-out program, the words that go with the candles are reproduced.

1.**RED CANDLE:** "As I light this red candle, let it symbolize **LOVE**. Love that we had for you our children, a love we still possess and a love which we are willing to share with others."

2.**BLUE CANDLE:** "As I light this blue candle, let it symbolize our **COURAGE**, courage first for taking the risk to be parents, and then our decisive choice to survive after our child or children have died."

3.**GREEN CANDLE:** "As I light this green candle, let it symbolize **GROWTH**, the growth that we have made since our child's death. We are in the process of adjusting to a new life, a new world, and accepting new horizons without our child's presence."

4.**WHITE CANDLE:** "As I light this white candle, let it symbolize **HOPE**, the hope we all have that some day our hearts will again possess joy. That we will once again know peace in our lives as we keep the spirit of our child in our hearts."

After the lighting of the four candles, one of the leaders says the following:

"The light from these four candles symbolizes the paths which we have chosen, the paths of Love, Courage, Growth and Hope. Walk with us, holding our hands, hearts, and spirits as we accept the greatest challenge life has to give. You will be our courage, you will watch us grow, through your love and our love combined,

we shall find hope. These candles remind us not only of what we have lost, but also of what we had.”

Now people are invited to come up one by one to light a candle for their child (or children). The parent, or parents, lifts the child’s photo off the display. One of the leaders hands the participant a tea-light in a glass cup. The other leader lights it as the parent holds it forward. The parent holds the candle and the photo (facing the gathering) and says something like: “This candle is for Jeremy, whom we miss every day.” Or, “... who always loved Christmas.” Whatever comes to the parent’s mind. The leaders have already lit candles for their children and said a few words, thus modelling the shortness of the speech.

Some of us light candles for bereaved parents who could not attend.

Participants are invited to respond in unison reading the “We remember them” line in the prayer below (from the *Gates of Prayer, Reform Judaism Prayer book*). (On printed handout.)

When We Remember Them

At the rising of the sun and at its going down

we remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter

we remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring

we remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer

we remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn

we remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart

we remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share

we remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live;

for they are a part of us as

we remember them.

A musical piece is then played—either a recording or, if you have a guitarist who sings, let him/her lead you in “This Little Light of Mine.” For a piece of recorded music, we usually use Karen Taylor’s “Precious Child.”

Everyone is now invited to partake in coffee, goodies and conversation.

Submitted by Cathy Sosnowsky, Co-leader of TCF North Shore (North Vancouver)