



Digital Pastoral Care for Grief: Individual & Collective

Some considered thoughts from the United Church of Christ,
National Setting, 2030 clergy network, Cohort, and digital pastors,

*Also consider the compilation of [worship resources](#) & tips here.

Goal: Gather and give pastoral care digitally. Provide resources from those of us deeply familiar with digital platforms and uses. Provide thoughts for collective & individual grief.

Some Digital Platforms:

Zoom-

-This is a way to gather digitally, and one of the primary tools out there right now. You can set up on a computer, where video is possible, on smartphones, where video is also possible, as well as give people a call-in number. Pro accounts are recommended for congregations to be able to host everything. TechSoup offers this at a discount.

-As a zoom "host," it works best if you have a meeting leader, usually the pastor, and another person who is also "host" who can help with some of the digital engagement. Oftentimes, especially for people who are not familiar with zoom, someone will have to manually "mute" people so that there is not background noise. (there are a whole bunch of options when you make a meeting, including "Mute people upon entry" and "automatically record in the cloud." You can "enable waiting room" as well, which is like the gathering before the service.) There is a chat function which people can use to type requests even if they are muted.

Facebook-

-You can use Facebook Events to livestream. Create the time and event page, and then livestream from the Event at that point. People can be more passive participants via live streaming (commenting and reacting, rather than face to face, as with zoom).

-If the scheduling of a livestream through a Facebook Event is difficult, post the announcement of a livestream to the Facebook Page (date, time, etc.), "Pin" the post to the top of the Page, and "Go-Live" from the page a few minutes before the announced time so people are able to find it. From a separate device, "unpin" the announcement from the top of the Page and "pin" the live video to the top of the Page. Try to fill the first few minutes of the livestream with announcements. For folks who are attempting to tune-in, they might be a few minutes late and will appreciate the grace. You might want to stream from one device (a phone oriented "landscape" or horizontally), and have a tablet or laptop for putting comments on the livestream (links to or text of announcements, links to any songs that folks can listen to on their own, etc.). Typing on your streaming device can create a lot of unnecessary noise and movement.

-If people are concerned about privacy for online prayer requests or updates, they can be handled in a closed Facebook group or by direct text to a pastor. If only pastors are admins on the Facebook Page, you could also direct people to direct message the page.

-If you are not yet comfortable with livestream technology, you can still use Facebook as a place to share prayers, comforting scripture and liturgy interactively, by coordinating times to post and comment.

Text in Church (or similar platform):

-Text messaging is a pervasive method of communication in the 21st century. With entire generations preferring text to a phone call as less intrusive, text messaging services provide a way to send a mass message to your entire congregation giving them a chance to respond when they're able. This opens the door to a more active conversation in a way which is more immediate, less formal, and requires less effort than composing an email and more comfortable for many than a phone conversation.

General ideas for pastoral care:

-Hold drop-in "office hours" via zoom. Offer times to schedule in with people 1::1. Sometimes people are more apt to sign up for a call then indicate otherwise, so consider apps like SignupGenius for days, or [Calendly](#) for scheduling (there is cost involved).

-Offer a daily prayer or meditation for folks to receive via email or facebook, and to commit to doing at some point in the day as a way of staying connected feels important.

-the Calm app has been helpful for some: <https://www.calm.com/>

-Encourage preparation. Have members draw up a cheat sheet for caregivers listing meds, allergies, doctor's name and number, preferred hospital, location of insurance cards and license, or anything else they may need. (Davida Foy Crabtree, a UCC leader, [recommends this book.](#))

-This can be done as a spiritual practice, or a webinar where it is prayerful, giving thanks for each of the ways these collective pieces and people intercede in our health and well being.

-Set up small groups with people and prayer partners.

-Remind people of small self care practices - go for a walk and get fresh air, video chat with family and friends, etc.

- Offer conversations and questions for spiritual gathering.

-Where did you see God today?

-Where have you felt connected to your community today?

-What do you need prayer for, today?

General Ideas for grieving families:

-Send cards, often, or organize people to send cards to families. Utilize USPS. It's familiar to people and will be appreciated if they are isolated.

-Scheduled daily phone calls for a family in grief, in a phone tree. Websites like [SignupGenius](#) can make sure that a family is checked on as many times as would be helpful for them.

-As delivery options are available, meals can be delivered.

-Age appropriate care packages for family members

[-Zoom](#) “drop in” hours. You can set up time for the family where they are digitally present and people can “drop in.” A proaccount, which has some cost attached, is needed. Things to consider:

- use the chat box for people to add thoughts, in addition. Think of it like a guest book.
- set the meeting to automatically record in the cloud. This will save the chat box as it goes.
- Use the USPS! Send cards. This is a method of pastoral care that older members will recognize and appreciate.

Wakes:

A wake serves a variety of different social purposes: for friends and family to connect and show care for a family in the midst of their grief; and to say an informal goodbye to the person who has died by way of storytelling, prayer, and hospitality. Consider digital ways to show up as a community as above. Invite someone who is knowledgeable with technology to serve as MC, and make sure that those on line have a chance to speak up and be heard. Collect pictures of family and friends and post them; encourage a few family members to tell brief stories as encouragement to others. Children may create some art to post online to help remember the person who has died and express their feelings. You may want to start with an informal prayer; end with a prayer folks know by heart and can say together, such as the Lord’s Prayer, or Psalm 23.

Funerals:

A Christian funeral is a service that centers and celebrates the life of the person who is passed, in the context of the resurrection story.

- Check the [digital worship resources](#) here.
- Ask the family if they have digital videos they would want to share. You can share them on Zoom as part of a service.
- Have an order of worship to email out beforehand, or put on a Google Doc (like this one) to which you can share a link in the chat
- Music is complicated regarding copyright. See notes below.
- If many people are dying in rapid succession it may become necessary to hold a group memorial service for the community and have individual services in a more spaced out fashion later. We can learn from our colleagues in hospice settings about how to do group memorials well.
- Hold times for collective lamentation and grief, and inviting people to (carefully) light candles in their settings on screen might be a way to hold a vigil digitally. (or a [digital one](#) on screen. Another [option here](#))
- [Here is a model Responsive Prayer for On-Line Funerals](#)

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(The **exception to this is the section of BOW entitled *Resources for the Church Year***, beginning on page 478. These prayers are copyrighted to their different authors, and the UCC cannot give permission to stream them.)

Music

- When streaming worship, know that there are **copyright implications**.
- **Avoid using pre-recorded music on anything you stream! Music from professional recordings is not covered by typical church copyright licenses. To use this, you will need to be in touch with the producers of the recording.**
- Hymns and songs in the public domain may be used without any further permission or license. Check the index at the back of the New Century Hymnal or other hymnals to see if the song is still copyrighted.
- **For songs under copyright which are performed live:** The usual licenses such as CCLI <https://us.ccli.com/streaming-license-terms-of-agreement/> or OneLicense <https://www.onelicense.net/how-it-works> offer streaming licenses along with reprint licenses. Check out their websites for more information.
OneLicense is offering reprint and streaming licenses free until April 15, as a response to Coronavirus:
<https://news.onelicense.net/2020/03/13/one-license-offers-gratis-licenses-to-help-cope-with-covid-19-challenges-valid-through-april-15/?fbclid=IwAR0V1E7EzkzdPfDKoWXiHNQJqrh6mZYL2ldCmbf219-lwgh40kaWKfmFGjk>
- Alternatively, creatively invite people to engage. Pause your livestream saying something like, “At this point, we will sign a hymn together by stepping away from the phone and singing Amazing Grace, as we wash our hands. We will come back together in 3 minutes.”

to add resources or comments, email daviesc@ucc.org