

Hello thank you for the invitation to speak on Memorialising. My name is Sue and I am associate priest (self supporting) at St Matthew's Church in CA a north Leeds suburb. I have been ordained just over 10 years having previously worked in banking. I did have an administrative role in the diocese as PA to the Director of Mission resourcing and latterly to Andrew Tawn, Director of Clergy Development. I have been retired from that for 3 years and now have the great pleasure of caring for my granddaughter Hope once per week and collecting her brother Heston from school.

I am quite busy at present (advent and Christmas planning) and when discussing what needed to be done at a staff meeting last week, I was advised not to take anything else on. 'O dear!', I said I have agreed to speak on memorialising for LCI, a zoom meeting.

What is memorialising – is that even a word. So I looked it up – it means to preserve the memory of/ to commemorate.

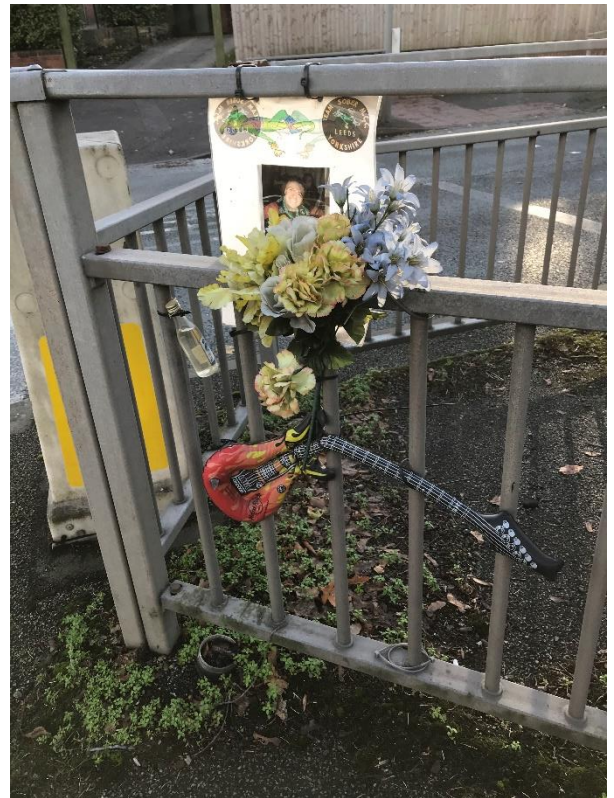
So I will speak, mostly, from my recent experience. There was a ten day period in April this year when 5 members of our congregation died(4 from Covid) . Yes we prepared for the worst but thankfully we did not experience any further deaths until 3 months later.

I conducted two of those funerals. Derek's funeral was a very stark affair, very unlike his wife's funeral which I had conducted 7 years earlier. It happened at 8.20 on a wet Monday morning. I arrived at the crematorium and the funeral director was already there and Derek's coffin in the entrance. It was a busy period for them and they wanted to get on with it. I worried that the three mourners to whom I had delivered copies of the funeral service, so that they could attend in spirit, if not in person, would be reading the service through at 8.30am, the allotted time but felt unable to delay the funeral by 10 minutes. Derek was my friend and it was important to me that his funeral was carried out as per his wishes and to the best of my ability. He had requested the book of Common Prayer funeral service – not language I was particularly familiar with. We will hold a memorial service as is our tradition when we are able to meet up in number again. More of that later.

The second funeral, Pearl, again a dear friend, I had conducted her husband's funeral three years previous, was altogether different. It was possible for ten people to witness the arrival of the coffin at the crematorium. I was asked by the chief mourner to choose 6 people from church to attend. A difficult choice as Pearl had been a member of the choir and had many friends. As I drove to the crematorium, I decided to drive past Pearls old house, she had moved to a care home a few months previously. I am so glad I did. The funeral director was outside her house with the hearse and Pearl's coffin and all the neighbours had lined the street.

When I got to the crematorium the funeral director advised me that I could conduct the funeral outside of the chapel, over the coffin, with the ten witnesses. Fortunately I had just conducted the funeral on zoom earlier so just repeated most of it.

I was to conduct another funeral, months later, for a member of our congregation. When I asked the widower what music, readings, personal touches were required I was told to choose whatever I thought best. The widower was not a church goer, but knew that it was very important to Pat, his late wife. I choose what my mum had requested at her funeral. It is really helpful when people do that. I arranged everything, this time it was to be in church. Less than 24



hours before the funeral I had to self isolate because my granddaughter had developed a cough and temperature. I had to get cover at the 11th Hour.

I have come across requests for unusual music, for mourners to wear purple and another requested that people wore a butterfly. When we memorialise someone it is important to include something of that persons preferences and character. This makes the commemoration very personal, and is a mark of respect.

Why do we do that? In my opinion there are several reasons. Firstly it is important for us to show that we knew the person and perhaps respect their wishes. It helps us forge a collective memory something to re-remember and talk about and it somehow keeps that person close. It gives a focus to our grief and a physical outlet for our sorrow. Importantly, it helps us to cry. All important stages in the grieving process. At my mum's funeral we had a board displaying items that were important to her, such as her Mothers Union badge, her dance competition medals and the two ha'penies she always carried in her purse to remind her of the time when she did not have two ha'penies to rub together. We were very poor!

We have just held our Armistice day remembrance service. We held it outdoors, as was permitted, socially distanced and quite short as people remained standing throughout. A visual spectacle was as important as the words we used. The scouts had produced a river of poppies from the church tower, perhaps you saw it on Look North, during the two minute silence they dropped remaining poppies from the tower parapet, and our bugler played the last post from there. (Photo) We could not conduct our act of remembrance by our war memorial inside church so created a makeshift memorial. I would have loved a drum head altar but that required too many people. The visual aspect along with simple words provide a fitting tribute to the war dead. This is ongoing memorialisation and is important to the nation and to very many people, as evidenced by our usual attendance of over 300 (we had 89 people socially distanced on the church lawn).

I don't know if you have heard of the Diana effect. When Diana Princess of Wales died there was such a wave of grief that found outlet in placing of flowers and candles outside the palaces. Some waited up to 12 hours to sign a book of condolence. Another poignant memorial is that on the site of the twin towers in New York, where all the names of the victims of 9/11 are memorialised, their names cut out of the bronze balustrade around the infinity pool. A rose is placed by their name on their birthday. Since the Diana effect we have seen the practice of road side memorials to RTA victims. I understand why people feel the need to do this, but it is better if they are maintained or removed.

Around All souls we would traditionally hold a memorial service for those who have died over the past year. We have not been able to do this. Derek would be remembered at such a service, his family do not want an individual memorial service. Normally at this service we would read out the names of the deceased, afterwards the family would be invited to light a candle and complete a form to have the name of the loved one entered into the book of remembrance. Often loved ones give a donation for a particular item the church is in need of and a plaque is erected memorialising that person. When we are eventually allowed to meet in numbers again, we will include personal items to remind us of the person. For example right up until the week before Derek's death, he was studying Greek translation, Derek was 93. We will place his translation text on the altar as a tribute to his brilliant mind and all the students he influenced during his years as headmaster. For others there will be individual memorial services. We are compiling a list. It is important that we recognise that the person has not been commemorated as we would wish and need to have a collective remembering to pay tribute to the life and times of the individuals.

There are very many, varied and individual ways of paying tribute, memorialising a person, we will see a very unique way shortly but I want to share a poem by Joyce Grenfell which made me smile. Clear instruction of what you would like when you die makes it much easier for the loved ones dealing with the funeral arrangements.

If I should die before the rest of you,
Break not a flower nor inscribe a stone,
Nor when I am gone, speak in a Sunday voice
but be the usual self that I have known.

My grandson saw a stone as we entered Moortown from Chapel Allerton which is engraved with the words “Welcome to Moortown” – he asked who had died? I had to explain that it was a signpost not a tombstone. He has a well developed concept of memorialising, even at the tender age of 4. Photos of his Great grandmas and his Granddad are focal points in his home and a candle is placed in front of them on birthdays and other celebrations. Collective remembering is an important part of the grieving process and is particularly poignant if it is personal to the deceased.

