A LEAVES OF REMEMBRANCE DEDICATION RITUAL

Whenever Leaves of Remembrance are laid along the city's sidewalks, the occasion is marked by a ritual of dedication and blessing. The ceremony is a bit different each time, adapted to the particular location of service or hospitality where the leaves will be. It's a public gathering of people sharing the human experience of loss, often including friends and family of those who have died. Others join to honor them, and to call for an end to the dying.

This is an example of a Leaves of Remembrance Dedication Ritual:

WELCOMING

The leader, usually a local clergyperson, calls people together:

> *Welcome – friends, members of the community, and especially those who have a personal connection with one of the people we are honoring today with Leaves of Remembrance. We appreciate your presence at this dedication, and hope you will say a few words about your loved one in a few minutes.*

A Homeless Remembrance Project representative continues:

> *The Homeless Remembrance Project exists because people who die while experiencing homelessness most often have no individual resting place, gravestone or memorial. Those who mourn them don't have a place to lay down a flower or a stone, or to stand and have a conversation. Also, the larger community is in danger of forgetting those who were so often ignored and disregarded during their lives. So the Project includes the Tree of Life gathering place in Victor Steinbrueck Park at the Pike Place Market, and these Leaves of Remembrance with names, placed with love at locations across the city.*

Someone speaks about this particular place of hospitality or service, and how homeless people are part of it.

LITANY OF NAMES

This is the heart of the dedication ritual, focused on the leaves and the people they represent.

> *The prophet Jeremiah spoke of our tendency to ignore suffering and look the other way:*
>
> > *Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?*
> > *Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me . . .*
>
> *These Leaves of Remembrance call us to stop and look. They bear witness: The sorrows and struggles of people living without a home are not nothing. Their lives are so much more than their circumstances. There is courage here, endurance and hope. Ties of family, friendship, solidarity and love. And all too often there is death at a young age, grief for family and friends who will never forget comrades they loved.*
>
> *Now as I call out the names of those honored by these Leaves, I invite you to respond after each one "We remember you."*

The names (printed in the program) are read aloud, and the gathered people respond.

BLESSING

May these loved ones rest in peace, and may we never forget them. We hold them in our hearts as part of the Beloved Community that transcends even the boundary between the living and the dead.
Their leaves cry out for justice, for shelter and safety. May all who pass by be called to remembrance, to compassion, and to action.

TIME FOR SHARING

People who knew those who died share memories, especially family members, friends and others who knew them. Others may share reflections also. There is sorrow, gratitude, love and often laughter.

CLOSING AND INVITATION TO RECEPTION/FELLOWSHIP

Thank you for the words you've shared. Thanks also to those who are hosting us today. Do stay if you can for some refreshments, and to share more stories about those you knew and loved.
May we honor them by refusing to look away from the suffering of those who are unhoused now, by recognizing their resiliency and courage, their ties of friendship, solidarity and love. By providing safe shelter, because without it people die. Despite all the forces that would make us strangers we resolve to be one community, called to care for each other. So let us go forth with determination, to speak, to agitate, to act and to love.

SOME MEANINGFUL WORDS FROM DEDICATION RITUALS

<u>From Lamentations, Chapter 1</u>

Come, all who pass by the way,
pay attention and see:
Is there any pain like my pain,
which has been ruthlessly inflicted upon me...?
For these things I weep—
My eyes! My eyes! They stream with tears!
How far from me is anyone to comfort,
anyone to restore my life.

<u>From The Antelope Wife, by Louise Erdrich:</u>

"The dead exert a protective influence and their spirits rejoice
when they know their names are still used in the world."

A poem by Raymond Carver:

Late Fragment

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

From a dedication at St James Cathedral:

Almighty and ever-living God,
in you we place our trust and hope.
In you the dead find everlasting peace.
Today we remember and honor
these brothers and sisters of ours,
who died on our streets and in our shelters.
May they rest in peace,
and may our hearts and consciences not rest
until all who are unhoused
find the shelter, help, and companionship they need.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

From Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Wondrously Sheltered"

On Friendship

It is not from the heavy soil of the earth, but from the free inclination and free desire of the spirit, requiring neither oath nor law, that a friend is bestowed on a friend. There is hardly a feeling that makes us happier than to sense that we are able to do something for others. Nor is it numbers that matter here, but intensity. Ultimately the most important thing in life is precisely our human relationships.

A poem by Joy Harjo:

Once the World Was Perfect

Once the world was perfect, and we were happy in that world.
Then we took it for granted.
Discontent began a small rumble in the earthly mind.
Then Doubt pushed through with its spiked head.
And once Doubt ruptured the web,
All manner of demon thoughts
Jumped through—
We destroyed the world we had been given
For inspiration, for life—
Each stone of jealousy, each stone
Of fear, greed, envy, and hatred, put out the light.
No one was without a stone in his or her hand.
There we were,
Right back where we had started.
We were bumping into each other
In the dark.
And now we had no place to live, since we didn't know
How to live with each other.
Then one of the stumbling ones took pity on another
And shared a blanket.
A spark of kindness made a light.
The light made an opening in the darkness.
Everyone worked together to make a ladder.
A Wind Clan person climbed out first into the next world,
And then the other clans, the children of those clans, their children,
And their children, all the way through time—
To now, into this morning light to you.