

Welcome

Invite participants to gather in a comfortable circle. Begin with a brief welcome, acknowledging that the holidays can be particularly painful when grieving. Follow with an ice breaker and opening prayer:

Icebreaker – “A Memory in My Heart”

Instructions:

1. Pass an object (such as a small stone or a heart-shaped token) around the group. Invite each participant to hold it for a moment and briefly share something meaningful about a loved one.

2. Prompts for Sharing:

- “One thing that always makes me think of [loved one’s name] is...”
- “A holiday memory I cherish with [name] is...”
- “Something [name] taught me that I still carry is...”

Encourage participants to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable with. This allows all to honor their loved ones and gently sets a reflective tone. After the sharing, conclude the icebreaker by saying, “Thank you all for sharing these memories. Let’s hold them close to our hearts as we move through our time together.” This icebreaker creates a supportive environment by acknowledging each person’s grief and connecting through shared memories, which can be very comforting.

Opening Prayer

Leader:

God of all comfort,
we gather in our grief,
bringing with us our memories,
our pain, and our longing.
Be with us as we remember
those we have loved and lost.
Surround us with your peace
and hold us in your love.

Amen.



Scripture Reflection

Choose one or two of these passages for reading and reflection:

- Psalm 34:18: *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*
- John 11:32-36: The story of Jesus showing his compassion and understanding of human grief by weeping at the death of Lazarus.
- Matthew 5:4: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

Reflection Prompt: Share a brief reflection on how these passages reveal God’s nearness to us in times of sorrow and how Jesus understands our grief.

Reflection

We have this image that holidays should always be perfect... like a Norman Rockwell painting. But we must remember that it is OK to be sad while the world celebrates. It is also OK to celebrate even when we are mourning. There is always sadness in the midst of joy, and there is joy in the midst of sadness. The carol "We Three Kings" recalls that one of the magi brought myrrh as a gift to the infant Jesus: "Myrrh is mine; it's bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom; sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb." The Lord whose birth we celebrate came precisely to be with us in both our joy and in our sorrows.

Faith Sharing

Organize participants in groups of three or four, inviting them to share responses to the following questions. Encourage each person to speak from the heart and to listen with empathy.

- Where do you feel the presence of your loved one, especially during the holiday season?
- What traditions or memories bring comfort or feel painful at this time?
- How does your faith or a sense of hope help you as you face the holidays?
- Is there something specific you are missing this year, and how can we support you?

Ritual Action: Lighting a Candle of Remembrance

Gather the group back together and invite each participant to take a candle (real or battery-operated) and say the name of his or her loved one. Then, he or she can light the candle to symbolize that person's light, still alive in the participant's heart. While this ritual is taking place, the leader can use these or similar words:

Leader: As we light these candles, we remember the love, joy, and presence of those who are no longer with us. We honor their place in our lives and recognize that their light continues in us. May their memory be a blessing as we carry their love forward."

Give a few moments for quiet reflection as the candles remain lit.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

End with a simple prayer that holds space for grief and hope.

Leader: Lord, as we leave this gathering, help us carry the warmth of this community with us into the days ahead. Be close to us in our sorrow and bless our memories with peace. May we feel the presence of our loved ones and the comfort of Your love this holiday season. Amen.