You’re probably reading this guide because you’ve recently experienced the death of a loved one. You are likely feeling overwhelmed and highly emotional. This guide is intended to help plan an event to remember and honor your loved one, and to alleviate some of the stress associated with the grieving process.

In this guide you’ll find information about some of the different options available to celebrate the life of your loved one, and how to plan a memorial event, including everything from when to hold the event to customizing the program.

- What type of service should you hold?
- When is the right time for the service?
- Who will participate in the service?
- Where should you hold the event?
- How do you personalize the event to honor your loved one?

**KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

- You don’t have to do this alone
- Planning the service is an important part of the grieving process
- Include others to lighten the workload and provide emotional support
DEFINITIONS

TYPES OF SERVICES

Culture, religion, location, and time greatly influence end of life ceremonies, rituals, and celebrations. “Funeral” has a very specific meaning for certain religions, for example. There are many options for this type of event in our culture today, some may be religious, non-denominational, spiritual or non-religious.

Although there are differences, a celebration of life, memorial service, funeral or other ceremony is designed to allow those whose lives were touched in big and small ways by the deceased to show their respect and honor their memory. The service also serves as an important step in the grieving process, allowing survivors to pay tribute to and celebrate the life of their loved one, as well as gain support and fellowship from others.

Below, we further define a few event types as well as options for disposition.

WHAT IS A CELEBRATION OF LIFE?

A celebration of life is an event focused on sharing stories of the deceased and commemorating the joys he or she brought into the lives of others. As the name implies, it's meant to celebrate the life of your loved one, opposed to grieving the loss. While there are often tears, these events tend to be creative, and focus on happiness and laughter. A celebration of life can take place immediately, or weeks or months after death and the body is typically not present.

WHAT IS A FUNERAL?

Funerals are typically held in a religious facility or funeral home, though home funerals are seeing a resurgence. The body is present at a funeral, so scheduling is dependent upon the choice of disposition, and must take place soon after death.

WHAT IS A MEMORIAL SERVICE?

A memorial service is similar to a celebration of life, in that the body is not typically present. A memorial service may be held in a place of worship or funeral home, although if the body isn’t present, many other locations may be considered. Parks, other outdoor settings, favorite gathering spots and other venues are popular options for memorial services. Timing can be immediate or several months after death.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR DISPOSITION?

Burial (traditional)
Burials typically involve purchasing a casket, cemetery plot or vault, and a grave marker or monument.

Green Burial
For those who wish to minimize their impact on the environment after death, a green or natural burial avoids formaldehyde preservation. Green burial settings are not maintained by landscapers and don’t have traditional grave markers.

Cremation
Cremation uses heat to reduce the body to ashes, which may be scattered or placed in an urn for keeping or burial.
CELEBRATION OF LIFE PLANNING

The most memorable events are highly meaningful, and capture the unique life and personality of the deceased. The following questions can help define the essence of your loved one.

- What were the individual’s religious or spiritual beliefs?
- What were their distinctive qualities?
- What were they passionate about?
- What do people think of when they think of the individual?

1. TIMING
A memorial service or celebration of life can be held any time after death. You may choose to make arrangements immediately, though it is also acceptable to wait several weeks or even months.

It can be difficult to make decisions immediately after a major loss; planning the event several months into the future allows you to enlist help from others, or even hire a professional planner.

Waiting also allows people to make travel arrangements, making it easier for friends and family to attend. You also will find more options available (location, venue, other services) if you're not dependent on having the event in the next 7 days.

2. TYPE OF SERVICE
Decide the type of service you would like to hold. Depending on the disposition of the remains, there are a number of options for the event. Here are some examples, but there are many other options:

- Traditional funeral service and burial.
- Cremation and traditional funeral service.
- Burial followed by celebration of life at a later date.
- Cremation and memorial service.

3. PEOPLE TO INVITE
After you’ve determined the type of service and timing of the event, it’s a good idea to make a list of everyone you’d like to invite. Immediate family is a good place to start, then consider more distant relatives.

Next make a list of friends, and not just current friends—inclue friends from different chapters of the person’s life: friends from childhood, school, different jobs, and different locations. Don’t forget to include your support network as well.

If people will be traveling in for the service, consider the accommodations they’ll need. Will they be able to stay with you or other family? Are local hotels or accommodations by owners available? This may impact the timing you choose.

4. LOCATION
Things to consider when choosing a location are:

- Will any portion be held at a religious location?
- How large of a venue is needed, based on the number of people expected.
- Does it have adequate parking?
- Is it handicap accessible?
- Can it accommodate all parts of the event—service, socializing, etc.
- When is it available?
5. OFFICIANT, CELEBRANT OR HOST

Who will lead the service/event? If the individual was religious or spiritual, the officiant or celebrant likely has a standard service that can be personalized. If a host will be leading the event, you can still choose meaningful customized elements, such as readings and music.

6. READINGS / READERS

You may want to choose religious prayers, readings, poems, personal writings, or song lyrics that were significant to your loved one. Next, choose the reader or readers who will present them.

Also, it can be touching to have people share personal anecdotes or memories about the individual.

7. EULOGIST / SPEAKERS

If you choose to have a eulogy, choose who will write and deliver it. Rarely are eulogists experienced, so you may share these guidelines for preparing and delivering a eulogy:

Be Brief
Be sure to check with the clergy or service director about timing. If none is provided five to ten minutes is a good guideline.

Be Focused
You can’t distill a lifetime into five to ten minutes, so don’t try. Start with a brief history of the deceased’s life, including significant relationships and professional history; interests; and achievements.

Be Personal
Focus on one or two notable qualities, passions, or characteristics of the person, and share a personal story or favorite memory related to it. A saying, quote, song, or religious text that was significant to the individual is a good way to close.

Be Positive
Now is the time to affirm the positive aspects of the individual’s life.

Write it Down
A written eulogy is another way for family and friends to hold the memory of a loved one. While practice is recommended, committing the eulogy to memory is not required. During this highly emotionally time, it may be nice to have a written copy to reference in the event thoughts become scattered.

Additional information about writing and delivering a eulogy can be found on pages 9-10.
8. MUSIC
Select songs, hymns, and other pieces of music that were enjoyed by the deceased, or that hold special significance. Determine who will provide the music? Professional musicians, DJs, family/friends, or a playlist on an audio system are all options. You may choose a combination of live music for parts of the program, followed by a playlist of significant songs as background music as guests socialize.

9. FOOD & BEVERAGE
Options for food and beverage include DIY (with help from friends and family), hiring a caterer, or full-service food and beverage provided by the venue you select.

You may choose to provide foods that were particularly liked by the deceased. Another option is a particular ethnic cuisine. Depending on the time of day, you may choose to provide light snacks, like appetizers and desserts, or a full meal. Be advised that many guests may have dietary restrictions, so inquire with your caterer/venue about options.

Many events, especially a celebration of life, choose to include a bar, which adds to the celebratory feel of the service.

10. PHOTOGRAPHER / VIDEOGRAPHER
You may choose to capture the event with photos or video, to keep the memories for years to come. This job can be undertaken by a family member or friend, or you can hire a professional.

In some cases, some families choose to webcast the event, which allows people who wouldn’t otherwise be able to attend to participate in the service.

11. FLOWERS & MEMORIALS
Traditionally, people send sympathy flowers to express their condolences. However, it is commonplace for families to request memorial donation instead of flowers. In the obituary, social media and event invitations, you can indicate whether flowers or memorials are preferred, or whether both are acceptable.

The typical way to indicate memorials are preferred over flowers is “in lieu of flowers...” but there are other ways to suggest survivors show their support. For example, “those wishing to make a memorial donation, may contribute to [specific charity name] or the charity of their choosing.”

12. PERSONALIZING THE EVENT
Personalizing the event can range from simple to elaborate, and can be done by a few people or by everyone attending.

One family was celebrating an individual who had a deep love of baseball. The invitations and printed program had baseball-related artwork and wording. The music included songs you’d hear in a ballpark; and the readings were from people with significant ties to the game. Peanuts, cracker jacks, and hot dogs were served. The theme helped honor and remember the departed in a very personal way.

Some traditional ways to remember a loved one are with a memory board of photos, a display of photo album, a video or slide show, or through displaying personal memorabilia.

To involve guests, you may ask that people bring a few words about the departed to share or post for others to see. It could be a favorite memory, a sentence or two on how they knew each other; or ask them to send a photo or song to be included in the slideshow or playlist.
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**PAGE 6**
WRITING AN OBITUARY

An obituary serves several purposes: it offers a notice of death, provides details about any services that will be held in remembrance of the deceased, pays tribute to the person, and, most importantly, it provides insight to friends and family that helps keep the person alive in memory.

If you’ve been tasked with writing an obituary and haven’t done it before, you probably don’t know where to start. This blog will help you through the process of writing an obituary.

DO SOME READING
Before writing an obituary, you may find it helpful to read other obituaries. In addition to newspaper obits, you can find them on news websites, funeral home websites, as well as by simply searching for “obituary.” Reading a few will help you determine what resonates. You may even find some creative and outside-the-box ways that obituaries have remembered a person—the kinds of obituaries that give you a good sense of who the person was in life.

DETERMINE WHERE YOU WILL PUBLISH
Most obituaries are published in the local paper, as well as the paper in the town where the deceased spent a significant amount of their life. If the loved one was a notable figure, you may consider national publications. Today’s newspapers will offer a print and online obituary. If you’re having a funeral, the funeral home may also offer obituary listings.

CONTACT THE PUBLISHER
After you decide where to publish the obituary, contact the newspaper, website, or other publisher to determine:
- Dates to run the obituary
- Deadlines
- Cost
- Any other requirements

CHECK WITH THE FUNERAL HOME OR NEWSPAPER
If you’re working with a funeral home, ask if they offer any assistance with the obituaries. Some will have a template that you can complete, or an outline that will help you compose the obituary. Some may even write the obituary for you. The newspaper may also provide a form or template or offer other writing assistance.

GATHER INFORMATION
Before you start to write, gather all the details you’ll need. Ask others for help or to fill in the blanks.

Basic biographical
- First & Last Name; Maiden Name; Nickname
- Age
- City, State
- Spouse/significant other’s name

Services
If there will be a public service, list:
- Date
- Time
- Location

Important details about the person
- Schools attended
- Military service
- Career – employers and positions
- Hobbies and interests
- Significant locations: where they were born, where they were married, where they lived

Cause of death
Many people are curious about the cause of death. If you are comfortable sharing the information, you may choose to include it. While it’s up to you, it may save you from having to repeatedly explain it to neighbors, acquaintances, and others. Some people choose this as an opportunity to thank caregivers, or draw attention to the disease, accident or illness that was the cause. Again, this is entirely optional.

Donations and memorials
If there is a charity that was significant to the deceased, or if family prefers donations instead of flowers, indicate so in the obituary. Common phrasing for this type of request can be "in lieu of flowers, memorial donations to ... or “instead of flowers, please consider the needs of the family.”

PERSONALIZE
Instead of a list of accomplishments, try to paint a picture that will help others remember the life of the deceased. Tell a story about them—how did they live? What was their passion? How did they impact others?

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**WRITING AN OBITUARY**

(continued)

**CHOOSE A PHOTO**

Different types of photos can accompany the obituary. It all depends on how you would like that person remembered. Some people choose a photo from the loved one’s younger days: a graduation, military or wedding photo. Some choose a more current photo. The photos can be professional portraits, or candid snapshots. There is no right or wrong photo, simply choose a photo that captures who the person was.

**EDIT AND PROOFREAD**

After you’ve written the obituary, leave it alone for a few hours or overnight. Reread it with fresh eyes and make any necessary edits. Then ask a close family member or friend to proof read the obituary for errors and omissions.

Make any final changes and submit the obituary. Many people choose to save a copy of the obituary, and some display it at the celebration of life, memorial service or funeral.

**EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE OBITUARIES**

These examples of non-traditional obituaries appear on the website: www.frazerconsultants.com

**William “Freddie” McCullough**

“The man. The myth. The legend. Men wanted to be him and women wanted to be with him. William Freddie McCullough died on September 11, 2013. Freddie loved deep fried Southern food smothered in Cane Syrup, fishing at Santee Cooper Lake, Little Debbie Cakes, Two and a Half Men, beautiful women, Reeses Cups and Jim Beam. Not necessarily in that order. He hated vegetables and hypocrites. Not necessarily in that order.”

**Jane Catherine Lotter**

“I was given the gift of life, and now I have to give it back. This is hard. But I was a lucky woman, who led a lucky existence, and for this I am grateful. I first got sick in January 2010. When the cancer recurred last year and was terminal, I decided to be joyful about having had a full life, rather than sad about having to die. Amazingly, this outlook worked for me. (Well, you know, most of the time.) Meditation and the study of Buddhist philosophy also helped me accept what I could not change. At any rate, I am at peace. And on that upbeat note, I take my mortal leave of this rollicking, revolving world-this sun, that moon, that walk around Green Lake, that stroll through the Pike Place Market, the memory of a child’s hand in mine.”

**Mary A. Mullaney**

“We were blessed to learn many valuable lessons from Pink during her 85 years, among them: Never throw away old pantyhose. Use the old ones to tie gutters, child-proof cabinets, tie toilet flappers, or hang Christmas ornaments. Also: If a possum takes up residence in your shed, grab a barbecue brush to coax him out. If he doesn’t leave, brush him for twenty minutes and let him stay.”
It’s an honor to be asked to eulogize a loved one, but it can also be intimidating, if not outright overwhelming. But the process doesn’t have to be difficult. In fact, searching your memories and sharing them with others can help bring comfort as you deal with the loss. Here are some tips to keep an mind, as well as a step-by-step guide to writing and delivering a heartfelt eulogy.

**TIPS FOR DELIVERING A GREAT EULOGY**

**Be brief**

While there’s no need to rush or cut short your remarks, focusing your comments on a particular theme or aspect of the person will help provide structure. The average eulogy is three to five minutes. It’s not uncommon to have multiple eulogists, so be concise in your remarks.

**Be organized**

Like any speech, a eulogy should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion (more on that below). Spend time organizing your remarks in a logical sequence with a beginning, a middle and an end.

**Be personal**

You were asked to provide a eulogy because of your relationship with the departed. Share your unique insights about the person in your remarks.

**Be positive**

Now is the time to focus on your best memories of your loved one. Those who knew the person well are aware of their shortcomings, or would be surprised to learn of them. Using humor is fine, but now is not the time to roast the person. Use the eulogy as an opportunity to pay tribute to your loved one.

**Write it down**

No matter how much you practice—even if you memorize the eulogy—write down the speech. The emotion of the day can affect your memory and delivery, so having something to reference will help put you at ease. Make sure the print is large enough for you to read in dim lighting. Don’t forget your reading glasses if necessary.

**Be personal**

It’s very important to be authentic, but you should also make sure to practice. Speaking your words out loud can help you to clarify your thoughts. Speak slowly and clearly. Articulate your words. It’s okay to pause if you become emotional. Bring tissues and have a bottle of water handy. Take a moment to compose yourself—the audience will be sympathetic and strong emotions are to be expected.

**WRITING A EULOGY: GETTING STARTED**

Now you know some tips for delivering a eulogy, but getting started is another story. A blank page staring back at you is a sure-fire way to get writers block. Before writing anything down, spend some time looking for inspiration and enjoying and sharing memories of your loved one with other close friends and family.

1. **GET INSPIRED**

A quick online search will yield a number of truly inspiring eulogies. Read some sample eulogies for ideas. Make note of those that resonate with you. What do you find appealing? Is there a common thread?

You’ll see some commonalities and discover that you don’t need to unravel the meaning of life, provide profound insights, or try to make sense of the death of a loved one. Rather a good eulogy helps mourners with the healing process. The audience may remember fondly the things you mention, or they may learn something new about the deceased. Simply helping others to remember the person you’re eulogizing through your sincere words is the mark of success.

2. **TALK TO OTHERS**

Use this time to talk to close family and friends of the deceased. You may find you spend a few hours on the phone or getting together to talk about your loved one. Write down stories from others, especially those stories that weren’t familiar to you.

These memories might be funny, touching, or particularly telling of the individual’s personality.

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3. BRAINSTORM

After you’ve had a chance to talk with others, spend some quiet time alone. You may want to go for a walk or just sit quietly and think about your loved one. What comes to mind? Take some time to think of memories, special moments, or your feelings toward that person.

- What words do you use to describe that person?
- What was your favorite thing about that person?
- How did that person impact your life?
- If you could tell the deceased anything, what would it be?
- What passions, hobbies, interests, talents, or special sayings did that person have?

Use the answers to those questions to create a mental image of that person. Now jot down the answers and make a long, descriptive list about your loved one.

4. CHOOSE A THEME

Now that you’ve got a long list of ideas, memories, and stories, choose a theme that best conveys what you’d like to remember about your loved one. This could also depend on your relationship to the deceased. You may choose a more formal theme that focuses on the person’s history, career and achievements. Or, you may choose a personal theme to convey your favorite stories, memories and anecdotes about the departed. Or, you may want a combination of the two.

As you develop a theme, think about the audience. Don’t include jokes or inside-references that most wouldn’t understand. Avoid negativity, anything shocking, offensive or confusing.

Use the theme to organize your brainstormed list: group ideas together; and choose what to include or exclude from the eulogy. For more ideas and specific themes to tie your ideas together, see this excellent guide to writing a eulogy.

5. WRITE THE BODY

Using the following outline and your notes, start writing the body of the eulogy. Use descriptive words to paint a picture for the audience. Would someone who didn’t know the person get a sense of who they were from your eulogy?

Eulogy Outline

I. Brief bio
   1. Birth place & date
   2. Significant life milestones
   3. Spouse, children, grandchildren

II. Achievements, talents, hobbies, passions, unique qualities and characteristics

III. Special memories and stories

Now is the time to be specific. Avoid long lists of general qualities. Tell an insightful anecdote that best illustrates that quality instead of simply mentioning the quality. For example, instead of “Mary was an accomplished professional who always helped new employees” use an example like, “Mary helped countless new graduates enter the technology industry. Not only did she hire candidates for Tech Time, but she also spoke to upper-level computer science classes at the University about interviewing for professional positions. In fact, she hired me for my first internship in 2002. I’ll never forget her sage advice. ‘XXXX which reminds of the time we were at a conference in Boston...’

6. WRITE THE CLOSING

Wrap up the eulogy with words of comfort. Refer to the person’s admirable qualities, or what they taught you about life, or the impact they had on you and others. Bid them a final farewell.

7. WRITE THE INTRO

It’s much easier to write the introduction after you’ve written everything else. Start by thanking guests for coming. Acknowledge the reason that you’re all there. Introduce yourself and why you’re speaking. Briefly state what you’ll be talking about.

8. ASK SOMEONE TO PROOFREAD

After you’ve polished up the eulogy, ask a close friend or family member to proofread it. Ask them to look for any errors or mistakes. Ask them if it conveys the message you want to leave with the audience.

Be sure to practice your edited eulogy, and don’t forget to bring a printed copy with you. After you’ve followed these steps, you’ll be ready to deliver a heartfelt, memorable eulogy that pays tribute to your loved one.
Choosing music for a Celebration of Life or Memorial Service doesn’t have to be a daunting task. Choose songs that mean something to you and your loved ones, or something that was meaningful or says something about the departed.

For inspiration here’s a small selection of poignant songs that may be right for the Celebration of Life or Memorial Service you are planning.

**CONTEMPORARY PLAYLIST**

- **Always on My Mind** by Elvis Presley
- **Amazing Grace** by Susan Boyle
- **Angel** by Sarah McLachlan
- **Angels** by Robbie Williams
- **Don’t You Forget About Me** by Simple Minds
- **Fly** by Celine Dion
- **Hero** by Mariah Carey
- **I Will Always Love You** by Whitney Houston
- **Landslide** by Fleetwood Mac
- **Like a River** by Carly Simon
- **My Heart Will Go On** by Céline Dion
- **Nothing Compares to You** by Sinead O’Connor
- **One Sweet Day** by Mariah Carey & Boyz II Men
- **Right Here Waiting** by Richard Marx
- **See you Again** by Wiz Khalifa
- **Somewhere over the Rainbow** by Israel Kamakawiwo’ole
- **Stand by Me** by Ben E King
- **Tears in Heaven** by Eric Clapton
- **Time After Time** by Cyndi Lauper
- **To Where You Are** by Josh Groban
- **Unchained Melody** by Righteous Brothers
- **Up Where We Belong** by Joe Cocker and Jennifer Warnes
- **What a Wonderful World** by Louis Armstrong
- **When I Look to the Sky** by Train
- **Wind Beneath My Wings** by Bette Midler
- **You Are the Sunshine** of My Life by Stevie Wonder
- **You Raise Me Up** by Josh Groban
- **You’ll Be in My Heart** by Phil Collins
CREATING A MEMORY BOARD

Displaying a photo or memory board at a Celebration of Life, Memorial Service, or Funeral helps mourners remember and celebrate the life of your loved one. The process of creating a memory board can also provide a supportive as you gather people to help.

ENLIST HELP

Invite family and close friends to help with this project. You'll find that people are willing to lend a hand. Gathering a small group of family and friends together for this project can be a supportive way to remember your loved one and share stories and memories, before the celebration of life or memorial service.

ASK FRIENDS / RELATIVES FOR PHOTOS

Send an email or call extended family and friends to see if they have photos to share, particularly if you know you are lacking photos of certain memorable events, or photos that capture the everyday life of this person. Ask them to send only copies that don't need to be returned, or to send them electronically so you can print your own copy.

INCLUDE SMALL MEMORABILIA

Beyond photos, you may wish to gather certain small memorabilia which can be placed on or near the memory board. These could include ribbons or medals earned, diplomas and degrees, citations and awards, trophies, tickets, programs, etc.

ORGANIZE PHOTOS

There are many ways to organize photos on a memory board.

- **Random** – Group a wide variety of photos together in no particular order. Choose your very favorites that you feel capture the essence of the deceased.
- **Chronological** – Begin at the beginning with baby pictures, and progress through childhood, school photos, wedding, children, etc., throughout their life.
- **By Life Phase/Interest** – Though this can be similar to chronological, this method groups different aspects of the person’s life together. For example, create photo groups for family, education/graduation, military service, career or volunteer work, hobbies, etc.

CURATE

Hopefully you’ve gathered an abundance of photos and memorabilia. Once you’ve had a chance to organize items, decide how many to include. Perhaps all, perhaps a selection of favorites. How much you want to transport and the amount of space for display are the only limitations for how much to include.

If you’re working with original photos and other materials, determine whether to make copies, or use the originals.

LAY OUT DESIGN

Now that you have an idea of what to include and in what order or groupings, lay out the materials on your poster board. You may find that you want to further edit what’s included, or that you’d like more.

Consider labels to tell the person’s story. You don’t need a label for every picture, but you might want to give a general idea of when, where or why a photo was taken. For example, below a group of hunting and fishing photos, you might type up:

"John always loved the outdoors, from his childhood at the family cabin on Square Lake to hunting trips with his good friend Joe and children Ryan and Becky."

Or under school photos, you might include:

"John attended K-12 in South Minneapolis before heading to the U of M where he graduated in 1962 with a degree in Business."

Or you may choose to include a simple name, location, and date for certain photos.

Include the small memorabilia where appropriate. Slightly larger items, like sashes, ribbons, or trophies can be hung on the corner of the board when it’s on display or placed on a nearby table or stand.

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CREATING A MEMORY BOARD (continued)

AFFIX PHOTOS
When you are pleased with the layout, affix the items to the board. When possible, use a copy of a photo so you can use strong adhesive, like Easy-Tack or glue sticks, which will keep the item in place, but may make it difficult to remove intact.

If you want to remove the items from the poster board later, consider using photo corners. Keep in mind that because this method allows for removal, you’ll need to be very careful during transport and set up to ensure that photos and other memorabilia remains affixed to the board.

COVER AND TRANSPORT
Use a plastic lawn & leaf bag to cover the memory board and protect it during transport. Lay the board flat in the trunk of a car or back of an SUV for best results while transporting to the display location.

DISPLAY
Place the poster board on easels in the venue. Place slightly larger memorabilia and framed photos on nearly tables and stands to complete the memorial display.

SUPPLY LIST
- Photos, copies of photos
- Poster board(s)
- Easel(s)
- Adhesive – glue stick, spray tack or photo corners
- Label maker, printer or neat handwriting
- Any additional embellishments, memorabilia, decorations

Hazeltine National Golf Club, located in Chaska, MN, is available for for Celebration of Life and Memorial Services.