

Materials Needed

Altar & cloth (if necessary)

On the altar at the beginning of the ritual:

Chalice with candle

Matches or lighter

Carafe filled with sparkling juice

Four chalices

Quarter representations (water, salt or other earth representation,
incense, (so it can be carried while lit) and a lit lantern)

God & Goddess candles in holders

Bread (cut into quarters)

Eight cloth napkins

4 to pass with the bread

4 to pass with the chalice so the edge can be wiped

On the floor surrounding the altar:

Four baskets of apples (enough apples so that every person participating can take one)

On the directional altars:

quarter/directional candle with matches/lighter at each

Around the circle:

Boxes of tissues (at least 4 or more, if necessary)

Hymnals

On the memory altar:

altar cloth

candles/votives in holders

cards for people to write names of loved ones to put on the memory altar

Chime and/or drums and/or other musical instruments (should be with whoever is responsible)

Ritual Set-Up and Preparation

In our group, we set up the chairs in three or four concentric circles surrounding a central altar. There are aisles from the central altar which lead out to the four directional altars. On each directional altar we have pre-set, a candle of the appropriate color and a lighter/matches. Other symbolic items may be on the directional altars. We sprinkle the floor of the space with dried rose petals which we then collect and use on the floor as part of our Mayday service.

Somewhere within the sanctuary/space close to where people come in, set up a memory altar. As part of your announcement of the ritual, ask people to bring pictures, mementos or other items to share as part of the memory altar. People are also told that they will be given space within the ritual to tell a story or share something about someone who has died.

Set up the altar with all of the stuff in the list. The directional representations will be taken off early in the ritual, so set them up on the outside edge. If you have a very small altar, it will be very cramped.

A small hand chime is used to demarcate certain parts of the ritual.

Another note: All of the movements performed by the four directional people are coordinated throughout the entire ritual. Anytime they come to the altar or leave the altar is always as a group. This requires a bit of practice. You will need to reserve seats for the four quarters so that they are near their aisle. It is better if they are sitting in the circle nearest the central altar.

Performing the Ritual

Creating, Cleansing and Consecrating Sacred Space

Chalice Lighting - (Note: This is our Fellowship's normal chalice lighting - if your church has a standard, you should probably put it here.)

“With the lighting of this candle
We renew our search for truth,
Our recognition of the worth and dignity of every person, and
Our striving for the goal of a peaceful world community.”

Casting the Circle (We have done this with a variety of tools. Personal choice.)

<Person starts in the East and casts clockwise.>

“This sphere is cast with the light of love,
Weaving astral form about,
For naught but love shall enter in,
And naught but love shall exit out.
A place of protection, for all to be.
A place of timelessness, for all to see.
A place of community, where all can share.
A place where loved ones know our care.”

Cleansing the Circle

<The four directions stand, go to altar and get representative item from altar. They turn and walk out to their quarter direction. They circle clockwise, taking care to maintain even spacing. When each is back where they started, they put down their directional representation on the direction altar.>

Chant - “Sphere be blessed, Circle be consecrated.”

“The Sacred Space has been created for those who would share the beauties of everyday mysteries. Let us now call forth to the elements and ask their awareness.”

<You may have to ask people to stand if they wish.>

Calling the Elements

“Air I am, Fire I am, Water, Earth and Spirit I am...”

“...I am Air” <everyone faces East - person calling lights pre-set candle>

“We call to the East and the Winds of Change, the direction of newness and birth, that we might seek a new wisdom within ourselves. Our keen intellect moves our minds, that we become better thinkers and decision-makers.”

“...I am Fire” <everyone faces South - person calling lights pre-set candle>

“We call to the South and the Flames of Inspiration, the direction of passion and adolescence, that we might seek the spark of life within ourselves. Our fiery will transforms our creative desires, that we become better crafters of words, music and justice.”

“...I am Water” <everyone faces West - person calling lights pre-set candle>

“We call to the West and the Waters of Life, the direction of emotions and maturity, that we might recognize the intuitive ability within ourselves. Our compassion shapes our relationships on the earth, that we become better perceivers of the web of life upon it.”

“...I am Earth” <everyone faces North - person calling lights pre-set candle>

“We call to the North and the Stones of Strength, the direction of the physical body and age-old wisdom, that we might seek the seed of life within ourselves. Our resilience heals the body as well as the soul, that we become better able to seek the balanced life that makes us whole.”

“...I am Spirit” <everyone faces the center and then sits>

(chime)

God & Goddess Invocations

Male: “We call to many gods in their differing manifestations: Herne, Wankatanka, Pan, Osiris, Kernunnos, Vishnu, Woden, Shiva, and Tammuz. Bring us your strength and wisdom.”

Female: “We call to many Goddesses in their differing manifestations: Brigit, Diana, Aphrodite, Persephone, Demeter, Gaia, Isis, White Buffalo Woman, Hecate, Ishtar, and Cerridwen. Bring us your strength and wisdom.”

(chime)

The Central Ritual

Beliefs about Death

<These work best as individual voices which come from different parts of the circle.>

“We are here today to share in the memories of those who have passed on before us. But what happens after we die?”

“Some people believe that when they die they go to heaven and spend eternity basking in the light of God’s love.”

“Some people believe that Bifrost, the rainbow bridge, will lead them to the hallowed halls of Valhalla.”

“Some people believe that dying in Banares, the City of Light, will cleanse their souls of all impurities.”

“Some people believe that when they die, they will reach Nirvana - a place of oneness & nothingness.

“Some people believe that when they die, they will take an honored place among the ancestors where they will dispense advice to the living.”

“Some people believe that when they die, there is nothing.”

“Some people believe that after they die, they are reincarnated from one life to the next, learning the lessons that they need -- in a state of continuous evolution.”

“Some people don't know what they believe.”

“Our beliefs about death and dying are as varied as our beliefs about life and living. Regardless of our individual beliefs, though, is the unmistakable truth that our loved ones live on through our memories of them and in the works that they created in this world.”

“Please turn in your hymnbooks to reading #720. Following the reading we will have a brief moment of silence.”

Responsive Reading #720

Moment of Silence

Chant -- “Autumn time, red leaves fall, while the weeping sky looks over all.
Demeter sadly walks the land, the dying grasses in her hand.” <from Libana>

Memorial Sharing

“Does anyone care to share a memory or story of a loved one?”

<People are free to share memories.>

Note: The amount of time that you can spend on this will depend on how many people are in the circle and how long it will take to do the closing. During practice, time how long you think the rest of the ritual will take. Subtract your best guess from the necessary ending time. In our fellowship we usually have 20 minutes of sharing, and it usually seems to be about right for 35 - 50 people. This is where the service leader needs to have a handle on things. Luckily most people take this very seriously and don't take up too much time. I try to give people warning when it is getting close to the time to stop so that any last minute people have a chance to speak. Don't worry if you have long moments of silence. The silence allows people to reflect. If you are worried about people participating, especially the first time, have a couple of people ready to go right at the beginning.

When the sharing is over say:

“Our thoughts are with you in this time of remembrance.”

(chime) Apple Offering to the Dead

Female: “In many cultures, what we call Samhain or Halloween, is a time of communing with the ancestors. People have a great feast and set places for the dead at their table. As a token of remembrance of these celebrations,

please take an apple from the basket and leave it somewhere as an offering in memory to the dead.”

<Four quarters come forward and each get a basket of apples to pass. Practice how this will happen. We usually have each basket stay within the quarter wedge of seats that it started in. This is where the quarter people may have to pass the basket from row to row on the aisle they are responsible for. When the baskets reach the back row, the quarters then walk back to the center and place the baskets on the floor around the altar.>

<music - we have a bagpipe player who does a Scottish lament>

Symbolic Great Rite (Done preferably by a couple)

Female: “The Wheel of the Year turns ‘round and ‘round and with it the cycle of life and death. Around us we feel the dying beauty of the trees in their colorful glory, and know that winter nears.”

Male: “But even through the depth of winter, we know that spring will come and deck the earth in radiant green, and summer’s sultry heat will soon follow, leading us back to where we are now: changed perhaps -- for the year is not a circle, but a spiral, like the DNA that makes up our bodies and the spiraling galaxy of which we are in turn, a part.”

Female: “To celebrate the endless cycle of death and rebirth, we will symbolically affirm the creation of life through the joining of polarities, the Great Rite.”

Male: “See in this wand, the essence of the God, the creative spark of light and life.”

Female: “See in this chalice the womb of the Goddess, the fertile darkness from which all life springs.”

<insertion of wand into chalice>

Male: “Behold existence is made manifest.”

Female: “Two made one.”

Male: “Male and Female”

Female: “Light and Dark”

Male: “Matter and Spirit”

Female: “As above”

Male: “So below”

Female: “Infinite balance is created in the union of all things.”

Cakes and Wine

“May the blessings of the earth be upon this bread as it strengthens and nourishes us.”

“May the blessings of the waters be upon this juice as it refreshes us and quenches our thirst.”

<Music - live if you can. We have a flute player who does this.>

<Four quarters get bread (in napkin), tear off and eat, turn and give it to the seats in their quarter. Then they turn back get juice, sip and wipe (with second napkin) and pass. The quarters will need to help pass the bread and juice in their section. We have found that it is easier if they do it exactly the same as with the basket of apples. When the bread and chalices reach the back, the quarters bring collect it and put it on the

altar.>

Opening the Circle

Thanks to the Deities

Male: "We give you thanks, Gods"

Female: "and Goddesses"

Male: "for the gifts that you grants us"

Female: "this community of friends"

Both: "love shared"

Male: "the beauty of the earth"

Female: "and the continued cycle of life"

Both: Blessed be!

Thanking the Quarters

<The quarters stand and go to their directional altar. Having the congregation stand is optional.>

"Winds of Change, Powers of the East - we thank you for your presence at this memorial rite We thank you for your gifts of the mind. Blessed be!"

"Flames of Inspiration, Powers of the South - we thank you for your presence at this memorial rite We thank you for your gifts of passion. Blessed be!"

"Waters of Life, Powers of the West - we thank you for your presence at this memorial rite We thank you for your gifts of emotion. Blessed be!"

"Stones of Strength, Powers of the North - we thank you for your presence at this memorial rite We thank you for your gifts of stability. Blessed be!"

Pass the Offering Bowls

<more music by our flute player>

Circle Opening

"Circle of light and love,

This rite is complete, this task is finished.

Return to the Earth from which you came,

Let peace and love remain."

Chant: "May the Circle be open, but unbroken. May the peace of the Goddess be ever in your heart. Merry Meet, and Merry Part. And Merry Meet again!"

"This Memorial Rite of Samhain is ended, we thank you for your sharing. Are there any introductions or brief announcements before coffee?"