

# HOW TO HOLD A VIRTUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE, A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

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Due to the [coronavirus pandemic](#), families in most parts of the world are unable to hold memorial services or even attend a graveside service for a loved one that has died. I am unfortunately one of those families. My family suffered the loss of my grandmother who died from COVID-19 on April 25<sup>th</sup>.

As someone who has dedicated their career to reimagining the way we die and the way we memorialize a loved one, I knew that I had to organize a memorial service for her. My cousins and I came together after our grandmother's passing to organize a virtual memorial service in her honor.

In this article, I outline the steps that were taken to organize her online memorial service using Keeper. I will share the tools that were used, my suggestions for holding a successful service, and what I would have done differently.

This is simply one “template” of the countless options you have when organizing a memorial service. I hope that this helps you if you and your family are also faced by a loss during this time as my family has.



My Grandmother,  
Annette

## HOW TO HOLD A VIRTUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE, A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

### 1. Choose a date and time for the virtual memorial service

Just like any funeral service, you should not worry about accommodating everyone's schedules. Some of our immediate family members work in hospitals, so we made sure to accommodate their schedules as first responders. Everyone else is in isolation and hopefully staying home, so find a date and time that works for the immediate family, and do not worry about everyone else.

If possible, schedule the memorial service at least 3-5 days in advance, to give yourself enough time to put everything together.

We hosted the service at 5:30PM EST when the majority of our attendees would be off work. This worked well, especially because we have family on the West Coast of North America.



*TIP: If you have family in Europe or other parts of the world, you may want to consider holding the serving at Noon EST. This is 9:00AM for those in the Pacific time zone, and evening for Europe, while East Coasters can be on lunch break from work.*

*Making the decision on the date and time of the memorial your first step helps you plan with a goal in mind and enables everyone to block off their calendar.*

### 2. Allocate Roles

Allocating tasks and roles to everyone that is taking part in the organization of the memorial service is key. My cousins and I scheduled a video call to discuss what we wanted to include in the memorial service, and then assigned a role to everyone involved.

## The Roles

### Host

The person that will host the virtual memorial service.

#### **In advance, the host should:**

- Prepare the order of service – i.e. the sequence of events for the service, who will speak when, etc. See below for the detailed order of service we used.
- Prepare an introduction to the memorial service. See below for what we included our introduction (it is more important than you think!).

#### **During the service, the host should:**

- Guide the service by introducing everyone before they are about to speak. This serves two important purposes. First, it tells people who that person is (even if most will already know) and second, it ensures that the service is organized and everyone knows when to speak (because let's be honest, there's always that one person who will completely ignore your order of service).
- Thank the speaker for sharing their message, and then introduce the next

### Speakers

In some cases, you may have too many people that want to speak, and other families may not have enough people that want to say something. If you are the organizer, my advice would be for you to suggest who should speak. For my grandmother's service, I knew it was important to have something said in French and in English. I suggested that my two cousins who speak French well write and say something together, and that two other cousins would write and say something in English.

I would suggest having at least 2 speakers so that the service is not too short, and it is always nice to hear from different people.

### Writers

The person giving the speech will often be the one that writes it. If you have a bigger family or want to involve multiple people, you can consider making the writing process collaborative.

To make the speeches more collaborative, my family created a group chat where everyone shared their favorite memories of my grandmother. This helped the person writing the eulogy because they were given ideas and memories to include. It also ensured that everyone felt included, even if they were not speaking, because their feelings and memories were shared.

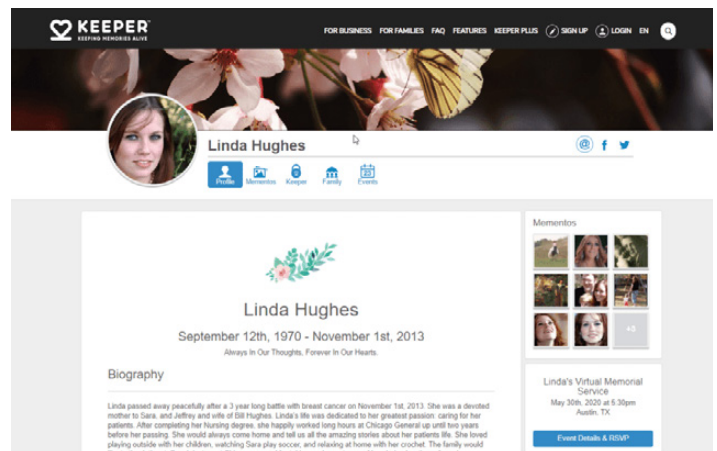
### 3. Use an online tool to share the details of the memorial service

[Keeper](#) was a clear choice for my family to gather memories, photographs and create an event page for the memorial service. After going through this experience myself, I found it particularly helpful that Keeper has both an online memorial solution, and connected event pages that enable you to add the specific details and links to the virtual memorial service.

#### Online Memorial Pages

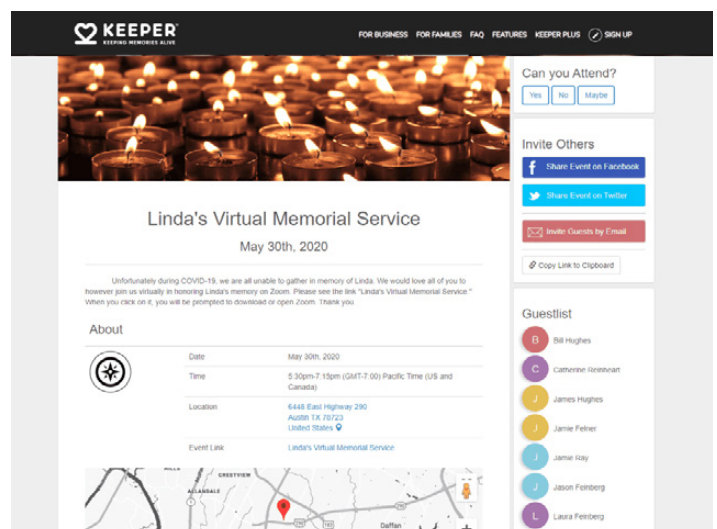
Online memorial pages are one central place where you can take the time to write an [obituary or a biography](#), upload photographs, videos, create a family tree, and add as much information about your loved one as you'd like. Friends and family are able to share their own tribute messages, stories, and upload their photographs.

I would recommend creating a memorial page before the memorial service because it is a simple and centralized solution for your community to send their condolences and share their pictures (which is especially helpful if you are creating a slideshow for the service). Furthermore, you are able to revisit these memories and stories years later and share it with future generations.



#### Online Event Pages

Event pages are very helpful when planning an online memorial service because it enables you to share details of the service and provide a direct link to the video conference. People are able to RSVP and ask questions about the event if they have any.



## 4. Select the video conferencing tool you will use

There are many video conferencing tools available today, and there are a number of new solutions being introduced. I would suggest using a tool that you (or the technology person) has experience with.

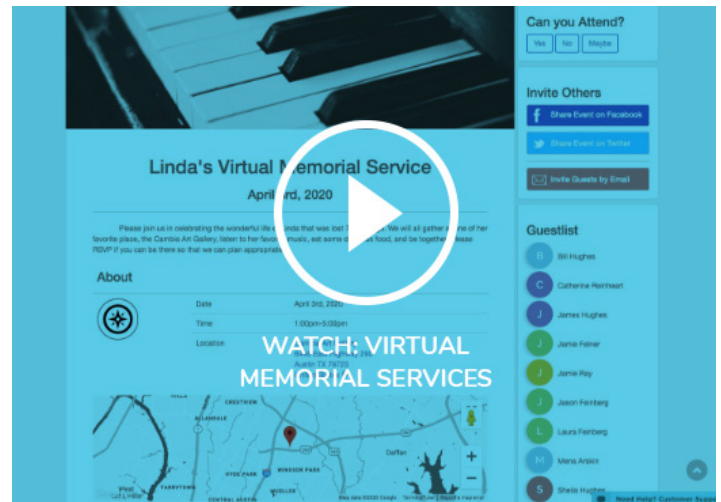
**We decided to use Zoom for a few reasons:**

- It is one of the only tools where you can see multiple people at once on your screen.
- You can mute and unmute everyone at once easily.
- You can do a screenshare (to show a slideshow, for example), while having a spotlighted speaker appear next to it.
- Many people have been using Zoom during the pandemic and using a tool that is familiar can save a lot of time and frustration for everyone.

Although you can have a video conference for up to 40 minutes using Zoom's free service, I would recommend spending the 20\$ for their paid service. It provides you access to additional tools and ensures that the memorial service will not be suddenly cut off if you surpass the 40 minutes. You can easily cancel the service after the first month.

If you do not want to use Zoom (as privacy may be a concern), [here is a list](#) of other video conferencing apps available.

**Do not forget to link the Zoom meeting link, or other video conferencing link on the Keeper Event page. Watch this video to learn how to do this:**



## 5. Invite Everyone

Gathering as a family, and speaking about your loved one is more than enough and will be appreciated by everyone involved. If you want to do a little more, here are a few ideas that we did for my grandmother's service.

## Build a Slideshow

When someone dies, we almost instinctively look for photographs of them. Have everyone share their photographs in one central place like the Keeper online memorial page. I would recommend the person that was allocated the tech role to take care of building it using one of the [slideshow tools available](#).

During the service, we played the slideshow during the speeches and it worked beautifully.



Spotlight mode in Zoom with a slideshow playing

## Show Home Videos

Event pages are very helpful when planning an online memorial service because it enables you to share details of the service and provide a direct link to the video conference. People are able to RSVP and ask questions about the event if they have any.



Tip: [Keeper Plus](#) users can upload unlimited native videos to a memorial page from their phone or computer.

## Consume something they loved during the service

My grandmother loved her scotch and red wine. In the event invitation, and before the service started, we asked everyone to pour themselves a glass of scotch or wine. During the service, we made a toast together with her favorite drink.

If the person loved coffee, or pie, or had a special recipe, share that with everyone before the service. Food and drink are a beautiful way to memorialize a loved one.

*Making a toast to my grandmother with her favorite Scotch!*



## 7. Do a Dry-Run

If you have more than one speaker and host, and are adding any multimedia elements like videos or a slideshow, I would absolutely recommend doing a run through.

I recommend that everyone says their speeches in full, which is great practice, but also enables you gauge if the service might be too long or too short. This may seem like overkill, but spending that extra 30 minutes practicing all the video conferencing controls can help reduce any stress and unknowns during the service.



## The Virtual Memorial Service Itself

### 6:00 – 6:30 PM – Virtual Memorial Visitation:

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During most memorial services, there is a [moment for everyone](#) to gather together and personally offer their condolences to members of the immediate family. This is something that you can do virtually as well. An hour before my grandmother's service, we held a virtual visitation where anyone could speak, catch up, etc.

#### My recommendations:

- Make this virtual visitation no longer than 30 minutes. We did a full hour and it felt too long.
- If you have a large number of people, consider using [breakout rooms in Zoom](#).
- Do not be afraid to mute people! Tip: If you are using Zoom, have the Participants panel open. In this area you can see who is talking or where loud background noise is coming from by looking at the microphone icon. If someone has a lot of noise coming from their end, mute them.
- If there is one person talking, [spotlight them](#) on the conferencing app so that everyone can see them.

### 6:30 – 7:15pm: The Virtual Memorial Service

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#### Welcome Introduction:

The welcome introduction should be done by the host. Make sure to spotlight the host so that they are visible to everyone. Remember to mute all participants before the introduction begins.

### **During the introduction, the host should:**

- Introduce themselves
- Welcome everyone and thank them for joining
- Tell everyone the order of service and what to expect
- Explain that everyone will be on mute for the duration of the service and ask them not to unmute themselves
- If you chose to do so, let everyone know that the service will be recorded and that it can be sent to anyone who could not attend
- Introduce speaker one

### **Speaker One**

After the introduction, the first speaker should begin. Do not forget to spotlight the speaker!

During my grandmother's service, a minute into the first speaker's talk, the tech person did a screenshare and played the slideshow in full screen mode. Those watching could see the slideshow in full screen on their devices, with the speaker (in spotlight mode) on the top corner.

### **Back to the Host**

When the first speaker is done, spotlight the host for a brief moment. The host can thank the person for sharing their story and say a few words. The host should then introduce speaker two.

### **Speaker Two**

Spotlight the second speaker just as they begin. If you are doing a slideshow, I recommend waiting about 30 seconds before starting the slideshow again.

You can continue this order of Host, Speaker, Host, Speaker throughout the service. It ensures that everyone has their cue, and makes the whole service run smoothly.

### **Back to the Host: Open up the floor**

After the last speaker, you can ask if anyone would like to say a few words. You should only unmute the person that wishes to speak and ensure to spotlight them.

I would recommend asking those that would like to speak to physically raise their hand so you can easily find their video. They can also let you know they would like to speak in the chat, or by [virtually raising their hand in Zoom](#). We did a combination of all three and it worked out well.

### **Ending of Service**

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To close the service, the host should thank everyone for joining. A nice personalized ending would be to ask everyone to raise a glass of your loved one's favorite beverage. Lastly, remind everyone about the Keeper [online memorial page](#) and share a link to it in the chat. Explain for those who may not be familiar with it that they can share their stories, re-watch the slideshow, and look at photographs.



## Some Final Thoughts on Holding a Virtual Memorial Service

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My grandmother's virtual memorial service was beautiful. There were over 50 people that "attended" my grandmother's and I am personally happy that I did all this planning before.

Everyone was touched, and my family received many messages of appreciation and gratitude that they could celebrate her life with us.

*My beautiful grandmother, Annette.  
You will be missed.*

I hope our guide on how to hold a virtual memorial service can help you and your family in this difficult time.

**Mandy Benoualid**  
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Keeper



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TO CREATE A MEMORIAL FOR A LOVED ONE!