

Commemoration at Home — Recommendations

This article is from the “Among Friends” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of March 28, 2020.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—It appears that the executive decisions of national and state governments (in an apparent effort to protect citizens from a virus) may interfere with disciples of Jesus Christ attending a church gathering to commemorate the suffering and death of our Lord.

Although I realize that people call this event either Passover, Lord’s Supper or Last Supper, I will refer to it here as the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord.

Congregations of the Church of God have for years supported individuals observing the commemoration at home. (In fact, most congregations have produced a paper to give “instructions” about how to do it. This article will include “recommendations” rather than instructions.)

In a recent article (titled “Commemoration at Home Without an Elder?”), I showed my complete support for people having a commemoration at home—even without an elder present.

The purpose of this article is to give some recommendations to people who may find themselves in a situation to observe the commemoration at home.

Dealing with restrictions

At the present time, the government has restricted the gathering of people in a church building for a normal church service. (In our state, the government has presently restricted a gathering to only 10 people.)

At the present time, the government has allowed pastors to give presentations in the building (to a skeleton crowd) which can then be transmitted from their buildings on the Internet.

As we approach the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord, we are planning to serve people—even if the government restrictions remain.

Hopeful for restriction removal

It is the hope of many pastors that government officials will remove the attendance restriction for congregations. While I can’t speak for the approach

of other congregations, I know that our congregation is a huge supporter of the free choice of the members.

By that I mean that the removal of the attendance restriction would allow members of the church to decide for themselves whether to attend or to stay home.

Removing the attendance restriction would allow the congregation to host a commemoration service for those who chose to attend.

Choosing to worship at home

Even if the attendance restriction were removed, that would not solve all the challenges for serving the congregation.

Why?

Though the removal of the attendance restriction would allow some disciples to choose to attend a live commemoration service, other disciples would choose to remain in low contact with people.

How will we serve the people who don't yet want to attend a service with a group of people?

Here is a four-step plan.

- Step No. 1—For people who like using the Internet, we will provide a live stream of the commemoration in the building on the Internet.

If you would like to watch our live stream of the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord, please go to churchofgodbigandy.com (all one word). Our transmission is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7 (picturing the night on which the Son of God was betrayed), at 7:45 p.m. (central time).

(Because the transmission on the Internet can have unexpected problems due to factors like equipment and weather, steps No. 3 and No. 4 are available to members of our congregation as a backup plan.)

- Step No. 2—For people who like using the Internet but may have trouble with receiving our live connection, we will provide a link to the 2019 commemoration in the building on the Internet. This online version will not include the music from last year. The length of that service without the music is 43 minutes long—which is 28 minutes shorter than the original.

(Because finding a link on a website can have unexpected problems due to factors like equipment and weather, steps No. 3 and No. 4 are available to members of our congregation as a backup plan.)

- Step No. 3—For people who don't want to deal with the Internet, we will provide to disciples in our congregation a DVD version of the 2019 commemoration in the building. This DVD version includes the music from last year and is 71 minutes long.

- Step No. 4—For people who don't want to deal with the Internet or with a DVD, we will provide to disciples in our congregation this article—which can serve as recommendations if they want to organize their own commemoration at home.

Advance preparation

If you are organizing your own personal observance of the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord in your home, here are some recommendations about how to prepare.

- Consider where you will partake of the three symbols—the foot-washing portion, the broken bread and the small amount of wine.
- If you are hosting the event, communicate with the guests about what they should bring. Basin and towel? Are you providing the unleavened bread and the wine?

The atmosphere

The commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord is a contrast of diverse emotions—mourning and rejoicing.

On one hand, the atmosphere is solemn because we are reflecting upon the fact that our sins caused the suffering and death of the Son of God. He suffered and died for us. He suffered and died for me.

Yet on the other hand, the atmosphere can also be jubilation. While we sorrow that we caused the death of the Son of God, we are thrilled beyond belief that He has given us life. The event is an evening of hope and joy.

(Food for thought: If you are meeting privately with other people, you might want to consider if your atmosphere matches up with their atmosphere.)

Include music?

A traditional format for many Church of God congregations is to sing one hymn—at the conclusion of the service.

I recommend that you consider adding more music to your observance. (At our service, we generally have three congregational hymns and four selections of special music.)

If your little gathering does not have any gifted musicians, I recommend that you use a CD or a selection from the Internet from gifted individuals or choirs.

Scripture reading

If you are doing a commemoration at home, I recommend that there be Scripture reading instead of preaching.

While I don't think the group should force a shy person to read, I hope that the group involves many people to participate in the reading.

Open with prayer

While many larger Church of God organizations don't pray at both the beginning and the end of the commemoration, I recommend that you pray to open and to close.

Last year, here is some of the music that we had in the beginning.

- Video presentation titled "Who Am I?" by Casting Crowns.
- Audio recording of a vocal solo titled "The Work I Began in You."

Introductory verses

Most people have some introductory verses. Many verses would apply. Here are some that have been read through the years.

- Luke 22:19-27
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-30

I recommend that you briefly read a few scriptures about the resurrection of the Son of God. Then, you can return to reading about His suffering and death.

- Acts 2:22-36
- 1 Corinthians 15:12-23

Washing feet

Before the foot-washing portion of the evening, I recommend that the gathering sing a hymn or play a musical selection. Last year, we sang two hymns.

- Hymn of praise—"There Is a Redeemer"
- Hymn of reflection—"In Thy Lovingkindness, Lord" (since the words are from Psalm 51).

I also recommend that a person read John 13:1-17. (Other verses could certainly be read.)

Eating of bread

Before the eating of bread, I recommend that a few people read some scriptures.

It is common for a person to read Matthew 26:26. There are many scriptures that would be appropriate. As a point of reference, let me list the verses that we read at our commemoration last year.

- Isaiah 53:1-7
- Luke 11:53-54 and Luke 20:19-20
- Matthew 26:36-46
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Last year, we had a vocal solo before the audience partook of the broken bread.

I recommend that someone offer a prayer of thanks for the bread and for its meaning. Generally, I recommend that each person take a piece and break it before eating both pieces. (I don't think a clergyman should break the bread for us. I believe that each of us broke Christ.)

However, you may want to devise a way to distribute bread without exposing the audience to an aggressive flu.

A small amount of wine

Before the drinking of a little bit of wine, I recommend that a few people read some scriptures.

It is common for a person to read Matthew 26:27-29. There are many scriptures that would be appropriate. As a point of reference, let me list the verses that we read at our commemoration last year.

- Matthew 27:15-26
- John 19:12-30

Last year, we had a violin solo before partaking of the wine.

I recommend that someone offer a prayer of thanks for the wine and for its meaning.

His final teachings

It is traditional for disciples to read from John 13-17. Some groups read the entirety of those verses. Last year, we read the following.

- John 13:31-35
- John 14:1-10
- John 15:1-13
- John 16:16-33

Last year at this spot, we played a video presentation prior to the reading of John 17. The selection was "The Prayer" by Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli.

- John 17—the entire chapter

Closing song

Last year, we concluded with a hymn of praise. We often choose "To God Be the Glory."

Close with prayer

While many larger Church of God organizations don't pray at both the beginning and the end of the commemoration, I recommend that you pray to open and to close.

Three final thoughts

I would like to leave you with three final thoughts.

- I pray that you receive comfort and inspiration from partaking of the symbols (foot-washing, broken bread and wine) of the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord on the night picturing the night on which the Son of God was betrayed.

- Think about the Son of God on the next day at 3:00 p.m. when the Passover offerings were killed and when He died for mankind.

Matthew 27:46-51—"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, 'This Man is calling for Elijah!' Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said, 'Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.' And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split."

- Remember that the Son of God is your Passover.

1 Corinthians 5:7—"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."