

# Transgender Day of Remembrance

*The Transgender Day of Remembrance was set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice.*

*The event is held in November to honor Rita Hester, whose murder on November 28th, 1998 kicked off the Remembering Our Dead web project <[www.gender.org/remember](http://www.gender.org/remember)> and a San Francisco candlelight vigil in early 1999. Due to the interest in both the web site and that original vigil, it was decided that an annual memorial to those killed due to anti-transgender violence or prejudice was necessary to help spread information about these deaths.*

## **Tips for hosting a successful Day of Remembrance event**

This document will provide you with some tips for a successful Day of Remembrance event, born out of ideas generated from previous DOR events, as well as other non-transgender-specific vigils and memorials. Special thanks goes to Shelly for a selection of tips based on her experiences organizing the San Jose, California, Day of Remembrance, and to Callan Williams for invaluable suggestions in the organization and preparation of this document.

Bear in mind that the below suggestions assume one is doing a candle light vigil. Do not feel limited to only this format, as other events in the past have included roundtable discussions between local activists and area politicians, a dramatic presentation of over 200 tombstones in the "quad" of a college campus, and other inventive possibilities. The only real limit is the imagination of your and your planning committee.

Also note that not all Day of Remembrance events are going to be big enough to accomplish everything on this list, nor do they. Take these as suggestions and ideas, not specific rules.

## **The guiding principles of the Day of Remembrance**

- “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.” (Santayana)
- All who die due to anti-transgender violence are to be remembered.
- It is up to us to remember these people, as their killers, law enforcement, and the media often seek to erase their existence.
- Transgender lives are affirmed to have value.
- We can make a difference: by being visible and speaking out about anti-transgender violence, we can effect change.

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## What can be done for Day of Remembrance?

- Candlelight Vigils / Marches
- Roundtable Discussions
- Performance Actions
- Political Rallies
- Read-Ins
- Art / Photography Displays
- ...Etc.

You are only limited by your imagination in determining the form and scope of your Day of Remembrance event.

Presented on the Day of Remembrance site are a couple examples of what others have done in the past in the name of Remembering those we've lost

## Planning:

Planning a DOR event is much like planning any event. You have to:

- Get a working group
- Reach out to all potential participants,
- Decide on the form of the event
- Handle the logistical details
- Get the media involved
- Do promotion
- Run the event
- Lay groundwork for the future

Like any event, the key to success is thinking about as many ways to make it better before the event, planning to avoid problems and concerns. For example, if you know that some groups might complain, get them involved as early as possible with the process.

## Organizational tips

- Raise any necessary funds for the event. Consider what money you may need for advertising (flyers), supplies (candles, etc.), and other necessities.

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Speak to local transgender and GLBT organization for funds, and consider applying for appropriate grants. You may also wish to arrange to "pass the hat" at other local events.

- Prepare your check list: make sure that this includes items like printing programs or handouts, preparing any signage or banners, purchasing candles and drip protectors, selecting people to help run the event, and so on.
- Hold a follow-up meeting, and go over what worked and what needs improvement for the future.
- Have a sign-in sheet available, allowing you to contact vigil participants in the future. They may be willing to help on next year's event. Contact those on your sign-in sheet, and thank them for attending and for signing up. You may wish to invite them to your event follow-up so they may provide feedback for next year.
- Use e-communications: have a mailing list, a web site and any other techniques.

## **Event tips:**

- Get a location for your event. As November is a cold and rainy time in some areas, make sure to have an alternate location if an outdoor event proves unworkable. Consider a community center, a governmental building like the local City Hall or State Capitol, or even a house of worship.
- Plan your turnout. It is best to have a large, diverse turnout, including members of all portions of the transgender community (transsexuals, crossdressers, genderqueers, trans-but, MTF, FTM, etc.) as well as those of other nationalities, ethnic groups, and socio-economic classes. This is a cause that touches all portions of our community. Consider having some of your volunteers who are part of these communities take responsibility for developing and implementing an appropriate outreach strategy for each group.
- Contact members of the local political establishment or noted activists in the area, and ask them to speak at the event, or to provide a statement. At the same time, limit the number of speakers (no one really wants to sit through too many speakers) and the amount of time for each speaker. Five minutes is

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a reasonable amount of time. In picking your speakers, consider people who will empower the audience. You wish to inspire action over sorrow.

- Finalize the program for the event. Make sure that your event will serve those who will attend, and make sure to provide speakers and other materials that will provide the best event possible.
- Many at the event will be compelled to help. Consider letting others assist in reading of victims' names, or lighting candles, or otherwise providing a pair of hands to help out where needed. This can be especially useful when it comes time to clean up and pack things away.
- Above all, do not forget to honor each of the victims: Read each name and light a candle or whatever, but recognize each person.
- Look at the resources for what has been done before. Is there a speech or music that has worked in other sites that might work for you?
- Consider honoring others who have been lost. Sometimes a local community will have witnessed the passing of others in the area, by whatever means. While their passing may not fit under the aegis of anti-transgender murder, do be aware that people will wish to remember those they have lost whatever the reason. Be sensitive to people's needs during a time of remembering -- but at the same time be wary of diluting the purpose of the event too much. You can, perhaps, set aside a special moment for those others who have passed on, without taking away from specific honors given to those we've lost due to anti-transgender violence or prejudice.
- Make sure you have printed material with follow-up actions at the event. Where can people who are moved go to help? How can they pass the message on to others?

## **Promotion tips:**

- Begin to plan your methods for advertising the event. Consider your flyers, your press release, and so on. Once the location, time, and speakers are in place, one can begin to distribute flyers and e-mail announcements. A sample flyer is available on the Day of Remembrance website.

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- Ask local organizations to include your event in their newsletter or calendar of events. Consider also providing them with camera-ready artwork for advertising, if they are willing to run such.
- Advertise the event. Host a flyer-posting party if appropriate, and distribute the appropriate press releases.
- Seek an interview for your or your spokesperson with the local media for the noon news. Also consider coordinating interviews with local newspapers and radio programs.
- Consider hosting a press conference the day of the event (late-morning is typically the best time for such), or plan for media involvement at the event. Prepare some words to share at the event site, and consider having these printed for use of the media.
- Be prepared to speak at the event, and to "MC" as needed. Plan for possible "disasters" such as weather, and have contingency plans in place.
- Consider the tone of your event. This is an emotionally charged subject, and can end up a very "down" event. Provide remembrance of those we've lost, but also provide reassurance and healing for those in attendance. Make for an empowering event.
- Contact all members of the press who attended and see if they would like follow-up information or an interview with you or your spokesperson.

## Sample event rundown

- Gather and distribute candles.
- Start the event by speaking briefly, letting people know why they are there: give them context to the event at hand.
- Have a speaker or two address the issue at hand. You may also wish to consider music, dance, poetry, or any other forms of appropriate artistic expression.
- Read each of the names for the current year, and light one candle with every name, passing it out. Then others light their candles from the first. You may also ring a bell (a maritime tradition) for each of the names. Alternately still,

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you can have a person with a candle to represent every murder victim, and have them snuff their candle out as they read the name of the deceased they represent.

- Say a few brief words to close the event; thank everyone for attending.
- Clean up.