

DEATH IS NOT A DEAD END

by Cindy S. Hansen

PURPOSE

To discuss the fears of death that most have and to rejoice in the hope shared as Christians in the life to come.

PREPARATION

Gather Bibles, candles, pens and paper.

Turn off the lights in the meeting room and light several candles. (There should be just enough light to see for the writing exercise.) Play several appropriate record albums to set a somber mood.

OPENING

The youth receive a pencil and paper as they enter into the dimly lit meeting room. Introduce the topic of death by saying, "Although we are Christians, many of us still fear death and its unknown quality. Think of these feelings now: the negative, dark, scary feelings of death. Jot them down. They can be words or phrases." Allow a few minutes of silence. Announce that each individual in the group is going to write a Cinquain poem about feelings of death. This form of poetry originated in France and the name refers to the French word for the number five. Explain there are five lines in the poem. The first line is one noun. The second line is two adjectives or a phrase to describe the noun, and the third is

three action words or a phrase about the title, the fourth line is four words to describe a feeling or feelings about the title. The fifth line is to rename the title in one word. Example:

DEATH
FINAL BREATH
LAST OF LIFE
LONELY, UNKNOWN,
FRIGHTENING, DESPAIR
DARKNESS

The youth can use the feelings they wrote as they entered the room. Keep the lights dim as the poems are written. Invite individuals to share their poems with the large group. What are some of these negative feelings of death? Why do we have them? Were the poems similar in any ways? What is the most common, fearful feeling of death?

THE "MEAT" OF THE MEETING

Turn on the lights and break into small groups of five to six. Have each group read Psalm 23:4 and brainstorm for a way to pantomime its version of the valley of the shadow of death. What feelings come from this verse? Hope? Lighter feelings? Why? Take turns performing the skits.

Have the small groups read other verses on death: Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14; Matthew 16:18;

1 Corinthians 15:54,55; 2 Timothy 1:7,10; 1 Peter 5:7.

What does the Bible have to say about death? Do we need to fear death as Christians? What is the hope that Jesus offers?

Keeping these thoughts of hope and salvation in mind—how does each person now feel about death? Better? How could you make sure your survivors would feel this hope and salvation after your death? If you could send a message, what would you tell people after your death? How could you assure them not to worry?

Distribute more paper and allow 10 minutes for each small group to plan a joyous funeral. How would you like people to feel at your funeral? Happy for you? How could you ensure they would feel that way? What would you include in the funeral service? Flowers? What kinds? Music? What kind? Would you want decorations? Would you want people to donate money to a charity, instead? What would you want the pastor to say? Share with the large group. How are these joyous funerals different from funerals you have attended?

RESPONSE (OR CLOSING)

Stop for a few minutes and think of the happy and hopeful feelings of death. Think of the happy feelings you wanted to share with guests at your joyous funeral. Jot them onto paper. Have everyone do a second Cinquain poem, this time with the happy, light feelings of death. Example:

DEATH
PEACEFUL REST
ONWARD TO HEAVEN
HOPEFUL, JOYOUS, WARM,
CONTENT
LIFE

Share the poems with the large group. Notice the difference between the two sets of poems. What are the reasons for the hope replacing the fear? Close with a prayer of comfort for those who mourn that they may know the peace that is in store.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

When Bad Things Happen to Good People, by Harold Kushner, Avon Books, 959 8th Ave., New York, NY 10019.