



CANDLELIGHT TRIBUTE CEREMONY

Introduction

Candlelight ceremonies began in the Netherlands to show thanks and to honour those who liberated the country and its people from German occupation during the Second World War.

In 1995, the people of the Netherlands held a special ceremony to commemorate their liberation by Canadian forces fifty years earlier. Dutch children placed lit candles on the graves of Canadian soldiers and the candles remained lit overnight in silent tribute. Residents were drawn to the cemeteries by the soft red glow of the candles burning in the dark. As a result, commemorative candlelight tributes have now become annual ceremonies in the Netherlands and other European countries.

Similar tributes take place across Canada in both public and private cemeteries. Encouraging youth, their families, Veterans and Canadian Forces (CF) members to interact with one another is an important element of the commemorative event.

Aims

- To engage youth in remembrance activities.
- To increase awareness and understanding of the price paid by many Canadians to protect peace and freedom at home and around the world.
- To help participants experience the emotional impact of a candlelight ceremony.

Anticipated Time Frame

Approximately 40 minutes.

Materials and Resources

- Candles (preferably in fire-resistant cases)
- Lighters/matches
- Copies of the *Commitment to Remember*
- Copies of the *Act of Remembrance*
- Copies of *O Canada*

Introduction and Ceremony

Young people are encouraged to plan and organize the candlelight tribute or similar type of remembrance ceremony¹. Getting actively involved will help youth feel a sense of ownership in the event. When choosing a site for a candlelight vigil, consider the Veterans section of any community cemetery in Canada or, if you are overseas, one of the hundreds of Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries². The ideal time for the ceremony is at dusk when the mood created by the lit candles is the most powerful.

One to two people should act as masters of ceremony (MCs), while others may serve as wreath bearers, wreath layers and readers of the *Commitment to Remember*.

Commitment to Remember

*They were young, as we are young,
They served, giving freely of themselves.
To them, we pledge, amid the winds of time,
To carry their torch and never forget.
We will remember them.*

Response: *We will remember them.*

Also two Veterans, if available, youth leaders or teachers should recite the *Act of Remembrance*, a key part of the ceremony.

Note about Web sites: Supplementary information offered by non-Government of Canada Web sites, that are not subject to the Official Languages Act, and which appear in this document, may be available only in the language(s) used by the sites in question.

Candle at the Veterans' Week 2002 Candlelight Tribute Ceremony in Ottawa. Photo: VAC.



Veterans Affairs
Canada

Anciens Combattants
Canada

www.veterans.gc.ca

Canada

Act of Remembrance

*They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn [sic].
At the going down of the sun,
and in the morning,
We will remember them.*

Response: *We will remember them.*

While it would be more meaningful to have Veterans in attendance, the ceremony may be conducted just with youth and their leaders.

When participants enter the cemetery, they branch off in different directions. The Veterans and youth leaders move to the front and right of the Cross of Sacrifice or monument. The youth move to the left front and line up on opposite sides of the Cross facing one another. If the

cemetery is small or does not have a cross or monument, these plans can be adapted. For example, the youth may line up on one side of the cemetery and the Veterans or youth leaders may line up on the opposite side, facing inward towards the rows of graves.

If available, a podium with a microphone may be located at the front of the cemetery, next to the Cross of Sacrifice or next to a monument. Every youth should receive a candle when they come into the cemetery. Veterans or youth leaders are given a lighter. Copies of the *Commitment to Remember* and the National Anthem are also given to everyone in attendance.

If a piper, bugler or other musical group is participating in the ceremony they should stand behind the Cross of Sacrifice or monument or off to one side. If live music is not available, taped music can be used.



Sequence of Events

- Arrival of participants.
- Greetings. This may include a brief history of the cemetery as well as background on the battle(s) fought by soldiers buried at the cemetery. The significance of the Cross of Sacrifice as well as the purpose and history of the candlelight tribute³ should be explained.
- Veterans or youth leaders (who are pre-selected) recite the *Act of Remembrance* in both English and French, as appropriate.
- Veterans or youth leaders move toward the youths to light their candles.
- Youth meet Veterans and youth leaders half-way for candle lighting. A number of youth, corresponding to the number of Veterans or youth leaders in attendance, come together in

the lighting ceremony. The remaining youth wait until the first group's candles are lit.

- Once all of the candles are lit, the youth are directed to the first row of graves where candles are to be placed. The lead youth walks to the end of the row with each person falling in behind and then stopping at a grave marker (one youth to one grave). Each youth should face the side of the grave marker bearing the inscription.
- The process is repeated in each row until all of the candles are lit and each youth is facing a grave marker. The Veterans or youth leaders remain standing near the Cross of Sacrifice or monument.

By now the sun is setting and falling below the horizon. At dusk, the lit candles provide a warm and tranquil ambiance to the ceremony.



- The youth step forward as a group and place their lit candle on the top of the gravemarker. Ensure that the candle is stable and unlikely to fall.
- Playing of the Last Post, minute of silence, Rouse and Lament.
- Selected youth lead the group in reciting the *Commitment to Remember* in English and French, if both languages are appropriate.
- Laying of a wreath on behalf of the youth of Canada. Wreath bearers carry the wreath forward for the wreath layers. The wreath is placed at the base of the Cross while music plays.
- The National Anthem is sung.
- End of ceremony.

Follow-up Activities

- At the conclusion of the ceremony Veterans, youth leaders and guests mix with the youth and visit graves. Together, they can reflect on the event and its meaning. Allow approximately twenty minutes for the visit.
- Ask youth to learn more about the soldier buried in the grave where they placed their candle. Youth can research the individual to understand more about their sacrifice. This will help ensure their memory is kept alive for

future generations. Information about fallen soldiers buried overseas can be found by visiting the Canadian Virtual War Memorial at www.virtualmemorial.gc.ca. For Veterans buried in cemeteries in your community, visit your local archives or library.

- Before leaving the cemetery, the youth should take their candle with them. The candle is not only a keepsake — it is a reminder of their duty to share with their family and friends what they have learned and experienced during the event.

Notes:

- ¹ A scenario for an alternative commemorative event can be found on the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at www.veterans.gc.ca. Click on “Canada Remembers” in the upper menu. Next, select “Veterans’ Week” from the left-hand menu. Scroll down, then select “Commemoration Guide”.
- ² Locations of Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries in France and Belgium and their histories can be found on the Commission’s Web site at www.cwgc.org.
- ³ Visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site to learn more about the history of the candlelight tribute. Go to www.veterans.gc.ca and click on “Canada Remembers” in the upper menu. Next, select “Veterans’ Week” from the left-hand menu. Scroll down, then select “Commemorative Candlelight Tributes.”

La présente publication est disponible en français sous la rubrique *Cérémonie à la chandelle*.

