

## One Funeral, Two Learning Tasks

by Jeanette Romkema

On February 1, 2018 my colleague and friend [Karen Ridout](#) died suddenly and unexpectedly. When I heard there would be a prayer service a few days later to honour and celebrate her life, my husband and I jumped on a plane to join family and friends to pay our respects and celebrate her life. Karen was a beautiful person and deserved this honour.

What I was not expecting was to see and feel her Dialogue Education influence on her own church service and the church she helped to establish, [Church of the Nativity](#) in Raleigh, North Carolina.

During this prayer service, everyone present was invited to participate in two learning tasks – yup, you heard me: *two learning tasks at a funeral!* With a smile, the rector [Stephanie Allen](#) shared, “We can’t possibly have a prayer service for Karen without learning tasks!” Indeed.



Here’s how it went:

### **Learning Task #1** (in the middle of the service)

*Sometimes those we love are ill for many months or years before they are taken from us. In this time, we are able to have final conversations and share things on our heart that we were not able to share until we knew our time together was short. When leaving this earth is a slow process, our loved ones (and we!) have time to close loose ends and finish the uncompleted; closure can be experienced.*

*However, this is not always how it works. Sometimes those we love are taken from us quickly and without warning. This was true with our dear friend, colleague, mother, sister Karen.*

*So in our time together today, I would like to invite you to have that final conversation you were not able to have, say the things you didn’t have time to say, or share with Karen what you didn’t have a chance to share. Indeed, she was taken far too soon.*

### Your invitation is:

*Take a small sheet of paper and pen from those being passed around. On your own, take 5 minutes to have that final conversation with Karen. What do you still want to say to her?*

*If you are wondering what we will be doing with these completed sheets of paper, let me explain how this will work: If you are an EXTROVERT you will have an opportunity to share all you wish after we finish this prayer service; if you are an INTROVERT, you don’t have to worry; be assured that these papers will not be shared with everyone here but are for you to keep and do with as you wish. [These instructions were met with loud laughter – yes, Karen taught them well.]*

**Learning Task #2** (at the end of the service)

*As we finish this service and you leave this space, I offer you one final learning task (in a way that Karen taught us so beautifully): take a small piece of paper from the table in the hall and write one thing that you are most thankful for about Karen and who she was to you. Write this down and place it in the glass bowl you will find there. These papers will be read by her children and then placed with Karen as she is cremated.*

*The family is deeply grateful for all that you share and all the ways you have been blessed.*

I have never experienced learning tasks that were more important and more meaningful. I was moved to tears in that final conversation with Karen and so were many others, and joyous to have the opportunity to share with her all the ways she had impacted my life.

Thank you, Karen, for teaching your church and church leadership so well, and challenging my thinking about what a funeral should be.

**How has this challenged your thinking of where we can use (or should use) learning tasks?**

---

[Jeanette Romkema](#) is a Global Learning Partners (GLP) co-owner and Managing Partner of Communications and Marketing, as well a Senior Consultant and Trainer with GLP.