



## Annual Candle Lighting Ritual - COVID-19 pandemic

*March 11, 2020 - World Health Organization declares global pandemic*

*March 13, 2020 - United States declares national emergency*

*We light this **first candle** to represent our past. We could not have conceived of how profoundly our lives would be affected by this virus. Our grief is complex, and we mourn for the ways in which life has changed.*

*We light this **second candle** in honor and memory of the millions of people worldwide who have died from COVID-19. It feels impossible to comprehend such a number. These may be people whom we have known and loved deeply. We may have provided care for them as they took their final breaths. Or we may have only heard about them on the news, their names and images leaving lasting impressions. Each of these human beings were and are important. They will live on in our collective memory.*

*We light this **third candle** to honor every person who has cared for members of the human family during this crisis. We hold close the healthcare workers on the front lines of hospitals, nursing homes, and home care who are diligent and compassionate in the midst of suffering and have been changed by what they have witnessed. We hold close all those caring for emotional needs who provide space for people to express themselves. We hold close all those people whose work ensures that we are fed and clothed. We hold close those who address the needs of our facilities, infrastructure, and transportation. We hold close teachers, parents, and other educators who share knowledge and model humility. We hold close our children who are bravely navigating this new world. We hold close spiritual leaders who offer solace as we explore questions that seem to have no answers.*

*We light this **fourth candle** in support of all those who are grieving, including ourselves. We may be grieving for loved ones who died from COVID, or from other causes during the pandemic. We may feel the pain of not being by their sides as they died, and having to miss or postpone important rituals like memorial services. We may know or be one of those who have recovered from the virus but are struggling with its lingering effects. We may feel a sense of collective loss that is difficult to describe, one that intersects with other losses. Our grief is valid.*

*These **four candles together** also represent the four seasons of the year. The days, weeks, and months that we have endured may have passed by in a blur as we faced the crises around us and felt the ache of isolation. Even so, we may also be able to remember moments when we connected with the natural world in new ways and observed our surroundings with fresh eyes.*

*We light a **fifth candle** to represent our future. We join together in hope for the health and wellbeing of the world, for new life, for equity and justice, and for clarity. We long for strengthened relationships with the people around us, and we will help each other maintain connections with those who have died. We will make space for ourselves to remember, to breathe, and to rest, during this year and in the years to come.*

Written by Molly Hicks, MMT, MT-BC, music therapist and bereavement counselor, March 8, 2021.

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