RITUAL FOR A LODGE OF SORROW
This ritual is a modified version of the Ritual for a Lodge of Sorrow as found in the Louisiana Masonic Monitor. Some of the differences are some deleted text, addition of the Skull Lecture, and an abbreviated Procession. The abbreviation of the procession is due to the limited floor space in the room my Lodge occupies. The use of the terms "at labor" and "at recess" are used instead of the original "open" and "closed" because of my Lodge's dispensation for a Perpetual Lodge of Sorrow. Technically, our Lodge of Sorrow never closes; we call it to recess.

Preparation of Lodge Room:
A catafalque (a small table draped in white) is set up between the altar and the West toward the North of the floor. Upon the catafalque are three candles, a pair of white gloves, and a skull. The candles traverse the catafalque being in the East, South, and West. During the procession, each of the Wardens will carry a white flower while the WM carries a sprig of evergreen.

Dim room lights while S.D. lights the three candles.

W.M. *** (raise lodge)

W.M. Brother Senior Warden, for what purpose are we assembled?

S.W. To honor the memory of those brethren whom death hath taken from us; to contemplate our own approaching dissolution; and by the remembrance of immortality, to raise our souls above the consideration of this transitory existence.

W.M. Brother Junior Warden, what sentiments should inspire the souls of Masons on occasions like the present?

J.W. Calm sorrow for the absence of our brethren who have gone before us, earnest solicitude for our own eternal welfare, and firm faith and reliance upon the wisdom and goodness of the Great Architect of the Universe.

W.M. Brethren, commending these sentiments to your earnest consideration, and invoking your assistance in the solemn ceremonies about to take place, I declare this Lodge of Sorrow at labor. Bro. S.D., you will take with you the necessary assistance and drape the altar.

S.D. Bros. J.D. and M.C., you will accompany me.
(S.D. & M.C. turn to the West and march together West of the altar. The J.D. moves to a point directly in front of the S.W., then turns East and marches to meet the S.D. and M.C. as they meet at the altar. The S. D. removes the Great Lights as a unit from the altar and hands them to the J.D. The S.D. and M.C. invert the altar cloth to reveal the black underside. The S.D. retrieves the Great Lights from the J.D. and replaces them on the altar, making any adjustments as necessary. The three return to their respective stations in reverse fashion.)
Chap. Grand Architect of the Universe, in whose holy sight centuries are but as
days and to whose omniscience the past and the future are but as one
eternal present, look down upon Thy children, still wandering among the
delusions of time, still trembling with dread of dissolution, and shuddering
at the mysteries of the future. Look down, we beseech Thee, from Thy
glorious and eternal day into the dark night of our error and presumption,
and suffer a ray of Thy divine wisdom to penetrate into our hearts; that
they may be filled with the brightness of Thy everlasting light, that we may
cherish, amid the uncertainties of life, reliance upon Thy promises and
assurance of a place at Thy right hand. Amen.
Response-----So mote it be.

W.M. * (seat lodge)

Secretary calls roll and reads Masonic record of the deceased brethren since last lodge of sorrow
followed by an appropriate hymn.

W.M. Brethren, in the midst of life we are in death, and the wisest cannot know
what a day may bring forth. We live but to see those we love passing
away into the Silent Land.

(Skull Lecture is given at the catafalque.)

W.M. Think of the brethren who were among us in all the pride and power of life.
Bring to your minds the memory of their wisdom, their strength, and their
beauty; and then think of yourselves. Thus will you be, when the lamp of
your brief existence has burned out. Think how soon death, for you, will
be a reality. Man's earthly life is like a flower, which blooms today, and
tomorrow is faded, cast aside, and trodden under foot. Most of us, my
brethren, are fast approaching, or have already passed the meridian of
life; our sun is sinking in the West.

The cradle speaks to us of remembrance; the casket of hope of a blessed
trust in a glorious immortality, and a never-ending existence beyond the
gloomy portals of the tomb!

Let the proud and the vain consider how soon the gaps are filled that are
made in society by those who die around them, and how soon time heals
the wounds that death inflicts upon the loving heart. And from this let
them learn humility, and that they are but drops in the great ocean of
humanity.

Finally, brethren, may we so live, that when our summons comes to join
the innumerable caravan which moves to that mysterious realm where
each shall take his chamber in the silent halls of death, we go not like the
quarry-slave at night, scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed
by an unfaltering trust, approach our grave like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

For this, at least, man learns by death: that his calamities are not immortal. To bear grief honorably and temperately, and to die willingly and nobly, are the duties of a good man and a true Mason.

(Appropriate Ode may be sung at this point followed by twelve bells being slowly pealed. S.D. extinguishes south candle after four strikes, west candle after eight, the east candle after the twelfth and then returns to his station.)

W.M. Brother S.W., in this hour of gloom and darkness, when death stares us in the face; when the skin slips from the fingers, and the flesh cleaves from the bones; when thoughts of the last bitter hour come like a blight over thy spirit, and sad images of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall, and breathless darkness, and the narrow house make us to shudder and grow sick at heart, what shall we do?

S.W. Worshipful Master, the light of nature and of reason fails us here. Its feeble rays penetrate not the darkness of the tomb! Let us look above to Him whose omniscience ruleth both life and the grave.

W.M. Bro. Chaplain, lead us in addressing our earnest petitions to that Almighty Father, who ever lends a listening ear to His suffering children.

W.M. * * * (raise lodge.)

Chap. Our Father Who art in Heaven, it hath pleased Thee to take from among us those who were our brethren. Let time, as it heals the wounds thus inflicted upon our hearts and upon the hearts of those who were near and dear to them, not erase the salutary lessons engraved there; but let those lessons, always continuing distinct and legible, make us and them wiser and better. And whatever distress and trouble may hereafter come upon us, may we ever be consoled by the reflection that Thy wisdom and Thy love are equally infinite. Let the loss of our brethren increase our affection for those who are yet spared to us, and make us more punctual in the performance of the duties that Friendship, Love, and Honor demand. When it comes to us also to die, may a firm and abiding trust in Thy mercy dispel the gloom and dread of dissolution. Be with us now, and sanctify the solemnities of this occasion to our hearts, that we may serve Thee in spirit and understanding. And to Thy name shall be ascribed the praise forever. Amen

Response-----So mote it be.

W.M. * (seat lodge)

(The WM leaves the East by way of the North. As he passes the SW's station, the SW falls in line behind. As the two pass the JW's station, he too falls in line. The procession continues in
this ccw fashion until reaching the catafalque in the Northwest area of the lodge floor. The J.W.
steps forward to the catafalque.)

J.W. In memory of our departed brethren, I deposit this white flower,
emblematic of that pure life to which they have been called—reminding us
that as this child of an hour will droop and fade away, so, too, we shall
soon follow those who have gone before us; and inciting us so to fill the
brief span of our existence that we may leave to our survivors a sweet
savor of remembrance.
(JW lays down his flower, lights South candle and returns to his place in the procession.
The procession moves about the lodge once more as before and arrives at the
catafalque. The SW steps forward to the catafalque.)

S.W. As the sun sets in the West, to close the day and herald the approach of
night, so one by one we lay aside our bodies. Let then this flower be to us
the symbol of remembrance of all the virtues of our brethren who have
preceded us to the Silent Land; and the token of that fraternal alliance
which binds us while here on earth, and which we hope will finally unite us
in heaven.
(SW lays down his flower, lights the West candle and returns to his place in the
procession. The procession moves about the lodge once before arriving at the
catafalque. The WM steps forward to the catafalque and holds in view a sprig of
evergreen.)

W.M. It is appointed unto all men once to die, but after death cometh the
resurrection. The dust shall return to the earth, and the spirit unto God
who gave it. In the grave all men are equal; the good deeds, the lofty
thoughts, the heroic sacrifices alone survive and bear fruit in the lives of
those who strive to emulate them. While, therefore, Nature will have its
way, and our tears will fall upon the graves of our brethren, let us be
reminded by the evergreen, symbol of our faith in immortal life, that the
spirit of man is eternal.

(WM places the sprig of evergreen on the catafalque and lights the East candle.)

Let us be comforted by the reflection that their memories will not be
forgotten; that they will still be loved by those who are soon to follow them;
that in our archives their names are written; and that in our hearts there is
still a place for them. And so, trusting in the infinite love and tender mercy
of Him without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls, let us prepare
to meet them where there is no parting, and where with them we shall
enjoy eternal rest.

All The will of God is accomplished. So mote it be. Amen.

(The WM returns to his place in the procession. The procession moves about the lodge once
more except that the SW drops out at his station, the JW drops out at his, and the WM continues
to his station.)
Rest in the eternal grant unto them, O Lord; and let light perpetual shine upon them. The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings. Blessed is the man who Thou choosest and receivest unto Thee; he shall dwell in Thy court, and shall be satisfied with the pleasures of Thy house even of Thy holy temple.

Rest in the eternal grant unto them, O Lord; and let light perpetual shine upon them. But some will say: How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? The body of man is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality - O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

My brethren, let Masonry speak to us through the lips of our brethren, who have gone away from us. Tell us the story of their lives, and recount their virtues, that we may remember and imitate them. But let their faults and their errors be forgotten; for to say that they had these is but to say that they were human.

THOU, O God, knowest our down-sitting and our uprising, and understandest our thoughts afar off. Shield and defend us from the evil intentions of our enemies, and support us under the trials and afflictions we are destined to endure while traveling through this vale of tears. Man that is born of woman, is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. Seeing that his days are determined, the number of his months is with Thee; Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; turn from him that he may rest till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day. For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof shall not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground, yet, through the scent of water, it will bud and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up, so man lieth down and riseth not. Till the heavens be no more shall he not wake nor be roused out of his sleep. Yet, O Lord, have compassion on the children of Thy
creation, administer them comfort in time of trouble, and save them with an everlasting salvation. Amen.

Response-----So mote it be.

WM  *  (seat lodge)

W.M. Brother Senior Warden, our recollection of our departed friends has been refreshed; and we may now ask ourselves: Were they just and perfect Masons, worthy men, unwearied toilers in the quarry, and possessed of so many virtues as to overcome their faults and shortcomings? Answer these questions as Masons should answer.

S.W. Man judgeth not of man. He, whose infinite and tender mercy passeth all comprehension, whose goodness endureth forever, has called our brethren hence. Let Him judge.

In ancient Egypt, no one could gain admittance to the sacred asylum of the tomb until he had passed under the most solemn judgment before a grave tribunal.

Princes and peasants came there to be judged, escorted only by their virtues and their vices. A public accuser recounted the history of their lives, and threw the penetrating light of truth upon their actions. If it were adjudged that the dead man had led an evil life, his memory was condemned in the presence of the nation, and his body was denied the honors of sepulture. But Masonry has no such tribunal to sit in judgment upon her dead. She does require, however, that whatever is said concerning them shall be the truth. And should it ever happen that nothing good can be truthfully said of a Mason after death, she will mournfully and pityingly bury him out of her sight in silence.

W.M. Brethren, let us profit by the admonitions of this solemn occasion; lay to heart the truths to which we have listened; and resolve so to walk that when our summons comes, it may be the privilege of the brethren to strew white flowers upon our graves and keep us in fond remembrance.

Brother Senior Warden, announce to the brethren that our labors are now concluded, and that it is my pleasure that this Lodge of Sorrow be called to recess.

S.W. Brother Junior Warden, the labors of this Lodge of Sorrow being now ended, it is the pleasure of the Master that it be called to recess. Make due announcement to the brethren, and invite them to assist.

J.W.  * * *  (raise lodge)
J.W. Brethren, the labors of this Lodge of Sorrow being ended, it is the pleasure of the Master that it be now called to recess.

W.M. Let us unite with the Chaplain in a petition to the Throne of Grace.

(Chaplain recites the 23rd Psalm)

W.M. This Lodge of Sorrow is now at recess.

(SD snuffs candles)
SKULL LECTURE
(A skull – real or synthetic – is held up to view)

Behold this emblem of mortality; once the abode of a spirit like our own.

Beneath this mouldering canopy once shone the bright and busy eye.

Within this hollow cavern once played the ready, swift, and tuneful tongue.

Now, sightless and mute, it is eloquent only in the lessons it teaches us.

If it could speak, it would speak thus:

Look at me as you pass by. As you are, so once was I; as I am now, so you shall be; so prepare now to follow me.