



LINE of DUTY  
DEATH  
PROTOCOL

## **FOREWORD**

As the author of this Protocol, it is with much sadness that one must be developed. While we strive to prevent injuries let alone death, sometimes no matter what we do, a fatality occurs. When this happens, we must be prepared to honor our fallen comrades with the utmost honor and dignity. The contents of this protocol have been unfortunately utilized numerous times in laying one of our own to rest. This Protocol is not the only way to conduct a Line of Duty Death Funeral, it is a guideline. The most important thing is to follow the family's wishes.

When we go about assisting with a Line of Duty Death Funeral one must not forget about the people that are indirectly involved with the death. A death of this nature takes a toll on people and mental health must always be a priority. Critical Incident Stress Management is one of the most important parts of conducting a Line of Duty Death Funeral, not only for family and Fire Department members, but for the support team assisting with the funeral arrangements as well.

I dedicate this manual to my father, Norman S. Ruth, who through his suffering and death taught me how to have compassion and understanding during the loss of a loved one. I also dedicate this to all those that have given their lives protecting us and to all of the people who have supported and assisted me with the development of this protocol. Many friendships have developed because of these tragedies and we have grown from this. It is my only wish that this Protocol never has to be used again.

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## **PROCEDURES**

1. Upon notification of a Line of Duty Death (LODD), the Fire Department (FD) must immediately notify the County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) office of the fatality, which in turn will notify the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Emergency Operations Center (EOC). This will start the notification process of State and Federal Agencies. The County Coroners Office should also be notified that this is a LODD and the autopsy protocol must be followed (all Coroners have a copy of procedure). NIOSH should also be notified to conduct an investigation
2. The local Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) team should be notified.
3. A Public Information Officer (PIO) will be necessary to deal with the news media. If details of the incident are sensitive in nature, a PIO is high priority. This should be the only Fire Department representative to speak to the news media. See attachment for info.
4. Lower flags to half-staff. The State Fallen Fire Fighter Flag will be brought to the Fire Station by a staff member of the Office of the State Fire Commissioner (OSFC) and will assist with details.
5. Coordination with the family must be done immediately. If the family wishes a full honors funeral, many details will need to be handled. However, if the family wishes are that there is to be no FD involvement, then the FD must honor those wishes and be there to support the family in any way they can.
6. A dedicated telephone number should be published for inquires and should be manned at published times (ie; 8 AM to 10 PM). A copy of the press release should be available to the person taking calls to include; date of incident with brief details of incident, date, time and location of Memorial service and Funeral service as well as directions. Forms should also be on hand to record the number of pieces of apparatus and manpower that are planning to attend both services (this will aid in estimating needs).
7. Have a meeting with all members of the FD as soon as possible to inform all of what is happening and what needs to be done. If at all possible a staff member from the OSFC will be in attendance to assist.
8. It is important to control what is being done on behalf of the FD and by whom. The person in charge should delegate the right person for the right job. At stressful times like these, many people are not suited for specific tasks and this must be taken into account.
9. Coordination with the Church and Funeral Director must also be done. Again, a staff member from OSFC will assist with these details.
10. Contact the Public Safety Officers' Benefit Program (PSOB) 1-888-744-6513 to begin the Federal Death Benefits paperwork. See attachment for information needed as well as for State Death Benefits.

## STATION PREPARATIONS

The Fire Station is normally draped in black bunting to symbolize mourning. There is no “official” way of doing this. The normal practice is to drape black cloth around the front of the building and apparatus bay doors. Similarly the apparatus is draped in black. Again, there is no “official” way to do this, however, it must be done with dignity and honor. Black wreaths are sometimes placed on the grille work of the apparatus and cloth draped on the front and sides. If the rig is taken out of service for the duration of the funeral, the draping can be done almost immediately. If the apparatus is to be used in the funeral procession, all red warning lights are normally covered with black bunting or black tape and NOT turned on. If American flags are displayed, they too should be covered in black. A temporary memorial is sometimes placed in front of the station consisting of a turnout coat, boots and helmet on a chair or stand along with a candle and flowers. This gives community members the opportunity to add to the memorial anonymously to pay their respects.

For the individual fire fighters, a mourning ribbon is usually worn. This consists of a piece of black ribbon approx. 1/8” wide x 5” in length folded over itself and attached with a small safety pin. When in uniform, a black elastic badge band should be utilized, if elastic bands are not available, black electrical tape will suffice. Sufficient quantities of ribbons should be on hand for visiting fire fighters to wear.

During the Fire Department informational meeting for members the following committees should be set up to take care of station preparations:

- (1) Food, there should be a supply of food and beverages in station for members that are working there as well as visitors. Contact the local food bank and/or churches to dispose of excess food after the funeral service.
- (2) House duties, cleaning of the station may be necessary to prepare for hosting large number of visitors, keeping in mind the forgettable things such as, toilet paper, paper towels, emptying trash, etc.
- (3) Manning phones, telephones should be manned to give information to out of town fire fighters; this should be done uniformly with a written statement from the PIO. Forms should be near by to record all calls to track the number of apparatus and fire fighters planning on attending both the Memorial and Funeral services. If possible, provisions should be made to have the station “online”, the age of computerization is here and this capability would make the exchange of information much more efficient and timely.
- (4) Bunting/ribbons, have a group obtain the necessary materials to drape the Station and to make the mourning ribbons. If the FD has a Ladies Auxiliary, the ribbons are normally done by them.
- (5) Memorial Service, a small committee should be set up to take care of the details of a Memorial Service. See Memorial Service page for details.
- (6) Honor Guard’s, obtain an Honor Guard for the Memorial Service to stand at the Head and Foot of the casket during the Service. An Honor Guard is appropriate for the Funeral Services also, the difference is during the Memorial Service only

two people are used at a time, at the Funeral a full Honor Guard complete with flags will be used. Research local Honor Guards prior to needing them.

A dry erase/chalk board should be used to track the status of the committees. This is an easy way for everyone to know the status and what still needs to be done as well as who is responsible for each task.

## **DEATH BENEFITS**

Depending on the cause of death, the deceased survivors may be eligible to receive State and Federal Death Benefits. These Benefits usually depend on the cause of death as determined by the autopsy. A team of forensics experts has developed a formal autopsy protocol and County Coroners are aware of this protocol. The following is information that you will need to provide with the benefits forms; a written statement of the deceased standing with the FD, a notarized statement as to the deceased activities prior to the death by the officer in charge of the incident, a notarized copy of the autopsy and death certificate. Other items may be needed case by case.

The staff member from OSFC will provide the State Benefits forms and will assist with the notification of the PSOB.

## **MEMORIAL FUND**

When the FD sets up a Memorial Fund, it is much easier to set up a savings account in the name of the FD for "*Name of Deceased Memorial Fund*". If a "Trust Fund" is setup there are more difficult tax liabilities and other problems that will be encountered.

## **PIO DUTIES**

The PIO is accountable for all of the "official" press releases from the FD and should be the only spokes person for the FD. The PIO needs to obtain the following information about the deceased; full name, address, date of birth, date of death, limited details as to cause of death, next of kin with address/telephone number, children's names with address/telephone numbers, FD info (rank, date joined etc), other information needed for dissemination will be, funeral home name, location, directions, date and times of viewing and Funeral Service, Memorial Service info, FD telephone number for inquiries including time to be manned and Memorial Fund info. In addition, time of arrival and meeting place for out of town FD's should be published for both the Memorial and Funeral Services. If the news media is persistent with inquiries, it may be advantageous to schedule formal press briefings with a written statement and time for questions. It is helpful if you have a photograph of the deceased available at the press briefing. See PIO Info attachment for suggested Do's and Don'ts as well as tips for conducting press conferences.

## **TRACKING FORMS**

You should design tracking forms to meet your needs. To track calls relative to FD's coming for the Memorial and Funeral Services so should record FD name, number of apparatus expected, number of Fire fighters expected and contact name and telephone number. This will aid in determining the parking area needed as well as preparing for food service after the funeral. You should also record donations such as food and money made to the FD. The family of the deceased will want to know about the donations.

## **COORDINATION OF AGENCIES**

Many Agencies all involved during the Funeral. Depending upon the type of death, the size of the community and the number of calls the FD runs, stand by units may be need to reduce stress on the FD. If the number of calls does not deem it necessary for stand by units, the FD should still be taken out of service during the time of both the Memorial and Funeral Services. Permission must be obtained to close streets, restrict the flow of traffic and to park on the roadways. Working thru the local municipality usually is the easiest way of obtaining these needed permits/permissions. If Fire Police are to be used, municipal permission also must be obtained. This should be done so, if needed, on street parking of apparatus and the use of fire police could be utilized for the Memorial Service. Depending on the projected number of visiting FD's, it may be necessary to supplement restroom facilities at both the Funeral Home and Church, this can be done by renting Porta Johns. The Salvation Army and/or Red Cross can usually supply refreshments at both places. Normally the County EMA can support in communications by providing a Mobile Command Post.

## **PLANNING THE MEMORIAL SERVICE**

If the Family wishes the FD to have a Memorial Service, coordination with the Funeral Home is extremely important. An additional guest book is essential to have away from the entrance (aids in keeping doorway clear). As stated previously, if the Station is within walking distance to the Funeral Home, have all FD members and visiting fire fighters assemble at the Station and march to the Funeral Home. You should depart so you arrive no less than ten minutes before the Memorial Service is scheduled to start. The home FD should be in the room with the immediate family (if space permits), then the visiting FD's as determined by the FD (depending on mutual aid, sister Companies etc). The only reason to delay the start of the Service would be due to family wishes. The OSFC staff member will assist in placement of all the fire fighters. A minimum of six feet space must be left between the casket and the front row of fire fighters. The home FD should be lead by the Chief, President and remaining officers. At this time you would place the Honor Guard at the casket. The Chaplain/Minister would then begin the Service (samples of Services are in back of book). Upon completion, the Chief and President should then place a carnation in a pair of bunker boots placed on a small stand at the foot of the casket, then proceed to the next of kin and present a bible to them. The

Chief and President should remain with the family for the rest of the Service. The remainder of the home FD should then pass in review placing a carnation in the boots and offer their condolences to the family (being brief). After the home FD passes in review, it is at this time you normally replace the Honor Guard. The remaining visiting fire fighters then pass in review.

## **DAY OF FUNERAL**

You should plan on arriving in the area of the Church/Funeral Home approx. four hours before the Funeral Service. Four to six people should be available to assist with parking fire apparatus. Line up of the apparatus should be from the Church to the Cemetery. You must take into account the width of the roadway and number of lanes. The purpose of visiting FD's bringing apparatus is to honor the Fallen Fire fighter not to parade. Only the home FD should move apparatus during the Funeral procession, this makes the Funeral more personal and is safer. Depending on the wishes of the Minister, seating for Dignitaries would be on the opposite side from the immediate family with the home FD either sitting behind the family of Dignitaries depending on family wishes. Seating of the family, dignitaries and FD's depends upon the Minister and Funeral Director. Typically the Funeral Director seats the family and the OSFC staff member seats the dignitaries and FD's. At the end of the Funeral the FD's and dignitaries are excused and lined up at the entrance to the Church, coordinating with the Honor Guard. The officer in charge of the Honor Guard then takes command of the FD's and issues the orders during the removal of the casket. The Honor Guard typically travels to the cemetery ahead of the Funeral procession, offers honors graveside and folds and American Flag that is draped over the casket and presents to the deceased next of kin. At the same time, if wanted, bagpipes play and/or bugler. If the family wishes, arrangements can be made with an area Medical Helicopter to do a fly over graveside at the end of the graveside ceremony. This is done to honor the deceased and gives closure graveside.

## **CROSSED AERIALS**

Crossed aerials are used to honor the deceased. It is a recommended practice that the placement of the aerials is somewhere between the Church and cemetery taking into account traffic flow and overhead obstructions (wires), contact local electric provider to cover lines, if needed. Typically you will need an area at least one hundred feet wide to set the aerials up. This takes into account for outriggers and sufficient room for the funeral procession to pass between the apparatus. If possible, obtain a flag (approx 16' x 20') to drape between the crossed aerials. The bottom of the flag must be far enough above the roadway (at least 20') for vehicles to pass underneath. When you attach the flag to the ladders, only tie the top of the flag allowing the bottom to hang loose. When obtaining the aerials, take into account the response area being served. It is usually best to utilize aerials from different areas to allow adequate protection. If at all possible use ladder trucks not aerial scopes, grease from the booms of aerial scopes may cause damage to the flag. You will need to obtain clothes line rope to tie the flag. Be sure that it is the type that does not have metal strands in.



# **DAY OF FUNERAL CHECKLIST**

Command Post

Radio Communications/cell phones

Set arrival time for FF & apparatus

Police coverage of key intersections (local PD /Fire Police)

Flyer with directions/funeral info/Memorial info

Refreshments (Salvation Army/Red Cross)

Restrooms facilities (Port a Johns)

Blocking of streets (coordinate with PD)

Procession route (cleared of parked vehicles)

Placement of visiting apparatus (coordinator)

Transportation of Family/FD

Transportation of Pallbearers to Cemetery

Coordination between Funeral Director and Minister

Placement of crossed aerals (obtain flag and rope)

Placement of Honor Guard(s)

Briefing of Fire fighters by Honor Guard Commander

Bagpipes/Bugler

Helicopter flyover

Casket cover

American flag for folding at graveside (who is folding)

Parking at Cemetery

# CHECKLIST

Notification of County EMA  
Autopsy protocol

CISM Team

Appoint PIO  
News release  
Photograph of deceased

Coordination with family  
Permission for Honors Funeral  
Pallbearers  
Special needs

Flags  
Half-staff  
Fallen Fire fighter

Committees set  
Food  
House duties  
Telephones/tracking forms  
Draping of station/apparatus  
Mourning ribbons/safety pins  
Memorial fund

Coordination with Funeral Director  
Memorial service  
Bunker boots/stand  
Bible/calligraphy  
Additional book  
Flowers  
Bar stools  
PA system  
Flags/placement

Coordination with Church/Minister  
Seating  
Parking  
Restrooms  
Memorial Service





## **PIO INFO**

### What the Public Wants to Know:

- Timely and accurate facts
- Magnitude
- Immediacy
- Duration
- Who, What, Where, When, Why, How

### How to deliver information:

- Short, concise, focused (12 year-old level)
- Relevant
- Empathy/caring (put yourself in the public's shoes)
- Visuals that enhance communication (maps, graphics)

### Examples of opening statements:

- I want to share with you information pertaining to this incident...
- My goal is to keep you informed with the latest, confirmed information regarding this incident...
- I know that you are interested in... and I pledge to do everything I can to keep you informed...
- I am here to share with you the knowledge and confidence I have in the first responders' abilities to protect the citizens of our community during this tragic time...

### Guidelines for answering questions:

- Be prepared (90-95% of all questions can be anticipated)
- Determine who will answer questions about specific subject matters
- Listen (recognize the underlying issue)
- Keep answers short and focused
- Practice self- management (control your emotions)
- Speak and act with integrity (tell the truth, follow up, you are speaking for your organization)

### Avoiding the Spokesperson Pitfalls:

#### Jargon

- Do: Define all technical terms
- Don't: Use language that may not be understood

#### Temper

- Do: Remain calm. Use a question or an allegation to springboard into something positive
- Don't: Let your feelings interfere with your ability to communicate positively

#### Attacks

- Do: Attack the issue
- Don't: Attack a person or organization

### Promises

Do: Promise only what you can deliver.

Don't: Make promises you can't keep or fail to follow up on promises

### Speculation

Do: Provide information on what is being done

Don't: Speculate about worst case scenarios

### Off the Record

Do: Assume everything you say and do is part of the public record

Don't: Make side comments or "confidential" remarks

## Question and Answer Reminders

Volume

Enunciation/pronunciation

Pace/rhythm/pitch

Facial expressions and eye contact

Posture

Gestures

Dress and grooming

Distractions

Watch out for "Uh," "Umm," and "You Know."

## Answering the Question

Make your point first. Be concise, say it in 30 seconds

Be as brief as possible

Don't be evasive or try to fake it. If you don't know, tell them you will try to find out.

Never say "no comment." If you can't answer the question for a particular reason, say so.

If the question is not in your area of expertise, don't try to answer it.

Don't answer a hypothetical question. Avoid speculating by rephrasing the question on your own terms.

Breakdown multipart questions and answer each part slowly and separately.

## Media Patterns During a Crisis

Most media follow a typical pattern by:

- 1) Searching for background information
- 2) Dispatching reporter/resources to the scene (may include both local and national coverage)
- 3) Obtaining access to the site or spokesperson
- 4) Dramatizing the situation. Looking for the best way to get the most dramatic video or photography possible
- 5) Expecting an instant briefing, complete with written information
- 6) Finding immediate victims and/or people who have been affected/inconvenienced by the situation
- 7) Expecting YOU to panic
- 8) Sharing information and sometimes rumors amongst themselves

## MUNHALL SERVICE

Chaplain:

Eternal God give to us wisdom, sympathy and understanding as we seek to Minister in this final tribute to our departed comrade. Amen.

President:

Dear relatives and friends; we firefighters are assembled her to pay our final tribute of respect and honor to the memory of our departed brother/sister \_\_\_\_\_ a member of \_\_\_\_\_. It is indeed a fitting and proper that we should thus honor our dead. In life, he/she was a companion, a friend and a fellow fighter. In the service, as a brother/sister firefighter, we learned to know, respect and love him/her, and we will always cherish a fond remembrance of him/her. We wish to dedicate this service to our departed comrade and brother/sister.

Chief:

As we stand in the presence of death, we are reminded that it is the only certainty in life. In the hour of sorrow and mourning we look to the eternal God who gives us joy for our sorrow and gladness for our mourning. "God is our refuge and strength and an ever present help in trouble."

Chaplain:

"If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I make my abode in the grave, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the mourning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, behold thou art there."

----- pause a moment -----

"The Lord is my Shepard; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Let us pray: Oh most mighty and merciful God, our only sure help in time of trouble, we turn to thee for strength and courage, in this hour of death. As you do share the pain and grief of your children, grant now we beseech the comfort and peace to these who mourn the loss of their loved one. Give them strength sufficient for this hour and grant them thine eternal grace until they dwell with thee forever, amen.

President:

"Brief life is here our portion, brief sorrow, short lived care. The life that knows no ending, the tearless life is there." "I cannot say, and I will not say that he is dead. He is just away. With a cheery smile and a wave of the hand, he has

wandered into an unknown land. Think of him faring on, as dear in the love thee as the love here.”

Chief:

While we bury his/her weaknesses with his/her body, his/her virtues shall ever be remembered and encourage us to nobler life.

Chaplain:

May peace rest with the ashes and spirit of Brother/Sister \_\_\_\_\_

“The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.” Amen

(taps if so desired)

### “Only A Fireman”

He is only a fireman the people say  
As they pass him or give him the way  
The alarm with a clatter, clatter and bang  
Strikes many an ear with an unpleasant clang  
His dress is not tidy and his face does tan  
But note he walks like a man  
Not ashamed of friends nor afraid of foes  
When to work each time he goes  
Not dreading danger not death each hour  
For his trust and hope is in an unseen power  
Who gives strength to his arm and light to his eye  
He dreads not to live, or fears not to die



## STEEL VALLEY SERVICE

Chaplain:

O God, who heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds, look with tender pity and compassion upon your servants whose joy, has turned to mourning. Leave them not comfortless, but grant that they may be drawn closer to one another and to you in their sadness. Fill their hearts with the light and comfort of your presence. Grant them such a vision of life where all mysteries shall be revealed and all tears be wiped away, that they may be able to endure. Dwell with them and be their God until the day breaks and the shadows flee.

We are gathered here on this occasion to pay our respects to our brother/sister firefighter who has answered his/her final call on earth. Firefighter \_\_\_\_\_ was a loyal member of (fire dept) \_\_\_\_\_, highly regarded by his/her fellow firefighters.

Member:

Let the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm give us comfort:

The Lord is my Shepard; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose;  
Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul

Response (all):

The Lord is my Shepard; there is nothing I shall want

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side  
With your rod and your staff that give me courage

Response (all):

The Lord is my Shepard; there is nothing I shall want

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes  
You anoint my heads with oil; my cup overflows

Response (all):

The Lord is my Shepard; there is nothing I shall want

Leader:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven, a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;... a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance;... a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace... (Eccl.3:1-8).

Through every season we realize how human fulfillment and true happiness come from knowing and valuing that which we have. Friendship and laughter, patience and sorrow,

humility and compassion, from birth through death – all these are God’s gifts to us, the precious moments of life itself. Through these seasons our fellow firefighter has lived his/her life. We pray now that he/she now enjoys the time of peace. The season is now. The time is ours.

Chaplain:

Let us pray. A time of death among the firefighting family is a time of pain. It is also a time of love and hope. Our faith in God, our creator, supports us as we suffer the death of people we have loved. Grant a fitting reward to your firefighter who has given his/her time and energy for the good of others. To him who has answered his final alarm on earth, grant him a place of refreshment, joy and peace. Amen

Member:

The ship that passes over the horizon is lost in our sight  
But it goes on; it continues to its destination and a safe harbor at last  
Beyond that horizon are other worlds that welcome the traveler  
We live with the conviction or struggle with the hope that life itself is a horizon, and our journey goes beyond it not to darkness but to life

Leader:

A prayer for Remembering

God, our creator, you guide our story by remembrance. We come here together before you to treasure the memory of our fellow firefighter who has helped us and shared in our journey of life. We ask the comfort of you blessing upon his/her family. May they be sustained by the memories of his/her service to the people of our community. We take this opportunity to say thank you for making a difference in our community and in the lives of your fellow firefighters.

All:

We are grateful that we were part of his/her life, he/she a part of ours, that together we shared your gift of life. We offer you, as our gift, those memories and moments that we have lived together: memories of trust and acceptance, memories of love and forgiveness, moments of simplicity and joy.

Chaplain:

Prayers for all God’s People

God, our creator, receive our prayers together with our silence, our tears, our broken plans and our fears. Our sorrow reminds us that life is not meant to avoid pain and that to love is to accept the risk of hurting. You are a God who never promised us joy without pain, or sun without rain, or roses without thorns. But you promised to be with us in our struggles to give light in time of darkness.

Help us to trust your presence in the events we do not understand, put us in touch with the inner resources hidden in us and guide us through the future by gently transforming our grief into compassion, our hurts into new hope for others. (AP).

All:

Help us to gain wisdom through our sufferings and give us patience and time to work through our feelings. We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen

## The Firefighter's Memorial Hymn

Leader:

In fond remembrance gathered here today,  
Tribute to pay to firefighters passed away;  
Garlands of flowers placed upon the dead  
Brightest blossoms deck their quiet bed.

Member:

When duty called, our firefighters would go,  
Ever undaunted, met the fiery foe.  
May guardian angels o'er them vigil keep,  
While they lie resting in eternal sleep

Chaplain:

Father in heaven, guide us on our way,  
Through storm and sunshine to eternal day;  
And when our duty on earth is o'er  
Vouchsafe our journey to the gladden shore.

Chaplain:

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you  
The Lord make his face shine upon you and give you peace  
The Lord lift up the light of his presence upon you  
Now and always...Amen

Leader:

Let us go forth renewed in the steadfastness of our faith.

All:

Let us be strengthened through the unity, friendship and compassion of all in the firefighting service.

Closing Hymn:

On Eagle's Wings Michael Joncas

Response:

And He will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of His hand.