

## **Candlelight Vigil August 15/16 2006**

### **History**

Within hours of the announcement of Elvis Presley's death on August 16, 1977 at age 42, thousands of fans crowded the gate area in front of Graceland Mansion in an expression of grief, shock, disbelief and love. Thousands upon thousands of people all over the world felt as though they had suddenly lost a close friend or member of the family. Such was the relationship Elvis had with his audience.

On the first anniversary of Elvis's passing a number of fans gathered outside the gates with candles and spent an evening talking and reminiscing. The next year there were more. The Austin-based Elvis Country Fan Club organized an opening ceremony. Each year, more and more fans were coming to Memphis that week for the candlelight tribute and various other activities started getting organized. When Graceland opened for public tours in the summer of 1982, fans suggested to the management that the gates be open during their candlelight tribute, allowing them to walk single-file up the driveway to Elvis's gravesite and back down. The management agreed. Responding further to the growing influx of fans in August, Graceland/Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc. (EPE) took the lead in organizing Elvis Week, which has grown in its diversity of events.

The solemn and beautiful Candlelight Vigil continues to be the climactic event of Elvis Week, which otherwise is a high-energy mix of music, dance, sports, social and charitable events presented by Graceland/EPE, Elvis fan clubs and many other participating organizations. It all happens in an atmosphere of international, multi-generational friendship and camaraderie. Elvis Week as a whole, and the Candlelight Vigil in particular, have become a cultural phenomenon known all over the world.

Years ago, some Elvis fans came up with an excellent analogy for helping novices understand what Elvis Week is all about: "Football fans have the Super Bowl. Elvis fans have Elvis Week!"

### **Important Information & Guidelines**

#### **Q. What about parking?**

Around 6:00 p.m. on the evening of August 15, the Memphis Police will begin the process of closing traffic on Elvis Presley Boulevard from Bluebird Street to Craft Road. It should be completely closed to through traffic by 6:30 p.m. Security-patrolled parking for the vigil will be available FREE of charge beginning at 6:00 p.m. in the regular Graceland visitor parking facility. Vehicles will be allowed to pass through the police barricades to come and go from the parking area all evening.

**Q. When does the Candlelight Vigil begin? How does it work?**

The opening ceremony takes place at 9:00 p.m. on August 15, near the front gates of the mansion property. Fans gather in the street and in Graceland Plaza to see this. There is a queue line in the street. At the end of the ceremony, torches lit from the eternal flame at Elvis's grave are brought down to the gate. The queue line starts to move as fans walk through gates and light their candles on the torches and then walk single file up the driveway to the gravesite in the Meditation Garden and back down. To accommodate everyone who is in line, the procession lasts into the wee hours of August 16, the anniversary of Elvis's passing.

Graceland staff members are positioned all along the way to offer assistance. Near the front gate, Elvis fan club leaders from all over the world work in shifts to offer further assistance. Although candle lighting for the procession is from the torches, please do be prepared to light your candle when asked to do so for our traditional "sea of candles" shot for the world news media at the start of the opening ceremony.

**Q. Any tips for my physical comfort?**

It is August in Memphis. That usually means heat and humidity. Please take precautions. Any health problems are sure to be aggravated by the climate, the crowding of people, and the long periods of standing. Many fans have learned to avoid the discomfort of being in a tight crowd for so long by first gathering with everyone on the street for the opening ceremony, then moving back to a comfortable spot in the plaza, enjoying a gorgeous view of the procession from there, then joining the queue line some time later after the crowd has thinned out. Restrooms are not available on the mansion grounds during the vigil. Restrooms are available in the ticket office pavilion, the restaurants, and other Graceland Plaza buildings.

**Q. What if I forgot to bring a candle?**

Graceland provides free candles to those who arrive at the vigil without having brought their own. These may be obtained at the guest services desk in the ticket office pavilion during the afternoon and evening of August 15 or at the barricaded area at the front gate anytime during the vigil.

**Q. Any special rules or guidelines?**

Please be considerate of others and do not hold up the movement or smooth flow of the procession by lingering at the grave site, stepping out of line to remain in the garden, bunching up into groups, etc. The idea is to have a continuous single-file flow. Remember that, however long you might have waited, there are many more behind you who have waited longer. Please keep moving.

If you would like to spend more time in the Meditation Garden during Elvis Week, please see the event listings for the schedule of free walk-up visit availability every morning and most evenings of Elvis Week. You may enjoy lingering in the Meditation Garden at those times or when you are on the regular Graceland tour.

As a security precaution, no bags (including camera bags, backpacks, shopping bags, briefcases or luggage items) will be allowed on the mansion property. Any bags or packages that you have should be returned to your car or your lodging before entering the queue line for the vigil. No one will be allowed through the mansion gates with any of these items. Any other items carried onto the property are subject to search.

Still cameras with or without flash may be used on the mansion grounds. However, camera tripods, video equipment, movie cameras, tape recorders, tape players and radios are strictly prohibited.

Food items, drink cans, and glass containers are prohibited on the mansion grounds. The Graceland/EPE staff provides water at stations at the front gate and mid-way up the mansion driveway.

Smoking is not allowed anywhere on the Graceland Mansion property. In the interest of the health and comfort of others, smokers on the street and on the plaza property are encouraged to find open, non-crowded areas to smoke.

Disruptive behavior and loud noise are prohibited.

Those who insist upon violating the rules or behaving inappropriately will be escorted from the mansion or plaza property. Graceland Security and the Memphis Police will deal with those issues if any arise.

**Q. What if I brought flowers or memorials?**

You are welcome to bring single flowers, small bouquets or other small remembrances to place at the gravesite as you walk by in the procession or when you tour Graceland or when you enjoy the free walk-up visiting times. Larger floral arrangements or memorial displays may be taken to the front gate security office any time and Graceland/EPE staff will take care of placement.

**Q. What if I need medical help?**

First aid and water will be available along the procession and queue line as needed by contacting any Graceland/EPE staff member or a police officer for assistance. Outside the mansion grounds there will be two special first aid locations. One will be in the specially marked area in front of the mansion gates. The other will be located directly across the street from the gate. A Shelby County rescue squad will be available to assist with special needs and emergencies. Graceland/EPE employees and the Memphis Police will be available throughout the area.

### **Q. What about access for persons with disabilities?**

Graceland has wheelchairs available for emergency use only. Those who have their own wheelchairs or need information about access arrangements for persons with disabilities may inquire at the Guest Services desk inside the ticket office pavilion in the plaza.

### **Q. What's up with all these reporters?**

The Candlelight Vigil attracts extensive media attention from around the world each year. Television crews, photographers and journalists will be allowed access to the vigil on a restricted basis. Most of their activity usually takes place during the first couple of hours. Media are asked to take care of their business in a quiet, respectful, expedient fashion. The media will be allowed to videotape and photograph in a specific area at the edge of the garden and they will be allowed to invite people to step away from the line on the driveway for interviews. They may also interview people on the street or in the plaza. If you find any media representative behaving improperly, please notify the nearest Graceland/EPE employee, who will either correct the problem or summon a manager to do so. Please be mindful that the media have their job to do and their coverage of this and other Elvis Week activities is important to the perpetuation of the Elvis legacy. Also, for each one of you who gets to be here for Elvis Week, there are thousands more who wish they could be here to participate. Access to media coverage is their way of sharing the week with you.

### **VigilCast 2006**

From 2000 through 2005, Graceland/Elvis Presley Enterprises presented its own Elvis Week video news magazine program with the Candlelight Vigil as its central theme. It was called VigilCast and was carried live online via AOL and then archived in the Elvis Week section our official site [Elvis.com](http://Elvis.com) for later viewing. There is no VigilCast production this year. However, still scenes from the vigil may be viewed via the live **GracelandCams** found on [Elvis.com](http://Elvis.com). Also **Elvis Radio (Sirius Satellite 13)** will have special live coverage of the Candlelight Vigil, including pre-taped interviews with friends and colleagues of Elvis. Information about Sirius Satellite Radio can be found at the Sirius/Elvis Radio studio directly across the street from the mansion gates in Graceland Plaza and in the ticket office pavilion.

### **Thanks!**

On behalf of Lisa Marie Presley, the Graceland/EPE staff, our parent company CKX, Inc, and Elvis fans everywhere, welcome to Graceland, and thank you for being here to share this special evening. Thank you for honoring the memory of Elvis Presley.