

FUNERAL / MEMORIAL SERVICES

Death brings special-care needs to any family and opens unique opportunities to ministry in the community of faith. Have a plan in place to provide comfort and assistance to every family upon receiving word of the death of a member of your parish. The pastor may be the first person notified, but the grieving family's care network, such as a small group or board of stewards, should immediately move to assist the grieving family.

Guidelines

A pastor is usually responsible for planning and conducting the funeral, but a care network is most effective in assisting the pastor in ministry to the family.

If you are new in the area be free to consult a local funeral director and/or a long-time pastor to learn of any local customs or ordinances unique to that place.

A pastor should be in contact with the family by phone and/or in person immediately upon learning of the death. In the case of an emergency, the pastor may need to rush to a hospital to counsel the family through difficult decisions such as organ donation, etc.

Upon notification of a death, pray with and for the family and their network of friends. Call one person from the care network, asking them to let others know of the need. The contact person should also call the family — asking how the group can help (e.g. going to the home or hospital, screening calls, assisting with media, setting up a meal plan, etc.). As soon as possible one or two care-givers should offer to be with the family.

Those comforting the bereaved should be alert for appropriate moments to offer prayer and/or read scripture. Be sensitive to the setting. An emergency room crisis, for example, may or may not be the best time and place to read scripture.

If a family member has died just before the pastor's arrival (or the mortician has not yet taken the body), gently urge the family members to view the body before it is taken to the mortuary. Some may resist, but if they can be so persuaded they will begin the necessary grieving process.

Both the care-givers and pastor must remember that death is not a time to offer advice or pat answers to unanswerable questions. Presence and sincere concern are helpful in themselves. Refrain from making trite statements about the deceased such as: "They look so natural" (No, they look dead.); "God must have wanted them for some greater purpose in heaven" (No, God does not will death on

anyone. His Son died to bring life). Instead, offer scriptural words of assurance that God loves and understands; that He is with them in their sorrow. If the deceased was a true believer, comments about the hope of the resurrection are usually appropriate.

Funeral Planning

As soon as comfortable, ask the family how you may assist in making arrangements. Never feel offended if another pastor is included in the plans for the funeral service. Assure the family that you are willing to help in whatever way they desire.

If you are to perform the funeral or memorial service, be sure to talk with the family to determine their wishes. Be patient, taking time to assist them in discussing the details among themselves. This conversation is particularly sensitive and in need of pastoral care if the death was unexpected.

If they are reluctant to initiate plans, be prepared to gently offer suggestions which you feel may be in harmony with the patterns of the family and the church. Make every effort to carry out their wishes. If changes must be made, be sure to confer with them before the funeral.

Simple funeral and graveside services are always appropriate. Though uncomplicated, let these ministries be rich in the spiritual resources of prayer and the scripture. The Gospel can be shared clearly, but should never be expressed in an attitude of judgment upon the deceased. Your task of evangelizing will be more effective later if your work of comforting and sustaining is done well at the moment.

The first step in planning for the funeral or memorial service is to prepare thoroughly, both spiritually and mentally. You may speak to more unchurched people at a funeral than on any other occasion.

A brief obituary may be read to bring essential facts regarding the deceased before the assembly of relatives and friends. This information usually comes from the funeral director, to which you may add additional comments from your own knowledge.

A brief story of the life of the deceased, spoken in appreciation of the quality of life lived and including notable contributions to the good of the church and society, may be appropriate. This information should be obtained from the family during an "interview time" when the funeral arrangements are discussed.

Your Presence Makes a Difference

There are two or three times when it is important to be with the family, depending on local customs.

One time is before the first viewing hours, when the family sees their loved one in the casket for the first time. Plan to arrive a few minutes before the viewing, offering a scripture reading (for example Psalms 34:1-4, 8-9, 15-18), then a brief prayer for comfort. Stay with the family during this private viewing time.

Another time is the final viewing, before the casket is closed for the funeral.

Stay close to the bereaved family at every possible moment before, during, and after the service. Most funeral directors will make arrangements for you to meet with the family in a side room for moments of prayer and reflection immediately before the service.

Immediately following the interment, go to the side of each family member and offer words of comfort or simply listen in silent love.

It is a worthy practice to return with the family to their home after the service. Some of the most effective ministries of comfort and understanding can be accomplished at this time. Tension has been released in the satisfaction that everything possible has been done to lay to rest the body of the loved one. You will get acquainted with other members of the family and their circle of friends. Lasting and fruitful contacts are made at such a time.

The Order of Service

Honor the requests of the family wherever possible. A service held in a home or mortuary will usually be less formal and quite brief. Local practice is usually a sufficient guide.

While brevity and simplicity are usually appropriate, the service for a prominent citizen or leader of the church, in which several ministers participate, will require more planning and time.

Sample Orders of Service

Order 1

Musical Prelude

Opening Scriptural Sentences

Invocation

Hymn

Scripture Lesson

Pastoral Prayer

Funeral Sermon

Benediction or Closing Prayer

Order 2

Instrumental Music (Hymns of Comfort)

Scriptural Sentences

Prayer of Invocation

Hymn

Scripture Selections

Pastoral Prayer

Hymn

Obituary or Life Story

Memorial Address or Funeral Sermon

Hymn

Benediction or Closing Prayer

Instrumental Music

Order 3

Hymns of Comfort

Scripture Reading

Prayer

Funeral Message

Prayer

Order for Graveside Service

Scripture Reading

Poem or Committal

Benediction or Closing Prayer

Hymns Suitable for Use at a Funeral

HWC - The Hymnal For Worship and Celebration

HFL - Hymns of Faith and Life

50 29 The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want

43 43 Great Is Thy Faithfulness

52 59 O God, Our Help in Ages Past

8 63 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

364 86 My Jesus, I Love Thee

218 177 I Know that My Redeemer Lives

240 192 When He Shall Come

410 268 My Faith Looks Up to Thee

205 273 And Can It Be?

466 277 Jesus, Lover of My Soul

435 352 What a Friend We Have in Jesus

460 381 All the Way My Savior Leads Me

490 387 Loved with Everlasting Love

204 392 Rock of Ages! Cleft for Me

186 456 On a Hill Far Away

460 Abide with Me! Fast Falls the Eventide

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Brief Passages

Psalms 103:13; 42:11; 46:1-2; 90:1-2; 91:1-2; 27:1; 23:4;
1 Corinthians 15:20, 22; Psalms 124:8 with 2 Timothy 1:10;
2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Numbers 23:10; Revelation 21:7; 14:13.

Longer Passages

Psalms 27:1, 3, 5, 11, 13; 139:1-2, 6-12; Matthew 5:3-4, 6-8; Romans
8:14, 16-18, 31-35, 37-39; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 35-44, 54-58;
Matthew 25:31-37, 40; Hebrews 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 2:9-11;
1 Peter 1:3-9; Revelation 7:9-17; 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

For a Child

2 Samuel 12:18-20, 22-23.

For a Youth

John 11:21-28, 32-36; Ecclesiastes 12:1.

For the Older Christian

Job 5:26; Psalm 92:13-14.

For the Committal at Graveside

Matthew 5:4 with John 14:27 and Matthew 18:14;
Malachi 3:17; Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14; 1 Corin-
thians 15:49, 53; Psalms 23:4; Isaiah 41:10, 13; Psalms 103:11, 13-14;
1 John 3:2 with 1 Corinthians 13:12; John 11:25-26 with Revelation
1:17-18; Psalms 46:1-3 with Deuteronomy 33:27.

THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

(The pastor may use the following order of worship at the church or chapel.)

Opening Sentences, such as:

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

“For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Invocation

O Eternal God, our Father, from whom we come and to whom we go, grant us the favor of Your divine presence at this time in our earthly pilgrimage; assure us by Your Spirit that the one we serve, even Jesus, has conquered death and is alive forevermore; enable us to view our temporal lives in the light of the eternal; and so may our spirits grow calm and our vision clear. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Hymn *(by the congregation, musicians, or organist) (Optional)*

Obituary and/or Tributes *(Optional)*

Old Testament Scriptures, such as: Psalms 23, 90, 121

New Testament Scriptures, such as: John 14:1-6;

1 Corinthians 15:35-49; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

Hymn *(by the congregation, musicians, or organist) (Optional)*

Meditation

Prayer (for the family and community)

Benediction *(not used if the service is to continue at the graveside)*

(The pastor shall at the appropriate time at the cemetery say:)

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold ...” (Job 19:25-27).

“For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world” (1 Timothy 6:7).

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

(The following may also be used at the cemetery.)

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going. Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me’” (John 14:1-6).

(Then shall the pastor say:)

Inasmuch as Almighty God, in His wise providence, has taken out of this world our deceased brother (sister, or child), we therefore commit this mortal body to the ground, looking for the general resurrection in the last day and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose Second Coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed, and made like unto His own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.

(The pastor may pray extemporaneously or use the following:)

The Collect

O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, in whom whosoever believeth shall live, though he die, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall not die eternally, we meekly beseech You, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that when we shall depart this life we may rest in Him, and at the general resurrection on the last day may be found acceptable in Your sight and receive that blessing which Your well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all who love and fear You, saying, “Come, you blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.” Grant this, we beseech You, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.
or:

Forasmuch as the spirit of the departed has returned to God who gave it, we therefore commit *his/her* body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; looking for the general resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies

of those who sleep in Him shall be changed and made like unto His own glorious body; according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto himself. Amen.

or:

Forasmuch as the spirit of this departed loved one has returned to God who gave it, we therefore tenderly commit *his/her* body to the ground in sure trust and certain hope in the power and love of Christ our Lord; at whose divine call they that sleep in Him shall one day rise to stand with Him, and hear with all saints the welcome summons: "Enter into Your Master's joy." For His is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

or, for a child:

In the sure hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commit the body of this child to the ground. The Lord bless *him/her* and keep *him/her*, the Lord make His face to shine upon *him/her* and be gracious unto *him/her*, the Lord lift up His countenance upon *him/her* and give *him/her* peace, both now and evermore. Amen.

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.