

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Millersburg, Pa

POLICY
FOR
PLANNING A CHRISTIAN FUNERAL SERVICE

Introduction

The following guidelines and suggestions for funeral planning are offered to members of this congregation as a means of education and as an opportunity to participate in the planning of the Funeral Service. If preliminary funeral planning is absent, the task usually falls to the family who, due to emotional distress, are not always capable of making such difficult and important decisions. Making preliminary decisions about one's own Funeral Service is far better.

The subject of death is not one which many people, even Christians, are eager to contemplate. Nevertheless, it is an experience in which everyone will eventually participate. For the faithful Christian, however, the reality and inevitability of death does not lead to despair. Those who have been Baptized into Jesus Christ also share in his victory over death. As the apostle St. Paul writes:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

For the faithful, resurrection and eternal life can be claimed as a "sure and certain hope." We can speak with such certainty not because of any merit or work on our own part, but solely because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His grace is given and received by us through our faithful participation in the Church's ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Thus, the first purpose of a Christian funeral is to proclaim the Good News of the Father's grace in Jesus Christ, who, by his resurrection, has destroyed death and opened the gates of heaven to all believers. The Christian funeral also serves to commend the deceased to the merciful care of God. In addition, comfort and encouragement are provided to the bereaved by means of the Word and Sacraments. Finally, the Christian funeral provides a framework in which the congregation can worship and praise our God, who is the source of all consolation, hope, and life.

With this understanding in mind, several variables regarding funeral preparation can be considered.

At the Time of Death

When a member of the congregation is near death, the pastor should be notified immediately. The pastor will visit with the dying person and provide the last rites of the church with them. Included among these are the opportunities to make a last confession of sin and hear the Lord's word of forgiveness, to receive Holy Communion, to be anointed, and to commend the person to the Lord through Holy Scripture Lessons and prayers.

Following the actual death of the parishioner, if the pastor is not already present, he should be notified as soon as possible so that he may offer prayer and comfort to the family. The pastor will assist the family in making final arrangements for the Funeral Service.

Where to Have the Funeral Service

If the church was an important part of the deceased's life, then the church itself is the proper location for the Funeral Service. The church was the center of their spiritual life: where they were Baptized, where they regularly gathered together with their brothers and sisters in Christ, where they heard the Word, and where they received Holy Communion. As the funeral liturgy is itself a Service of divine worship, then the church is the most appropriate location for it to be conducted. To be buried from the church is a powerful symbol of the deceased's final witness to the Gospel.

Moreover, only in the church may the full range of the church's rites be observed. Processions, congregational and choral singing, organ offertories and accompaniment, a host of Christian symbolism, and certainly not least, the opportunity for Holy Communion are possible only in the church.

There are certainly occasions when a location apart from the church is a better choice. If the deceased was an inactive member of the congregation, had little or no connection with the church, or had some serious reason for not desiring a church funeral, then it might be more appropriate for the Funeral Service to take place in a funeral home. Most funeral directors are willing to provide a location for a funeral service. The pastor will also be able to offer guidance in these matters.

Cremation or Burial?

Cremation is nothing other than the hastening of the decay process. However, it is greatly desirable that the body of the deceased be present for the Funeral Service. If cremation is desired, it should take place after the Funeral Service. Reputable funeral directors provide appropriate packages so that this can be accomplished at minimal cost. If the person is buried with the appropriate rites prior to the Funeral Service, then the liturgy can be modified for use as a Memorial Service.

Visitation and Viewing

It is customary for the family of the deceased to receive friends prior to the funeral. Often this will include a viewing of the deceased's body. However, neither a visitation nor a viewing is required and may certainly be omitted, according to the preferences of the deceased and/or family. The visitation may take place in the church or in a funeral home.

Open or Closed Coffin

When the Funeral Service is prayed in the church, the coffin must be closed prior to the beginning of the Service. The family may be present for the closing of the coffin or may proceed to the sanctuary while the coffin is closed in private.

Social or Fraternal Tributes and Ceremonies

The ceremonies or tributes of social or fraternal societies have no place within the Service of the Church. If they are desired, the most appropriate setting is the funeral home or at the graveside following the committal rites of the church.

The Liturgical Rite

The order for the Burial of the Dead, found in the Lutheran Book of Worship, will be the liturgy used for all Funeral Services prayed in the church. Certain options contained within the liturgy can be exercised according to the wishes of the deceased. Please note that there is no place for eulogies within the liturgy. If anyone wishes to eulogize the deceased, they may do so at the reception. At the end of this document, there is an opportunity to personalize these options.

A Eucharistic or non-Eucharistic Service

A funeral is designed to be celebrated within the context of the Service of Holy Communion. The Sacrament is a means of receiving several gifts from God, all of which are helpful for the family and friends of the deceased: the real presence of Jesus Christ, continued unity with the deceased, and the promise of eternal life with those we love through Jesus Christ.

The Pall, Paschal Candle, and Procession

When the coffin is brought into the nave, it will be prepared for the procession by being covered with a large white cloth known as the Funeral Pall. The pall symbolizes the purity and righteousness of Jesus Christ which were first given in Holy Baptism. Moreover, the pall has the practical benefit of covering both expensive coffins or simple coffins, thus symbolizing that everyone – rich and poor alike – stand equal in the sight of God.

Thus the American flag is not draped on the coffin during the Funeral Service. If the deceased is entitled to that honor through his or her service to the military, the flag may be displayed, properly folded, during the visitation, and then unfolded and draped upon the coffin as it is removed from the church and taken to the cemetery. At the conclusion of the graveside liturgy, the flag will be properly folded and presented to the family.

The Paschal Candle represents the Light of Christ and the Resurrection. It is the church's Easter candle which is first lit each year at the Easter Vigil and represents Jesus Christ rising in glory, triumphant over the forces of evil and death. It is used at all Baptisms and funerals as a symbol of our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The family may participate in the procession or may choose to take a place in the congregation prior to the procession.

Hymns

The singing of appropriate hymns during the Funeral Service is always desirable. The liturgy calls for two hymns: a processional hymn and the Hymn of the Day. If additional hymns are desired, a recessional hymn may be used, as well as hymns during the distribution of Holy Communion. All hymns used in the Funeral Service must come from the Lutheran Book of Worship or With One Voice.

A variety of hymns are appropriate for use at a Funeral Service. Hymns should not be selected on the basis of sentimentality, nor merely because they are favorite hymns. Rather, hymns should be used to support the church's proclamation of the Gospel, the hope of eternal life for all who die in Jesus Christ. Hymns which proclaim the hope of the Resurrection and/or express Christian confidence, hope and trust in the Lord are most appropriate. Following are possible hymns:

76	O Morning Star How Fair and Bright!	342	I Know of A Sleep in Jesus' Name
117	O Sacred Head, Now Wounded	343	Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer
131	Christ Is Risen! Alleluia!	351	Oh, Happy Day When We Shall Stand
135	The Strife Is O'er the Battle Done	352	I Know that My Redeemer Lives!
145	Thine Is the Glory	358	Glories of Your Name Are Spoken
158	Alleluia! Sing to Jesus	377	Lift High the Cross
174	For All the Saints	385	What Wondrous Love Is This
175	Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones	448	Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound
176	For All Your Saints, O Lord	451	The Lord's My Shepherd
182	Rise, O Children of Salvation	452	As Pants the Hart for Cooling Streams
210	At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing	453	If You But Trust in God to Guide You
229	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God	456	The King of Love My Shepherd Is
230	Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word	459	O Holy Spirit, Enter In
272	Abide with Me	474	Children of the Heavenly Father
294	My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less	479	My Faith Looks Up to Thee
314	Behold A Host Arrayed in White	501	He Leadeth Me: Oh, Blessed Thought
315	Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	509	Onward Christian Soldiers
320	O God, Our Help in Ages Past	532	How Great Thou Art
325	Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart	691	Sing with All the Saints in Glory
327	Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me	702	I Am the Bread of Life
330	In Heaven Above	741	Thy Holy Wings
331	Jerusalem, My Happy Home	770	I Was There to Hear Your Morning Cry
333	Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me	779	On Eagle's Wings
337	Oh, What Their Joy		
339	Lord, Now Let Your Servant		
341	Jesus, Still Lead On		

Scripture Readings

Lessons from Holy Scripture for the Funeral Service should be selected based upon their appropriateness rather than their sentimental value. Of primary importance is the proclamation of hope and comfort brought about by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Four Lessons will be read: the first, from the Old Testament; the second, a Psalm; the third, a New Testament Epistle; and the fourth, from a Holy Gospel.

Readings of a non-Scriptural nature such as poetry or other works of literature are not to be used during the Funeral Service; such literature may not be given the honor due to Holy Scripture. If a non-Scriptural composition was particularly meaningful to the deceased, it may be printed in the funeral bulletin or on the funeral cards provided by the funeral director.

Following is a list of Lessons from Holy Scripture that are especially appropriate for a Funeral Service. Other Lessons are also possible.

Old Testament

Job 19:23-27a
Isaiah 25:6-9
Isaiah 61:1-3
Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33*

Psalms

Psalm 23
Psalm 42
Psalm 46
Psalm 90
Psalm 118
Psalm 121
Psalm 130
Psalm 143

Epistles

Romans 5:1-11
Romans 5:17-21
Romans 8:31-35, 37-39
1 Corinthians 15:12-26
1 Peter 1:3-9
1 John 3:1-2*
Revelation 7:9-17
Revelation 21:2-7

Holy Gospels

St. Matthew 11:25-30*
St. Matthew 25:1-13
St. Luke 12:35-40
St. John 5:24-29
St. John 6:37-40*
St. John 11:21-27
St. John 14:1-6

*Especially appropriate for the burial of a child.

Flowers and Memorials

The congregation provides altar flowers for church funerals. These are given to the glory of God and in loving memory of the deceased. One or two other vases may be placed in the church if desired. No other flowers may be placed in the nave or chancel. However if the family so desires, additional flowers may be placed around the coffin in the visitation area.

Due to the perishable nature of flowers as well as their cost, it is preferable to request that contributions in memory of the deceased be given to the church *in lieu* of flowers. Memorial contributions can then be used to purchase a more durable item for use in the church in memory of the deceased. Frequently, these items are of a liturgical nature and are used during Services. Such items may be engraved with a memorial inscription. The pastors will consult with the family of the deceased before purchasing a memorial item with these funds.

Pallbearers

It is customary to provide six individuals to carry the coffin of the deceased. This is often a sign of special honor or affection.

Funeral Luncheon

Luncheons will be provided by the congregation upon request at cost to the family.

Honorariums and Fees

Individuals often wish to give a monetary honorarium to those who provide ministry or support for the Funeral Service. Such gifts, given to the pastor, the musician(s), and the secretary, are usually included in the funeral director's final bill. However, it must be clearly noted that members of the congregation are not expected nor charged a fee for Funeral Services. Therefore, the giving of any honoraria is left strictly to the discretion of the family of the deceased, or determined according to the deceased's previously expressed wishes.

The custodial service for the church is a paid service. Whereas there is no charge to congregation members for use of the sanctuary, the Augsburg Room, or Fellowship Hall, there is a cost incurred for setup and cleanup of these areas. The fee is \$40 for each space used. This fee is usually included in the Funeral Director's final bill.

Worksheet

On the following pages will be found a Funeral Service Planning Guide for each confirmed member of your household which provides various options for your Funeral Service. Please complete this questionnaire and return it to the Church Office so that we may keep it on file for future reference. If you need any guidance in completing this form or have any questions not answered by this document, please speak to the pastor.

Funeral Service Planning Guide

Please complete the following questionnaire and return it to the office of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 324 North Street, Millersburg, PA 17061. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the pastor at 692-2141.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____

Next of Kin: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

1. Do you desire your body to be buried? _____ Cremated? _____

(Even with cremation, the body ought to be present for the Funeral Service.

See St. Paul's Funeral Guidelines for more information or speak with the pastor.)

2. Viewing/Visitation

a. Do you desire a time of visitation? _____

 i. The day of the funeral? _____

 ii. The evening prior to the funeral? _____

b. Do you desire your remains to be present? _____

c. Do you desire an open or closed casket? _____

d. In the church or in the funeral home? _____

3. Funeral Service

a. Hymns to be sung (cf. Funeral Guidelines for suggestions)

- i. Processional Hymn _____
- ii. Hymn of the Day _____
- iii. Hymns during Holy Communion (optional)
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
- iv. Recessional Hymn _____

b. Scripture Lessons (cf. Funeral Guidelines for suggestions)

- i. Old Testament _____
- ii. Psalm _____
- iii. New Testament _____
- iv. Holy Gospel _____

c. Do you desire any flowers other than the Altar Flowers? _____

d. Do you desire memorials to be given to St. Paul's? _____

e. Suggestions for Pall Bearers (up to six)

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

4. Burial

a. Name of Burial Cemetery: _____

Address: _____

b. If you are entitled, do you wish to have the American Flag
draped on the casket at the graveside Service? _____

c. Do you desire the accompanying military rites? _____

5. Do you desire a funeral luncheon? _____

Signature

Date