

FUNERAL GUIDELINES

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PRIOR TO THE SERVICE

The altar candles may be lighted before the people arrive and extinguished after they have left. When there is a choir, members should assemble in their places quietly before the service begins. The choir should not participate in the processions. When a pall is to be placed over the coffin, it should be ready in the Narthex.

A SERVICE OF WORSHIP

The Christian funeral is a service of worship and should involve all those present. Funerals today are held in various places outside the church, but seldom should the locations preclude congregational participation. The funeral serves a support function such that the religious, social, and emotional needs of the mourners are met.

LOCATION OF WORSHIP SERVICE

The funerals of practicing Christians should be in the parish church, the place where their lives of worship have centered. In this setting, congregational singing should be encouraged and participation in the prayers should be taken for granted certainly to the extent of saying "Amen" and joining in the Lord's Prayer.

CHANGES IN THE WORSHIP SERVICE FORMAT

Because of the emotional stress involved, the occasion of a funeral is not the time to press for changes in accepted parish practices.

THE MINISTRY OF THE PASTOR

The pastor's ministry is to lead the bereaved into and through the rites of the church where the voice of the Gospel can be heard with healing power and clarity. In an effort to be positive and to emphasize the victory of the resurrection, the pain and loss of death must not be minimized or ignored. Both must be held in balance. The bereaved need to confront and accept the loss of the deceased as well as be given hope. Moreover, the congregation needs to be encouraged to support the bereaved not only at the time of the funeral but also as the bereaved return to the duties of their lives.

THE SERVICE OF THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Intended primarily for use in the church with the body of the deceased present. But service may be easily modified for use in other locations -- crematory chapel, private house, funeral parlor -- where processions and other liturgical actions are not feasible. The service may be used as a Memorial Service following interment or when the body has been destroyed in an accident or natural catastrophe by omitting certain portions of the liturgy.

FUNERALS FOR NON-MEMBERS

Conducting funerals for people who have no connection with the church is a normal part of the ministerial obligation. It is usually inappropriate to hold such a service in the church (current ELCA practice has changed to some degree) and not all the parts of the service

may be appropriate. By certain omissions and choices of alternate selections this service may be adapted for such funerals.

MUSIC SELECTIONS

Music selected for use at a funeral should embody high standards of quality, and in general reflect the spirit of Christian confidence, trust, and hope in the resurrection. The hymns should reflect such themes as the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints, hope in the resurrection. Hymn versions of appropriate psalms may be sung also.

OVERVIEW OF THE SERVICE

The minister, vested in alb or surplice and stole in the seasonal color, will meet the coffin, the pallbearers, and the bereaved at the entrance of the church. (The bereaved may arrive and go to their seats prior to the beginning of the service.) The location of the opening part of the service should be chosen -so that the congregation is able to hear what is said.

The coffin remains closed throughout the service. When the service is in a funeral parlor or private house, the coffin is closed and in place before the liturgy begins. The funeral director shall be instructed concerning such matters as timing, closed caskets, music, flowers, etc.

A white pall may be placed over the coffin to recall the white robe given in Baptism, the robe of Christ's righteousness. The pall further has democratizing value, for it prevents both the display of a costly coffin and embarrassment at a simple one. This action of placing the pall over the coffin will take place prior to the liturgy.

The procession which begins the liturgy is as follows: Cross, Paschal Candle, Presiding Minister, Assisting Minister, Pallbearers with the coffin, the Bereaved, The symbolic intent of this order of the procession is that the symbols of Christ go first -- cross, paschal candle, minister -- and then the dead and the living follow where "Christ has led the way," as the final prayer at the grave puts it.

As the procession moves to the altar, a psalm or hymn may be sung. (See suggested list of appropriate hymns)

The coffin is to be placed in the position with the feet toward the altar. The position reflects the accustomed role of the deceased in the church -- facing the altar as part of the congregation. The paschal candle is placed on its stand at the head of the coffin. The liturgy of the Burial of the Dead proceeds. (See list of suggested readings)

The sermon may include a recognition of the life of the deceased, but its purpose is not eulogy but a proclamation of hope and comfort in Christ. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for relatives or associates of the deceased to comment briefly on the meaning of the life of the deceased for the community, but this must not overshadow or exclude a proclamation of the Gospel by the preacher.

The service for the Burial of the Dead may be part of the Holy Communion. The visual and active aspect of the Holy Communion can be helpful when words fail, and when silence

and embraces and eating together are important. Moreover, the Preface, which joins our earthly praise with the praise of the hosts of heaven, has particular relevance to a funeral. When the Holy Communion is celebrated, the service continues after the prayers with the Peace. Under normal circumstances, gifts of money would not be gathered. Under no circumstances should the bread and wine be received by the family of the deceased to the exclusion of the congregation. The sacrament is for the gathered congregation.

THE COMMENDATION

The Commendation is a prayer which asks God to receive the deceased in mercy. The prayer is a concluding statement of trust to console the living with God's care for the departed.

When the body is to be cremated, the service may be held in the church and the commendation in the crematory chapel. In that case, at the commendation the coffin should remain in its place until the mourners have left, rather than having it disappear by some mechanical device.

At the commendation, the ministers take their places at the coffin. The procession forms in the same order as before. As the procession leaves the church, a psalm, hymn (especially an Easter hymn), or anthem may be sung. If it has not been sung in the Holy Communion, "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace," is appropriate or the Benedictus, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel," might be sung.

The pall is removed from the coffin in the narthex. The paschal candle remains at the church. The processional cross may be taken to the place of interment.

THE COMMITTAL

When the body of the deceased is to be transported to a distant interment site, when it has been donated for medical use, or in other situations when those present at the funeral cannot be present at the interment, the commendation alone will suffice.

When the body has been willed for medical research or other scientific purposes, the committal service, with appropriate modifications, may be used with the bereaved before the body is removed. A memorial service may be held later.

When feasible, the procession from the hearse to the grave follows the same order as before: cross, presiding minister, pallbearers and coffin, the bereaved. Where this is not feasible, at least the presiding minister should precede the coffin to the place of interment. It should not be necessary for the mourners to have books or pamphlets to participate in the Committal.

The coffin is lowered into the grave or placed in its resting place. It is important that the mourners see the coffin lowered into the grave and not simply remember it resting on top of the device by which it will later be lowered after the mourners have left, for it gives the mourners a clearer memory of what happened to the body. (Current practice in the ELCA has changed in this area as well.) Earth (not sand or flowers) may be cast on the coffin by

the minister and those who stand around, as the minister commits the body to its resting place. The dismissal, "Let us go in peace," is said by the minister. This makes a dismissal by the undertaker unnecessary.

THE MOOD OF THE LITURGY

The Burial of the Dead is an Easter liturgy. It has its focus in Baptism by which one is made a child of God forever and is dramatized in the Easter Vigil and its celebration of the passage through death to new life, where Christ has led the way.

The mood of the Burial of the Dead is richer than the older practice that developed in medieval times and emphasized the loss, the sorrow, and the fear that death evokes. In this service, both the sadness and the joy must be seen together -- one tempered by the other. Fraternal and other rites should not be a part of the churches liturgy.

References:

Manual on the Liturgy, pp. 355-365

Suggested Hymns

No. 174 "For All the Saints Who From Their Labors Rest"

No. 342 "I Know of a Sleep in Jesus' Name"

No. 340 "Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense"

No. 320 "O God, Our Help in Age & Past"

No. 459 "Holy Spirit, Enter In"

No. 337 "Oh, What Their Joy and Their Glory Must Be"

No. 314 "Who Is This Host Arrayed in White"

Also suggested Easter Hymns No. 128-155

Suggested Psalms

Psalms 23 - 90 - 118 - 130 - 42:1-7 - 46:1-7 - 121 - 143

Other Suggested Readings

Job 19:23-27

Isaiah 25:6-9

Isaiah 61:1-3

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33

Matthew 11:25-30

Matthew 25:1-13

Luke 12:35-40

John 11:21-27

Romans 5:1-11

Romans 5:17-21

Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

1 Corinthians 15:12-26

1 Peter 3:1-2

1 John 3:1-2

John 5:24-29

*John 6:37-40

Revelation 7:9-17

Revelation 21:2-7

*Appropriate for the burial of a child

L.C.W. AND ITS ROLE

L.C.W. is the designated group in the church who will be responsible for the serving of funeral meals. L.C.W. will develop written guidelines in a standardized format for this meal service. It is anticipated that the charge for this service will be the cost of the meal plus 10% and the cost of cleanup charged by our cleaning service. L.C.W. shall appoint a person, in all likelihood the Pastor, to contact the bereaved family regarding whether or not they wished to have a meal served. L.C.W. shall also make available coffee and snacks during the visitation day before the funeral. It is suggested that the funding for this shall come from the fellowship monies.

INCIDENTAL FEES FOR MUSICAL SERVICES FROM OUR CONGREGATION

The organist shall receive \$25. For providing special music (anthems, solos), there shall be a fee of \$15 per person.

VISITING CLERGY

Visiting clergy may be present upon the consent of this congregation's pastor.

FLOWERS

After the funeral, flowers may be left at the church, buried at the grave site, or taken by family members.

BULLETINS

Bulletins outlining the service and containing information about the deceased will be made available at no cost.

MEMORIALS

Memorials are encouraged per the guidelines already established.

FRATERNAL GROUPS

Such groups, upon the consent of the pastor and following the guidelines outlined by the L.C.A. may be permitted to give tribute to the deceased.

VISITATION

The visitation hours shall be established after consultation with the Pastor. Visitation in the church is highly encouraged.

GIFTS TO THE CLERGY

Members of the congregation shall follow the steps in our Wedding Guidelines for monies given to the Pastor. Monies received shall go into the Pastor's Discretionary Account.

PASTORAL SERVICES TO MEMBERS OF ANOTHER CONGREGATION

The responsibility and authority for pastoral acts or services rest with the pastor or vice-pastor of the congregation where the deceased held membership. The minister who is asked to provide pastoral services for members of other congregations shall contact the Pastor or vice-pastor of the church in which the person held membership before providing the service. if the request for pastoral service involves an individual who has had conflicts with his/her pastor or congregation, the immediate family should be urged to resolve the difficulty prior to receiving pastoral service. The Pastor who performs a service for a member of another congregation is obligated to provide information regarding that pastoral act or service performed to the pastor or vice-pastor of the congregation in which the person held membership.