

Funeral Handbook



First Presbyterian Church

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Introduction

Christians recognize death as an inevitable part of life on earth, but in the presence of death, “We grieve,” says the apostle Paul, “but we do not grieve without hope.”¹ Death is a solemn and mysterious human experience, bringing painful separation between loved ones. In the midst of our grieving, we profess that, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has overcome the power death. Christians commend to God’s care those who die, trusting that, by God’s grace, nothing – not even death – can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.²

The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and informs Christians’ attitudes and responses to the event of death. Death brings loss, sorrow and grief to all. Yet, in the face of death, Christians affirm with tears and joy the hope of the gospel. Christians do not bear bereavement in isolation but are sustained by the power of the Spirit and the community of faith. The church offers a ministry of love and hope to all who grieve.³

Providing guidelines for funerals held in our family of faith is one of the responsibilities of the Session of First Presbyterian Church. This document seeks to assist anyone planning a funeral in our sanctuary, or at another location, using the services of our pastors as well as members of the congregation. If you have any questions regarding how First Presbyterian Church may assist you in a time of grief, please call the church office at 662-234-1757 to speak with one of our pastors.

The funeral is the beginning – and only a part of a much longer process – of grief. Because it is difficult for survivors to make decisions when dealing with emotional stress and grief after the loss of family members, the Session encourages all of its members to plan their funeral arrangements in advance. These decisions include location and options for burial, selections of scripture and music and preparing one’s estate. The Session encourages everyone to prepare a legal will as well as an advanced directive for medical care known as a “living will.” These documents are to be shared with family members.

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13

² Romans 8:38-39

³ Book of Order W-4.10001

When Someone Dies

In the event of a death in your family, one of the pastors of First Presbyterian Church is to be notified immediately in addition to the licensed funeral home of your choice. The pastor will visit with the family to offer condolences on behalf of the congregation and to begin to plan a service of witness to the resurrection, taking into consideration the desires of the deceased and surviving family members.

Funeral or Memorial Service?

The service of worship witnessing to the resurrection is, first and foremost, a service of worship to God. It shall be conducted with dignity and simplicity and will emphasize the love and grace of God as well as hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The service may be performed before or after the committal of the body.⁴ The *funeral* service is one in which the remains of the deceased are present in a casket. The casket may be open before the service for a viewing in Fellowship Hall, but shall be closed when moved into the sanctuary for worship so as not to distract from the purpose of giving witness to the resurrection.

A *memorial* service may or may not include the remains of the deceased. If not previously interred, the cremated remains, or ashes, shall be displayed tastefully somewhere in the sanctuary other than on the communion table.

Services of witness to the resurrection may be held on any day of the week except Sunday and at any time, but must be coordinated with the pastors' availability. Services are usually held at either 11:00 am or 2:00 pm, but other times of day may be chosen.

Ordinarily, both pastors serving First Presbyterian Church will participate in funerals, one as homilist and the other as liturgist. The church's Director of Music shall serve as organist for all funerals when one is requested unless he is unavailable or unless he approves a request for someone else to play.

The family may request a guest pastor to participate in the service with the consent of the presiding pastor. Ordinarily, the visiting pastor shall assume a supportive role to the presiding pastor and must be invited by the Session to step into the chancel here.

⁴ Book of Worship W-4.10005

Casket Adornments

When in the sanctuary, it is appropriate for the casket to be covered by fresh flowers or our congregation's pall, which represents a baptismal garment symbolizing the faith professed by the deceased. Just as we are all equal in the sight of God, we are all equal in death in faith and baptismal vows. The casket, while in the sanctuary, may not be covered by other symbols – civic, national or fraternal – that emphasize an allegiance held in higher esteem than one's Christian faith.⁵

Music

The final authority determining the suitability of any music for worship rests with the presiding minister in consultation with the Director of Music. Instrumentalists or vocalists may also be employed, but only with the approval of the Director of Music. While secular music is not appropriate for use during the worship service and may not be used, such arrangements for recorded music to be played in Fellowship Hall during the visitation or reception may be made with the pastor.

Floral Arrangements

The use of flowers for the funeral or memorial service shall be kept within the guidelines of what is appropriate and customary for a service of worship on the Lord's Day (Sunday morning), which is two arrangements placed in the urns on each of the pedestals flanking the pulpit and lectern. All remaining floral arrangements are to be left in Fellowship Hall or taken to the graveside for the committal. A casket spray may also be used in lieu of the pall.

Video Presentations and Photography

The use of video presentations and cameras is not allowed during worship. A DVD or CD recording of the service may be made by prior arrangement with the presiding pastor.

⁵ Ibid

Other Participants in Worship

In recent years, the church has allowed a relative or close friend of the deceased to offer a brief reflection during the service of worship. If this is desired by the deceased or surviving family, it should be offered by one, but no more than two, individuals and should be planned, each remembrance lasting no more than three minutes. A manuscript used is subject to review and editing by the presiding pastor. It should reflect the accomplishments of the person and his or her growth in faith of Jesus Christ. While this type of reflection is discouraged as a part of a service of witness to the resurrection, it may be permitted by the presiding pastor. A more appropriate venue for public acknowledgment of the deceased and what he or she meant to survivors is during a visitation or reception following the service of worship.

Receptions and Visitations

First Presbyterian Church (FPC) is pleased to serve as the host site for gatherings in Fellowship Hall before or after a funeral service. Ordinarily, the time of the visitation or reception shall be up to two hours in length. Longer periods of time for this purpose can be extremely tiring to the family of the deceased, especially to elderly participants.

In the event of death of a church member, a member's spouse or the child of a member or a former member of FPC, we offer a choice to the family of hosting a visitation / reception at Fellowship Hall or providing a meal to the immediate family of the deceased at Fellowship Hall following the service / committal. If a visitation / reception is chosen, coffee, water, lemonade and light food will be offered if the family desires. A choice of silver service or less formal serving pieces may also be made by the family.

Deacons are charged with the responsibility and authority to oversee all arrangements, working alongside the presiding pastors who care for the grieving family.

In the event of a death in our family of faith, we are called to provide Christian love and care. Therefore, all fellowship groups, circles and individuals in the congregation are encouraged to support the deacons in providing comfort and meals for the grieving family in the days, weeks and months that follow.

Graveside Services

Graveside services are offered for simplicity and convenience if desired by the deceased or those surviving. There are some issues you may want to consider when choosing an alternative graveside service. Inclement weather such as rain, wind or extreme temperatures may hinder the logistics of performing such a service. Terrain in cemeteries can be uneven and wet, causing difficult footing.

Additionally, the service length must be brief as most attendees are standing behind the few chairs provided for the family. These and other issues may interfere with the congregation's ability to provide comfort to those in need.

Committal

Family and friends of the deceased may gather at the graveside or crematorium for a service of interment, which is to be conducted with simplicity, dignity and brevity. The committal, which can occur before or after a service of worship, includes readings from scripture, prayer, words of committal and a benediction. The service, led by the presiding pastor, will focus upon the reality of death, entrust the one who has died to the care of God and bear witness to faith in the resurrection.⁶

Funeral Director

The funeral director of a licensed funeral home makes all of the arrangements required throughout the funeral process, from the transfer of the deceased from the place of death to the ultimate place of burial (if applicable). The director obtains the death certificate, prepares the remains for burial and works with the family to select caskets and burial garments if those have not already been chosen. The funeral director also prepares and places obituary notices as he or she coordinates arrangements for the funeral and burial. The pastors are available, if requested, to join the family when they meet with the funeral director since decisions during that time can be both emotionally and economically difficult to make.

Cremation

Cremation is a matter of personal preference. It is not inconsistent with the Christian faith. One may also choose to donate his or her remains to be used in the study of medicine or science at medical schools and hospitals.

Fraternal, Civil, and Military Rites

Because fraternal, civil and military rites are not a part of the worship service, these organizations should pay tribute to the deceased at another hour and place. If a flag is used to cover the casket en route to the place of burial, it shall be placed on the casket as it is taken out of the sanctuary at the conclusion of the worship service. The flag folding rite shall take place at the conclusion of the presiding pastor's words of committal before the casket is lowered into the vault.⁷

⁶ Book of Order W-10006

⁷ Book of Order W-4.10005

Gift Designations and Memorials

Undesignated gifts given in memory of loved ones to First Presbyterian Church shall be set aside for the church's debt reduction fund. The family will be notified of all donors by mail following the funeral.

Honorariums

Honorariums for pastors and musicians involved with a funeral service are handled by the funeral home in charge. When a funeral home is not used, such as with a memorial service involving no remains, honorariums are appropriate and should be provided by the family. Please contact the church office for more information on customary amounts for honorariums.



Typical Order of Worship for a Funeral or Memorial Service

Scripture Sentence

Call to Worship

Hymn (Optional)

Invocation

Scripture Readings

Music (Optional)

Homily

Prayer of Commendation

Hymn (Optional)

Benediction

Suggested Scripture

Psalms 16:5-11, 23, 27, 39:4-5, 42:1-6, 43, 46:1-11, 90:1-12, 91, 103, 106:1-5, 116, 118, 121, 130, 139:1-12, 145, 146.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Isaiah 25:6-9, 26:1-4, 40, 43, 44:6-8, 55, 61, 65.

Lamentations 3:19-32

Daniel 12:1-3

Joel 2:12-29

Matthew 5:1-12, 11:25-30, 25:1-13, 25:31-40

Luke 7:11-17, 18:15-17, 12:35-40, 23:39-43

John 4:23-24, 5:24-29, 6:37-58, 11:17-27, 14:1-6, 14:25-27

Romans 5:1-11, 5:17-21, 6:3-9, 8:31-39, 14:7-12

1 Corinthians 15

Philippians 3:3-11

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 Peter 1:3-9

Colossians 3:1-17 and 23

Revelation 7:9-17, 21:2-7

The Session, pastors, and members of First Presbyterian Church open our hearts to all who are grieved by death and loss. We take seriously our vows to pray for all who are so afflicted. It is our prayer and hope that First Presbyterian Church may be a source of strength, comfort and hope through the promises of the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. The pastors, elders and deacons stand ready to assist you in your time of grief following the worship service. May God's peace be with you.⁸

⁸ This Funeral Handbook was approved by the Session of First Presbyterian Church on May 11, 2009.