

FUNERAL GUIDELINES

At a person's death, the church shares the grief of those who mourn and remembers the brevity of life on earth. At the funeral we give voice to sorrow, thank God for our loved one, and entrust this companion of ours into the hands of God. Trusting in God's promise in baptism that we are claimed by Christ forever, we rest in the sure hope of the resurrection. When the church gathers to mark the end of life, Christ crucified and risen is the witness of worship, the strength of mutual consolation, and then hope of healing. [Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 279]

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is an assembly of baptized children of God. The most essential thing that we do is gathering to worship our Lord Jesus Christ. In worship, Christians are reminded again and again that they are the baptized people of God and that their Baptism is not just for this time and this world but forever.

We understand the funeral to be a service of worship to God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The death of a baptized Christian, one who has lived in the communion of the church, is an occasion for thanksgiving and the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every activity surrounding such a death and burial should point to the good news of the gospel.

The guidelines provided here were approved by the congregational council of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church on June 12, 2007.

INITIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The death of a member of the church should be reported as soon as possible to one of the pastors who will assist in all arrangements for the funeral. No plans for the funeral should be made apart from consultation with the pastor. Generally, a funeral will take priority over any other scheduled event at the church. It is usually inappropriate to hold funerals for people having no connection with the church in the church.

When possible, it is always helpful for Christians to make funeral arrangements and consider their own funeral service before their death to avoid leaving difficult decisions for the bereaved during their time of grieving.

PASTORS

Either of our pastors is available to conduct funeral services. The pastor's ministry to the bereaved is to lead them into and through the rites of the church where the voice of the Gospel can be heard with healing power and clarity.

Other denominations and society in general have traditions and customs that may or may not compliment Lutheran theology and practice. The pastor can help you discern whether a practice is appropriate.

Should you desire another pastor to participate in the service, that person must be an ordained pastor of a recognized Christian denomination whose teachings are consistent with our Lutheran understanding of death and resurrection.

THE SERVICE

The Funeral service [*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pp 279-285] is the liturgical rite for the funeral. It is an Easter liturgy that has its focus in Baptism by which one is made a child of God forever and is dramatized in the celebration of the passage through death to new life, where Christ has led the way. The mood of the service is richer than the older practice of emphasizing the loss, the sorrow, and the fear that death evokes. The fuller understanding of death recognizes these feelings of grief and desolation and gives them expression, but it also moves beyond them to a confident hope. Because it is a worship service it should involve all those present. Assembly participation such as congregational singing is encouraged. The Funeral service is intended primarily for use in the church with the body of the deceased present. The coffin remains closed throughout the service. Even when the service is at a location other than the church, it should not preclude participation. The service may be used as a memorial service, following interment or when the body has been destroyed in an accident or natural catastrophe.

HOLY COMMUNION

The service may be part of a celebration 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. At such celebrations, the invitation to commune is extended to all communicants present at the service.

EULOGIES

At its core, Lutheran theology always proclaims that we are saved by grace and never by our earthly works, personalities or associations. Eulogizing, therefore, is generally discouraged. It is allowable for a close associate of the deceased to offer some personal remarks but never in such away as to confuse the theology of grace. Generally, one person should be chosen as a representative to make such remarks.

Personal condolences, expressions of affection, memories and offers of support should be offered to the family in private.

THE SANCTUARY

The funerals of practicing Christians are best conducted in church, the place where their lives of worship have centered.

THE BURIAL

The church regards burial in the ground, entombment above ground, commendation to the sea, cremation, and donation for medical research or organ transplant as acceptable methods of disposition of the body.

THE PASCHAL CANDLE

The paschal candle from the Easter celebration, also used for baptisms, is placed near the head of the casket as it rests in the church to point the assembly to the promises of dying and rising with Christ that God makes at the time of baptism.

THE PALL

A funeral pall is a large white cloth, sometimes marked with a cross, that completely covers a casket or a smaller white cloth that covers a cremation urn. A pall may be placed over the coffin or urn to recall the robe of Christ's righteousness and baptism. The pall further has democratizing value, treating every Christian exactly the same, for it prevents both the display of a costly coffin and embarrassment at a simple one. Flowers, flags and other adornments are removed from the casket as the pall is put in place and returned at the conclusion of the service.

ORGAN DONATION

There is no church law or theological reason preventing Lutheran Christians from choosing to be organ donors. Our theology and confessions affirm the resurrection of the body. God's promise to resurrect the dead is not compromised by organ donation. Almighty God, who created our bodies, has the capacity to resurrect them with or without the presence of specific organs.

CREMATION

Cremation (burning the body and reducing it to ashes) is becoming more prevalent in our society and in the Lutheran Church. Lutheran theology and tradition do not favor any particular form of burial. God's ability to give resurrected bodies to those who bear the name of Christ cannot be compromised by any human action, including cremation. The container holding the cremated ashes is treated the same way as a casket when it is present for the liturgy. It may also be covered with a smaller pall. In the absence of the body, some families choose to provide a photograph of the deceased that may be placed beside the urn during the funeral.

SOCIAL AND FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Because the church understands the funeral to be a service of worship, it does not allow social or fraternal societies to introduce rites or ceremonies into its liturgy. These ceremonies should not be mingled with the church's worship of God either in the church

building or in any other setting (such as funeral home, mortuary, or at the graveside). Military and fraternal tributes and rites should be kept separate from the funeral and committal services of the church.

It is acknowledged that some church members, as individuals, may hold membership in social and fraternal organizations. These organizations may or may not include in their charters and membership rituals elements of religious belief and practice that have Christian overtones. The liturgical ministry of the church to its members should not be confused or commingled with the rituals of social and fraternal societies, regardless of whether they espouse religious beliefs. This separation of the church's liturgical ministry from the rituals and tributes of social and fraternal societies does not invoke judgment upon the purposes, character, or social value of such organizations, or upon congregants who may hold membership in them.

The symbols of social and fraternal organizations should not be displayed in the church. This applies only to free-standing decorative symbols not those worn by persons. This does not prohibit members of the society or fraternity from attending the funeral, nor does it prohibit the wearing of symbols by those in attendance.

FUNERAL MUSIC

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 characteristic of the spoken parts of the service. Hymns should reflect such themes as the invocation of the Holy Spirit, comfort, the communion of saints, hope in the resurrection. Whenever music is employed in the service, and by whatever instruments or voices, it should not cloud communication of the content and mood of the service with musical triteness or sentimentality.

The church organist is available to play for funeral services that take place at the church. There is no fee associated with this service. If the service is held at another location, arrangements for musicians are left to those making the funeral arrangements.

The pastor has final approval of all music for appropriateness and should be made aware of all music to be preformed.

DECORATIONS AND FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Floral arrangements may be placed in the sanctuary but all other decorating is discouraged. No flowers or decorations should be placed in the altar area.

FEEES

Because the death of a church member is dramatically tied to life in the church and affects the entire congregation, no fees are associated with funeral services.

RESOURCES

These guidelines have been constructed primarily from the following copyrighted resources of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Pfatteicher, Philip H. and Carlos R. Messerli. *Manual on the Liturgy, Lutheran Book of Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979.

Lutheran Book of Worship, Ministers Desk Edition. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.

Division for Congregational Ministries, ELCA, Worship. *Frequently Asked Questions: Funerals*. 2003.

Division for Congregational Ministries, ELCA, Worship. *Frequently Asked Questions: Organ Donation and Cremation*. 2003.

Division for Congregational Ministries, ELCA, Worship. *Frequently Asked Questions: How Do We Use a Paschal Candle?* 2003.

Division for Congregational Ministries, ELCA, Worship. *Frequently Asked Questions: How Do Rites of Social and Fraternal Societies Relate to Lutheran Liturgical Practice, Especially Funerals?* 1999.