

A Witness to the Resurrection: Memorial and Funeral Services at Covenant Presbyterian Church

The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and shapes Christians' attitudes and responses to the event of death.... In 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. [Book of Order, Directory for Worship]

Just as the church embraces us in our baptism and throughout our Christian life, so it should embrace us in our death and in our hope of resurrection to eternal life. The purpose of this writing is to assist members of Covenant Presbyterian Church in the realistic consideration of this eventuality and the decisions that are required at the death of a loved one.

Because it is difficult under emotional stress to plan wisely, the session should encourage members to discuss and plan in advance the arrangements which will be necessary at the time of death, including those decisions about the Christian options of burial, cremation, or donation for medical purposes. These plans should provide for arrangements which are simple, which bear witness to the resurrection hope, and in which the Christian community is central. [Book of Order, Directory for Worship]

By prior consideration and planning, the family of the deceased can be relieved of some difficult decisions, and the intentions of the deceased for an appropriate service of worship can be maintained. A form entitled "At Death, Burial and Service Instructions" is available from the church to assist in your planning and communicate those plans to family members and the church.

AT THE TIME OF DEATH...

MINISTERIAL STAFF

Upon the death of one of our members, a minister of the church should be notified as soon as possible. This is best accomplished by contacting the church office t 704.333.9071. Our ministers also earnestly desire to know of those who need comfort and counsel as they face death. By being involved early in situations of death or impending death, the minister can help with necessary decisions regarding funeral homes, disposition of the body, and service arrangements, as well as caring for the spiritual needs of those involved.

TYPES OF SERVICES

All services conducted by ministers of the church are services of worship for the community of faith. While the form of services may differ, each is a Service of Witness to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. Memorial Service

The Memorial Service is a service where the body is not present. Interment of the remains in a Service of Committal has either preceded the memorial service or will take place at a later time.

2. Funeral Service

The Funeral Service is a service where the body is present either in a casket or an urn. Usually the Funeral Service is concluded with a Service of Committal at the burial site.

3. Service of Committal

The Service of Committal (often referred to as a graveside service) occurs at the interment site where the remains of the deceased are laid to rest. It is usually quite brief. Should no other service (Memorial or Funeral) be held, the Service of Committal may take a longer form.

LOCATION OF SERVICE

The service on the occasion of death ordinarily should be held in the usual place of worship in order to join this service to the community's continuing life and witness to the resurrection. [Book of Order, Directory for Worship]

The church sanctuary and chapel are appropriate places for a Memorial or Funeral Service. Significant moments of life are celebrated here: baptisms, marriage, Communion, intercession, worship, and call to service. Here we see the symbols of our Christian faith. In this place we have tangible reminders of God's presence and care, and the support of a community of faith that surrounds us with comfort and love.

Before or after the service, the church will make available the Fellowship Hall, parlor, or narthex for visitation if the family so chooses. Requests for the use of a visitation space should be made at the time of the arrangements for the Memorial or Funeral Service.

BURIAL

Appropriate options for Christians regarding the disposition of a body include burial, cremation, or donation for medical science. Arrangements for these options are made by an individual or the family through a funeral director. The Columbarium and Memorial Garden at Covenant Presbyterian Church is available to church members (and their immediate family) who choose cremation. Information about costs, niche locations and other issues may be obtained from the church administrator.

THE SERVICE OF WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION

Memorial, Funeral and Committal Services are acts of worship among the Christian community. The purposes of such services of worship are to glorify God, to affirm our belief in the resurrection to life everlasting, and to comfort the bereaved. Gratitude and honor are appropriately expressed to God for the life and witness of the deceased; however prolonged and undue attention upon the deceased is discouraged.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

The service begins with scriptural sentences. It is appropriate for worshipers to sing hymns, psalms, spirituals, or spiritual songs which affirm God's power over death, a belief in the resurrection to life everlasting, and the assurance of the communion of the saints. Scripture shall be read; a sermon or other exposition of the Word may be proclaimed; an affirmation of faith may be made by the people. Aspects of the life of the one who has died may be recalled. Prayers shall be offered, giving thanks to God.... The service ends by commending the one who has died to the care of the eternal God and sending the people forth with a benediction. [Book of Order, Directory for Worship]

1. Scriptures

The Scriptures are a rich source to which Christians and Jews alike have turned for comfort and assurance in times of grief. The minister will guide the selection of appropriate scripture passages, and would welcome suggestions of those with particular meaning for the family or the deceased.

2. Hymns

Hymns should be chosen which affirm the goodness and grace of God, and which give comfort and support to those who grieve. The minister and the organist will guide the selection of appropriate hymns.

3. Other Music

The church's organist will provide suitable sacred music and is available for consultation with the family concerning these musical selections. The appropriateness of musical selections will be determined by the church music department. Instrumentalists or vocalists may also be employed, but must be approved and contracted by the church's music department. The family is expected to cover the cost of any musicians other than the church organist.

4. The Pall

The church has available a pall for Funeral Services. A pall is a large cloth that covers the casket during the service. It represents the covering of the Christian by the righteousness of Christ, and alludes to the baptismal waters of death and new life in Jesus. Since righteousness is an unmerited gift from God and all people stand equal in the eyes of God, the outer appearance of the casket in its cost or beauty is of no consequence to the Christian community. By use of the church's pall, the focus of the service may remain on the goodness and grace of God. A flower pall or spray on the casket for the funeral service is therefore unnecessary.

5. Flowers

In keeping with the simplicity and understanding of the Christian faith to avoid ostentation, flowers are limited to two arrangements on the Communion Table. Typically, the family of the deceased will furnish the arrangement of flowers for the service. After the service, the family may take the flowers or donate them for the church's use.

OTHER FRATERNAL, CIVIC, OR MILITARY RITES

The service shall be complete in itself, and any fraternal, civic, or military rites should be conducted separately. [Book of Order, Directory for Worship]

The service of worship is an act of the Christian community in which the wider community is welcome. If other rites take place, these rites shall be conducted apart from the service and place of worship.

COSTS AND FEES FOR MEMORIAL AND FUNERAL SERVICES

There are no charges or fees for use of the church's facilities, for worship bulletins, or for the service of the minister and organist. Costs to the family related to the memorial or funeral service will be for the flowers the family provides, for additional musicians and vocalists the family may request, and for food services arranged by the family. The purchase of a Columbarium niche and related burial expenses are arranged through the church business office.