

WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES... PLANNING A MEMORIAL OR FUNERAL SERVICE

Rev. Dr. Douglas K. Showalter
Interim Pastor, Church of the Pilgrimage (United Church of Christ)
8 Town Square, Plymouth, MA 02360
office@8townsquare.org
dougshowalter@8townsquare.org

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When a loved one dies, a family is suddenly confronted with a multitude of decisions which need to be made quickly and with care. Many of those decisions relate to the planning of a Christian service of worship to mark the passing of the deceased. To help families with some of those decisions, I offer this small booklet which contains lists of some suitable hymns and scripture passages.

In all such planning, it should be recognized that there is no single, "right" way to conduct a meaningful Funeral or Memorial service. Circumstances, customs, and personal preferences can vary widely. In my view, such services should be planned to reflect the special needs and interests of individuals and their families.

TYPES OF SERVICES

A Funeral Service takes place with the embalmed or cremated remains of the deceased present.

A Memorial Service takes place when the remains of the deceased are not present.

A Committal Service takes place in conjunction with the interment of the embalmed or created remains of the deceased. This brief service may be combined with either of the above services, or held at a time totally separate from them. When an interment is to be held at a later time and is private or takes place in another community, the words of committal are sometimes added at the end of a funeral or memorial service itself, to provide a sense of completeness, particularly for those who won't be attending the interment.

PURPOSES OF A CHRISTIAN SERVICE

The Christian faith triumphantly proclaims the victorious passage from bitter death to eternal life in God's keeping. It also bears witness to the redemptive love of God which stands with us, and cries with us, when we who are left behind must face the painful partings and tragedies of this earthly life.

Through appropriate Biblical passages, prayers, and hymns, a Christian Funeral or Memorial service should help grieving families and friends get in touch with these vital truths of our faith--and derive hope and comfort from them.

Thanksgiving is another important aspect of a Christian service: thanksgiving to God for the earthly life of the deceased and thanksgiving for all that person has meant over the years to beloved family and friends. Christianity teaches that individual persons are both unique and precious to God. As such, in death as in life, it is important that we honor them and bear witness to our thankfulness for them.

Also, the service should help a family commend their loved one into God's keeping. It should help them find a sense of peace, as they shift their focus from the earthly to the eternal spiritual identity of their loved one.

SERVICE ORDER

Like all worship services, a Funeral or Memorial Service should convey a sense of inter-connectedness and progression in achieving its purposes. Here is the basic order I often use for both Funeral and Memorial services. Certainly this order is open to modification to suit personal preferences.

With hymns, and without additional speakers, this service order often lasts about 20-25 minutes. The Committal service lasts under 5 minutes.

Services in the Church often include sung hymns. Sung hymns are not usually used at the funeral home or a grave site.

MEMORIAL OR FUNERAL SERVICE

Organ Prelude

Opening Statement

Hymn

Invocation Prayer

Old Testament Reading(s)

New Testament Reading(s)

Solo (occasional)

Personal Remembrance(s)

Silent Meditation and Individual Reflection

Pastoral Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

Hymn

Benediction

COMMITTAL SERVICE

Psalm 121

Statement of Committal

Prayer

Benediction

HYMNS

There are many hymns in our church's "Hymns of Truth and Light" hymnal which are appropriate for use in Funeral or Memorial services. Here is a partial list which includes both solemn and triumphant expressions of our Christian faith and hope. Very often the hymn chosen to conclude the service is triumphant in tone. Not all verses of a hymn need be sung.

- 80 Our God, Our Help in Ages Past
- 95 Be Still, My Soul
- 224 Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart
- 263 Now the Day Is Over
- 275 Dear Lord, Who Loves All Humankind

- 334 Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name
- 345 God Be With You Till We Meet Again
- 368 Blest Be The Tie That Binds
- 401 Amazing Grace
- 404 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
- 425 O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go
- 465 O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee
- 469 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
- 472 I Would Be True
- 473 O Jesus, I Have Promised
- 477 God of Grace and God of Glory
- 486 For All the Saints
- 487 Abide With Me
- 488 Nearer My God To Thee

- 535 Eternal Father, Strong To Save (The Navy Hymn)
- 592 The Old Rugged Cross
- 596 How Great Thou Art
- 611 In the Garden
- 613 Great Is Thy Faithfulness

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Biblical scripture is that inspiring voice beyond ourselves and our personal grief which rings down through the centuries to remind us of the eternal God who has been--and remains--the blessed hope and "mighty fortress" of countless generations of humanity.

Here are some of the more familiar Old Testament passages:

[Note: "a" indicates first part of verse only.]

Psalm 23	"The Lord is my shepherd"
Psalm 25:1,2a,4-10	"To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul"
Psalm 27:1,4-9,13,14	"The Lord is my light and my salvation"
Psalm 46:1-5,10	"God is our refuge and strength"
Psalm 84	"How lovely is thy dwelling place"
Psalm 95:1-7	"O come, let us sing unto the Lord"
Psalm 100	"Make a joyful noise to the Lord"
Psalm 139:1-12	"O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!"
Psalm 147:1-12	"Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing"
Isaiah 40:1,2a,28-31	"Comfort, comfort my people"

Additional Old Testament passages:

Psalm 1:1-3	Psalm 104 (selected)
Psalm 8:1a,3-8	Psalm 107 (selected)
Psalm 24:1-6	Psalm 130
Psalm 34:1-10,15,17-19,22a	Psalm 145 (selected)
Psalm 36:5-10	Psalm 148:1-13
Psalms 61-62 (selected)	Proverbs 31:10-31 (wife/mother)
Psalm 63:1-8	Isaiah 25:1,4,8-9; 26:3-4
Psalm 103 (selected)	Deuteronomy 32:1-3,7,9-12; 33:26-27a

Here are some of the more familiar New Testament passages:

Matthew 5:1-12	"Blessed are the poor in spirit"
Matthew 6:19-21,25-34	"Consider the lilies of the field"
John 10:7-16	"I am the good shepherd"
John 11:11-26a	"I am the resurrection and the life"
John 14:1-6a,23	"In my Father's house are many rooms"
Romans 8:14-18,28a,31-32,35,37-39	"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"
Romans 14:7-9	"None of us lives to himself"
I Corinthians 15:50-58	"O death, where is thy victory?"
II Corinthians 4:16-5:5	"We never become discouraged"
I John 4:7-16	"Beloved, let us love one another"

Here are additional New Testament passages:

Mark 10:13-16 (child)	I Thessalonians 4:13-18
John 3:16	II Timothy 4:7-8
I Corinthians 13	I Peter 1:3-9
Ephesians 3:14-21	Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1,5
Philippians 2:5-11	

PARTICIPANTS

If acceptable to the family of the deceased, I welcome family members, friends, and guest clergy to assist me in leading the service and particularly to share their remembrance of the deceased at the time of Personal Remembrance

ORGANIST and SOLOIST

For services held in our church, arrangements for an Organist are made through the Church's Organist and arrangements for any soloist are made through the Church's Music Director. All musical selections are subject to approval by the Minister.

REMEMBRANCES

This portion of the service is often better when it seeks to be suggestive, rather than exhaustive in commemorating and giving thanks for the life of the deceased. Here are several ways to add a more personal note to the service. A single item can be used, or several approaches can be combined.

- A special poem(s) is read in honor of the deceased
[An assortment of poems is available in my office]
- Statements of remembrance are presented by family or friends--or read by the Pastor on their behalf
- Eulogy given by the Pastor, developed from biographical and other information provided by the family
- An open invitation is given to the congregation for impromptu statements of remembrance
- A moment of individual reflection takes place in silence or as the organist softly plays one or two stanzas of special music
- Excerpts from family letters written by or to the deceased are read
- Excerpts from "sympathy" letters received following the death are read

**Love like the ocean is vast and forever,
And sorrow but a shadow that moves over the sea.
May the forever of Love,
soon bear the grief of this hour
Away from your hearts.**