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Help with planning a funeral service

“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8.38,39

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First of all, please accept our condolences at your recent bereavement. The death of a relative or friend is never an easy time and we will try and do all we can to help you.

A funeral marks the close of a human life on earth. It is the opportunity for friends and family to express their grief, to give thanks for the life which has now completed its journey in this world and to commend the person into God's keeping

The minister who will be conducting the funeral will be in touch with you very soon, but this booklet contains some information which we hope may help you. We have included the outline of the order of service, to help you know what will happen, as well as readings and hymns that you may want to include as a part of the service. The minister will talk to you in more detail about the different options when they talk to you about the funeral. We will seek to make the funeral service reflect something of the personality of the one who has died and the circumstances of their death. Feelings of grief, gratitude, joy and sadness often intermingle, but they are set in the context of the Christian hope of eternal life. We hope that this booklet will help you with planning the funeral.

The Order of service

The exact order of service will depend on whether the funeral you are arranging is being taken in church or in a crematorium as well as the choices you make in consultation with the minister.

Order of service if in church

- Music on entry to the church
- Sentences of Scripture and Welcome are given
- A Tribute including a Eulogy usually (and poem if required)
- Hymn (during the Covid Pandemic we are not to sing in church still)
- A psalm and or Bible reading followed by an Address by the Minister
- Hymn or other musical item (if required)
- Prayers, ending with the Lord's prayer
- Hymn
- Commendation of the deceased to God

Followed by a short and simple service at the crematorium or cemetery, committing the deceased's earthly remains to cremation.

Order of service in a crematorium

- Music on entry
- Sentences of Scripture and Welcome are given
- A Tribute including a Eulogy usually (and poem if required)
- Hymn (during the Covid Pandemic we are not to sing in church still)
- A psalm and or Bible reading followed by an Address by the Minister
- Prayers, ending with the Lord's prayer
- Hymn
- Commendation of the deceased to God
- Committal of the deceased's earthly remains to cremation
- Music on exit

Notes on the order of service

The service begins with short readings from the Bible ('Sentences of Scripture') which remind us of the hope of eternal life we have in God: "Jesus says 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believe in me will never die.'" These are normally said as the minister leads the coffin into the church or chapel. If you choose a piece of music to begin the service with, we would therefore normally prefer it to be an instrumental piece. Please talk to the minister about your choices.

It is common to have a family member or friend give a tribute or read a poem which reflects something of the deceased's life. We have included some poems and readings which may be appropriate later in this booklet. If you do not have a separate tribute, the minister will include a tribute as part of their address.

We have included some suggestions of hymns, Psalms and Bible readings later in the booklet.

You are welcome to choose either the modern or the traditional version of the Lord's prayer which is said as part of the service. The two versions are:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

There will be an opportunity to spend a short time listening to the piece of music at the end of service and it is therefore often appropriate to choose a piece of music which reflects something of the deceased's life.

As part of the committal (which is held at the crematorium), the curtain is normally closed around the coffin. In our experience, this is a helpful element of the service, which with the offering of prayer and the trust that the person is in God's safe hands can begin the process of healing the grief of loss.

Bible readings

The Bible tells us of God's care and love for us and of the hope of eternal life. The readings below are ones that are often chosen for funerals, although the minister will be happy to discuss different readings with you.

From John chapter 14 verses 1-6

Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. My Father's house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And, if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

From Revelation chapter 21 verses 1-7

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children."

From 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 14 to chapter 16 verse 10

Do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Psalms

The book of Psalms in the Bible is a collection of poems and songs which touch the full range of human emotion in all its heights and depths, its joys and sorrows, and pours out these feelings in prayer and praise to God. Individual psalms are therefore often very appropriate to use at funerals and have inspired many of the most-used hymns.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

From Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD watches over you—
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
the LORD will watch over your coming and
going

Hymns

There are many hymns which are appropriate for funerals, many based on Bible passages. We have included the first verse of a few of the more commonly chosen ones.

both now and forevermore.

All my longings lie open before you, Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.
LORD, I wait for you;
you will answer, Lord my God.
LORD, do not forsake me;
do not be far from me, my God.
Come quickly to help me,
my Lord and my Saviour.

From Psalm 103

The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the
earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from
us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who
fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

As for mortals, their days are like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's
children.

The Lord's my Shepherd (5 verses)

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us (3 verses)

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but Thee;
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.

Love Divine (3 verses)

Love Divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Poems and readings

There are also a variety of poems and other readings which people find express something of their feelings at the time of bereavement. We have included a few of the more popular and appropriate ones. Although popular, we would not recommend that you use either 'Death is nothing at all' or 'Do not stand at my grave and weep', as they do not really reflect the pain and reality of bereavement even in the light of the Christian hope of eternal life. One of the opening prayers at the funeral service talks of Jesus being moved to tears at the grave of Lazarus his friend, which recognises the pain of loss. We believe that these readings reflect both the pain and the hope we share.

What is Dying?

A ship sails and I stand
Watching till she fades on the horizon
And someone at my side says,
'She is gone'.
Gone where?
Gone from my sight, that is all;
She is just as large as when I saw her.
The diminished size and total loss of sight
Is in me, not in her,
And just at the moment
When someone at my side says
'She is gone'
There are others who are watching her
coming,
And other voices take up a glad shout

How great Thou art (4 verses and chorus)

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed;
Chorus

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

Abide with me (5 verses)

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

The day Thou gavest (5 verses)

The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,
The darkness falls at Thy behest;
To Thee our morning Hymns ascended,
Thy praise shall sanctify our rest.

'There she comes!'

And that is dying.

by Bishop Brent

You can shed tears that she is gone

You can shed tears that she is gone
Or you can smile because she has lived.

You can close your eyes and pray that she'll
come back

Or you can open your eyes and see all that she's left.

Your heart can be empty because you can't see her
Or you can be full of the love you shared.

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember her and only that she's gone
Or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what she'd want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.
by David Harkins (can be amended to 'he')

Footprints

One night I dreamed I was walking
Along the beach with the Lord,
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints.
Other times there was only one.
This bothered me because I noticed
During the low periods of my life when I was
Suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.
So I said to the Lord, 'You promised me,
Lord, that if I followed you,
You would walk with me always.
But I noticed during the most trying periods
Of my life there has only been

From *The Pilgrim's Progress*

I see myself now at the end of my journey; my toilsome days are ended. I am going now to see that head which was crowned with thorns, and that face which was spit upon for me. I have formerly lived by hearsay and faith, but now I go where I shall live by sight, and shall be with Him in whose company I delight myself. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of; and wherever I have seen the print of his shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my foot too. His name to me has been as a civet-box; yea, sweeter than all perfumes. His voice to me has been most sweet; and his countenance I have more desired than they that have most desired the light of the sun. His word I did use to gather for my food, and for antidotes against my faintings. He has held me, and has kept me from mine iniquities; yea, my steps hath he strengthened in his way.

One set of prints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most,
Have you not been there for me?'
The Lord replied,
'The times when you have seen only one set
of footprints
It was then that I carried you.'

The Divine Weaver

A man's life is laid in a loom of time
To a pattern he does not see.
While the Weaver works and the shuttles fly
Till the end of eternity.

Some shuttles are filled with silver thread,
And some with threads of gold;
While often but the darker hue
Is all that they may hold.
But the weaver watches with skilful eye
Each shuttle fly to and fro,
And sees the pattern so deftly wrought
As the loom works sure and slow.

God surely planned that pattern
Each thread - the dark and the fair -
Was chosen by his master skill
And placed in the web with care.
He only knows the beauty
And guides the shuttles which hold
The threads so unattractive
As well as the threads of gold.

Not till the loom is silent.
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the pattern
And explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful
In the weavers skilful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern he had planned.

Now, while he was thus in discourse, his countenance changed; his strong man bowed under him; and after he had said, 'Take me, for I come unto Thee!' he ceased to be seen of them.

But glorious it was to see how the open region was filled with horses and chariots, with trumpeters and pipers, with singers and players on stringed instruments, to welcome the pilgrims as they went up, and followed on another in at the beautiful gate of the city.

by John Bunyan

Finally

Funeral services always raise profound questions about the meaning of life and death. Jesus himself believed in a life-giving God: 'the God of the living, not of the dead.' We believe that Christ's resurrection is the triumph of good over evil and of life over death and has made eternal life available to us.

People who have lost someone close to them are often so busy with practical details and arrangements between the death and the funeral that they do not experience the full sense of their loss until later. Grieving is a natural and important part of coming to terms with and healing this loss and it may continue for some time. We are also here to help after the funeral as well as before. Do contact us at any stage if you would like someone to talk to. We will also be inviting you to our annual Service of Light where we will remember all those who have died, give thanks for their lives and give thanks to God who loves us so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to give us eternal life.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

Matthew 5:4

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