

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH FUNERAL & MEMORIAL SERVICE PLANNING GUIDE



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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A FUNERAL?

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 the hope of healing. The scriptures and sacraments are central in our worship. Everything that takes place during a funeral or memorial service must be consistent with Biblical principles of worship.

Prayer in funerals normally includes thanksgiving for the memory of the departed, intercession for comfort for family and friends who remain, and expression of our hope through the resurrection of Christ.

Worshippers are participants in the service. Therefore, singing hymns, confessing our faith, praying together, hearing the proclamation of God's Word, and sharing the peace of the Lord are all appropriate expressions of worship. Holy Communion may also be celebrated at a funeral. Since God is the object of worship, eulogizing a person in the worship service is discouraged.

IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Call one of our pastors or a staff member at the church office. They will help you with arrangements and bring comfort to you.

Call the funeral home of your choice. They will ask you to come to the funeral home later to make arrangements.

Put your trust in God for comfort and strength.

LOGISTICS

Funeral or Memorial Service? A funeral is when a casket or an urn is present; a memorial service is when there are no remains of the deceased present. A funeral is typically held before the burial or inurnment; a memorial service may be held after the burial or disposition of ashes. Either approach is appropriate.

Traditionally, after the funeral, there is a brief graveside service and committal. If there is to be no formal graveside ceremony, the words of committal may be included at the conclusion of the funeral service.

The sanctuary of the church is an ideal setting for a funeral. This is where the community's life of faith is lived out: here marriage vows are made, children are baptized and confirmed, communion is received, scripture is read and interpreted, prayers are offered up, and the people of God are nourished in their faith.

When funerals are held at St. Paul Church, a staff pastor and organist conduct the services. The officiating pastor will consult with the minister of music and the family in designing and celebrating the funeral service. Any special requests (such as special music, the inclusion of a guest minister, or family remarks) must be approved by the officiating pastor prior to the funeral.

For various reasons, the family may choose to have the funeral in the chapel of a funeral home or another location.

Civil ceremonies such as fraternal rites or military honors are not specifically part of the Christian funeral service. These organizations can pay tribute at another hour and place, such as prior to the church funeral or at a graveside ceremony.

PLANNING THE FUNERAL

The pastor will meet with the family to plan the service. Contact the church office at (920) 725-3961 as soon as possible to make arrangements and confirm the availability of the church, the pastor, and the organist. (If the office is closed for the day, the phone message will tell you how to contact a pastor in an emergency.)

The pastor will have suggestions for scriptures, hymns and other music, and will discuss the order of service with the family.

Many families wish to have a luncheon or reception following the service. This fellowship time is usually scheduled between the funeral service in the sanctuary and the graveside service at the cemetery. (A typical schedule for a late morning funeral would have visitation at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m.; funeral at 11:00 a.m.; luncheon around 12:00 noon; and graveside committal at 1:30 or 2:00 p.m.)

Our Fellowship Hall is an ideal place for the luncheon. These meals are catered in. (The funeral director can suggest various caterers in the area.) Our Hospitality Team will set up the dining area and serve the refreshments.

Other options: Some families make arrangements to meet at a nearby restaurant for the meal, particularly if a smaller turn-out is expected. If an afternoon or evening service is planned, the family may choose to have a more casual reception with coffee, desserts, and/or fruit, rather than a full sit-down meal. If the service is held in the funeral home chapel, the home itself may be able to host refreshments on site.

St. Paul provides a funeral pall to be used when there is a casket. (In the case of a cremation or a Memorial Service, the pall would not be used.)

We do not generally print bulletins for a funeral service unless the family so requests.

It is appropriate to hold a viewing or visitation in the narthex of the church prior to the service. The funeral director and pastor will work with the family in setting a visitation time. For the convenience of family and friends, this is often scheduled immediately prior to the service time and/or the night before.

PRE-PLANNING YOUR FUNERAL

Is it morbid to start planning your funeral while you're still alive? Not at all! It will prove to be of immense help if you have expressed or recorded your wishes before you die, take ill, or become incapacitated.

Just as people can make prior arrangements with a funeral home and cemetery association, it is a good idea to pre-plan the funeral service as well. Your pastor would be glad to help you do so. It will be a great benefit to your family in the event of your death if you have made some prior decisions that clearly express your wishes. It may be uncomfortable to think about these things, but it can spare your loved ones confusion or anxiety about your intentions.

For instance, there may be scripture passages and hymns that are particularly meaningful to you. Share them with your pastor, who will keep them on file in the church office. Share them also with close family members. Write down any advance directives in a place where they can be easily found.

THE BENEFITS OF A FUNERAL

A church funeral service is primarily an opportunity for the community to praise God, who has won us the victory over death by the resurrection of His Son.

The funeral is also a wonderful way to bring comfort and healing to those who mourn. The presence of family and friends gathered together can support and strengthen us in our sorrow. We can give thanks for the life and witness of the one who has passed away.

Children and grandchildren may learn things about their dear one that can remind them of qualities they can cultivate in the days ahead. A Christian funeral teaches us all how to deal with death and loss.

Occasionally people stipulate in their will that they do not wish to have a funeral service. While this is often intended to ease the burden on a family, as if to say, "Don't make a fuss over me," it usually does a disservice to the survivors. The family and friends may be torn between a desire to honor the wishes of the deceased, and a very real need for the comfort that a funeral or memorial service can provide. It is important to keep in mind that the funeral is not primarily for the dead, but for the living.

The funeral functions to give a sense of both celebration and closure to a person's life. In a way that may not happen otherwise, it makes death undeniable, and it makes the hope we have in Christ vividly real also. Spiritually and psychologically, it is used by God to bring us through the process of grieving, and to start the healing. It is not an ordeal to be gotten over with; rather, it is an avenue of God's grace, which never forsakes us. So we are to enter into it with an expectation of God's comfort and the easing of our pain through His grace.

WHAT IS THE BEST PLACE FOR A FUNERAL?

The church holds valuable memories of sacred events which serve to comfort those who mourn. The church is the place for all kinds of experiences throughout our lives, from the day of our baptism to the day of our funeral. So it's appropriate to gather in the sanctuary to receive God's comfort at such a time as this.

The church staff will endeavor to give priority to funeral arrangements. Previously scheduled meetings and regular building use can often be adjusted if necessary to make that happen.

The funeral home is also an appealing and accessible place for the service. Its environment can indeed hold out comfort for a sorrowing family. Yet its only associations are with death, and not the full gamut of life celebrations.

St. Paul Lutheran Church is a sanctuary, not a rental hall. It is where the community of faith worships. For our members it is natural that their final ceremony should be in this space. In the case of the death of an immediate family member of one of our active church members, a church funeral may also be arranged as a ministry to the family. For non-members who desire our services, the pastors will work with the family and the funeral director in making arrangements at the funeral home.

WHAT DO I SAY WHEN FRIENDS COME TO CALL?

Thank them for their kindness. Often friends don't know quite what to say to the bereaved. They may say some things that sound disagreeable or even hurtful. But receive their comfort as from the Lord, and listen to it for God's voice speaking to you through them. Be thankful for their presence. Don't be afraid to talk with them about your loved one or to tell them what you need from them.

People sincerely want to help. Let them help you in whatever ways seem appropriate. Be patient with their shortcomings. Recognize that others too have been touched by your loss.

WHAT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE WILL HELP ME THE MOST?

The Word of God can be a source of great comfort and strength to you, as it has been for many generations.

Many of the Old Testament Psalms ring with raw lament and high hope. Read:

Ps. 22	Ps. 23	Ps. 27	Ps. 31	Ps. 39
Ps. 42	Ps. 46	Ps. 90	Ps. 103	Ps. 118
Ps. 121	Ps. 139			

The New Testament points us to the promise we have in Christ. Read:

John 11:25-26	John 12:23-26	John 14:1-6
Romans 8:35-39	Romans 14:7-8	I Corinthians 15:51-57
II Corinthians 5	I Peter 1	Revelation 21:1-7

HOW LONG WILL THIS DEEP SORROW THAT I AM FEELING LAST?

Be patient with yourself. Sometimes when we think we have overcome deep hurt, it returns again with little provocation. But grieve with each successive stage of your sorrow. Don't be afraid to weep and to tell God how you feel. All your emotions are legitimate. Seek the Lord in prayer and ask for His comforting help.

It may take many months until you feel like yourself again. That is not unusual. With the loss of a spouse, parent, child, or sibling, it may take a year to two years to get past the worst of the grief. If sorrow persists in a deep and agonizing way beyond that point, speak with your pastor and find some further help.

HOW MUCH DOES A FUNERAL COST?

This will vary depending on how simple or elaborate your plans are. Your funeral director will be able to discuss various options with you regarding caskets or cremation and related expenses for the services they provide.

For active members of St. Paul Church, there is no fee for the use of the church building for a funeral, nor is there a fee for staff services. The pastor and music minister, as full-time staff, will lead the worship service without charge to our members, for this is an integral part of our ministry to one another. Still, though this is not required of our members, many families wish to give an honorarium to the pastor and the organist. The funeral director can suggest some guidelines.

Soloists and any additional musicians should be compensated for their time. For non-member funerals, the officiating pastor should be compensated appropriately.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE FUNERAL?

St. Paul Church provides ongoing consolation to its people during the bereavement. There will be follow-up communications. There is a support group that meets regularly. There is a staff-created booklet available entitled "*Good Grief.*" Your pastors will be happy to provide counseling and visiting to you as needed.

One of the best things that families can do following a funeral is to return to church for Sunday services, so that they may enjoy the fellowship and strength of the faith community as it gathers around Word and sacrament.

REMEMBER . . .

The Christian funeral is ultimately a testimony to the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over the powers of sin and death. It thus draws attention not primarily to the deceased but to the Triune God, who has claimed us in baptism, and does not forsake us. We are comforted in Christ with peace such as the world cannot give. A Christian funeral is a fitting climax to an earthly life that has been lived in trust and obedience to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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AND
THE LIFE**



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