

A HANDBOOK TO HELP YOU PREPARE

On the Issues of Death and Dying

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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

The purpose of this handbook is to help you deal, from a Christian perspective, with many of the issues of death and dying while there is enough time to consider and reflect. This handbook is divided into the following headings:

- A) A Christian Perspective of Death,
- B) A Christian Perspective of the Burial Services,
- C) Call Your Pastor,
- D) Organ Donation, Earth Burial, Cremation,
- E) Choosing a Funeral Home,
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- H) Prepaid Funerals and Funeral Insurance,
- I) The Services for the Burial of the Dead,
 - 1. Funeral Chapel, Church, or Gravesite,
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 - 12. Visitation, and Viewing the Body,
- J) Children and Death and Funerals, and,
- K) Checklist for the Funeral Home Visit

Read the entire handbook. **Reflect** on the issues and opinions given. Carry out any suggestions that are appropriate for you. **Fill out** the worksheets. **Return** a copy of the Services Worksheet to the church office and place a copy of the Financial Worksheet with your will. **Send** a copy of the Living Will to your doctor and place a copy with your will. **Sit down** with the person who will be charged with carrying out your wishes after your death, tell him or her of the location of your documents and **discuss** your wishes.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH

Before we were born, as we lay in our mother's womb, our lives were contentment. There were no loud noises, no sharp edges, no severe temperatures, no worries of tomorrow, no concern about food and clothing. We could almost hear our mother's voice as it resonated down through the amniotic fluid. We could hear our mother's heart beat. We knew her love. She cared for us in every way. Life was good.

This life was ended by our births. Had we been asked, we would, no doubt, have said, "No, thank you very much. I do not want to be born. I like it here. Though dimly, I see my mother here and though vaguely, I know her sure love."

"Come out," the doctor said, "You will like it out here. You can see your mother face to face and know her more deeply."

The doctor was right. The voice of our mother, that we could almost hear, is now clear. Her love that we knew in her heartbeat and protection, we now know in presence and closer relationship.

In our lives we have come to know God. We can almost audibly hear his voice through the written and proclaimed gospel. He cares for us in all things. We sense his presence in the beating of the waves on the shore. We have experienced his love in countless ways. Life is good.

This life will, for all of us, be ended by our death. Once again, given the choice, we would no doubt respond, "No, thank you very much. I do not want to die. I like it here. Though dimly, I see my God here, and though vaguely, I know his sure love."

"Do not be afraid," Jesus, the great physician says, "Death has lost its sting. Come. You will like it here. You will see me face to face and know me more deeply."

In the end, this is the Christian perspective of death. It is simply being

born again for the last time. We will be born into heaven and God's presence.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11: 25,26)

Because of our belief in Jesus Christ, we know that the one who has died is happy and with God. We mourn then, for ourselves and not for the deceased. We will miss them. Our lives will never be the same and so we are sad and often afraid.

When Jesus saw all the mourning and how sad everyone was because Lazareth had died, he too wept. He did not weep for Lazareth. He knew that he would soon raise Lazareth from the grave. He wept for the sadness of the mourners. Lazareth was raised, and so shall our loved ones be raised. We mourn our loss even as Jesus mourns with us.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE OF THE SERVICES FOR THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

The Christian Burial Services are services of worship where, unlike non-Christian services, the sure and certain hope of our resurrection because of our Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed. The services are also a time of pain, of mourning and of loss. Into this sadness and confusion the celebration of life eternal brings clarity and hope.

There are several different and appropriate services for the burial of the dead. The **Funeral Service** is held at a place set aside for worship (usually a church or funeral chapel) and the casket is present. It may, or may not be followed by a Committal Service at the graveside. The **Memorial Service** is also held at a place set aside for worship but the casket is not present and the service may or may not be preceded or followed by a Committal Service at the graveside. The **Graveside Service** is a combining of the Funeral Service and the Committal Service at the gravesite. The **Committal Service** is a very brief service at the gravesite to commend the deceased to the ground.

Because all of the Christian services of the burial of the dead are centered around the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sure and certain hope of the resurrection into eternal life of the deceased, anything that detracts from this message of hope is not appropriate. Therefore, extended eulogizing, videotapes of the life of the deceased, secular music, fraternal and social organizations' rites, and secular readings have no place during a Christian burial service.

CALL YOUR PASTOR!

When a Loved one is dying or has died, call your pastor. Your pastor can come to your home or the hospital and share your and your family's grieving. Your pastor can also be a great resource in dealing with the perfunctory business of a death. Your pastor can also be present when you speak to the funeral director.

If it is not possible to have the pastor present in the hospital or funeral home, make sure to call the church office to be sure that the church and/or social hall and/or pastor is available for the date and time you would like to select for the services.

ORGAN DONATION, EARTH BURIAL, CREMATION

Each Sunday in our worship service, we proclaim to one another that we believe in the "**resurrection of the body.**" By this we are saying two things.

First, we refer to the "**Body of Christ,**" his bride, his church. In essence, we are saying that we believe that on the day when Christ comes again, all believers will be raised up to be with him.

Second, we refer to our **new imperishable spiritual bodies** bearing the image of Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15: 41-50) In this way, we, as members of the Body of Christ, will be raised.

While we are alive, our physical bodies have value. They are gifts from our God. They are temples of God's presence. They house our souls. They are the means by which we serve our god. When we have died, our bodies return to their original state. David writes in Psalm 103: 13-16:

- 13 As a father is kind to his children,
So the Lord is kind to those who honor him.
- 14 He knows what we are made of,
He remembers that we are dust.

- 15 As for us, our life is like grass,
 We grow and flourish like a wild flower;
16 Then the wind blows on it and it is gone--
 No one sees it again.

The great majority of people in America prefer an **Earth Burial**. There is comfort for those who remain to have a place to go, and visit, and remember, and mourn. The gravestone marks the name and the years of the deceased, bearing witness to the importance of his or her life.

A growing number of Christians are choosing a **Reverent Cremation**. They often cite the issues of the proper stewardship of the earth and financial resources and the inherent glorification of the physical body with an earth burial, as reasons for their decision.

Both are acceptable to the Lutheran Church. What matters in both is that the entire funeral reflect our belief in the resurrection of the body by Jesus Christ.

We can serve God in both life and death. The need for **Organ Donors** to save and improve the lives of others is critical. In life we serve God by saving and improving the lives of others. We can do the same in death by becoming an organ donor.

It is important to make this decision prior to your death. Should an accident occur, haste must be given to the transportation of your donated organs to those whose lives hang in the balance. There is no time for your family to make this decision after your death. The DMV will make a notation on your driver's license of your decision so that those who need to know, will know.

If you have any questions concerning this, call your pastor or doctor.

CHOOSING A FUNERAL HOME

Most people choose a funeral home by remembering which home handled the funeral of a friend or relative. They were polite, professional, helpful and reasonably priced so one goes back to them. This is no longer a good way to choose a funeral home.

In most areas, virtually every funeral home has changed hands in the last 10 years, some more than once. Outside, national, and international companies have bought up some. Others have been bought up by one local funeral home owner. And still others have been simply traded, one for another.

Service, quality, and cost vary greatly. Because keeping track of who owns which home is difficult at best, and because comparison shopping is next to impossible, before you choose a funeral home, ask your pastor. Your pastor works with all of them and can answer any questions that you may have.

CHOOSING A PASTOR

Immanuel's policy for the use of her sanctuary includes the use of her **pastor**. There is never a charge for the use of the buildings nor for the pastor, but it is a package deal. One can not "rent" the building without the pastor as if the sanctuary were a town hall.

The major exception to this rule is that the pastors of Easton Southern Baptist, St. Jude's Roman Catholic, Easton United Presbyterian, and any ELCA pastor are invited to use our facilities as if their own.

GETTING YOUR LEGAL AFFAIRS IN ORDER

Wills

A **will** is a legal document that determines disposition of your estate. With a will in place you can pre-determine who among your friends and family will receive what specific effects and/or all or a percentage of your estate. In your will you can designate an executor, the person who will see that your last wishes are carried out. This person can be given a great deal of latitude or very little. This person can be a friend, family member, or your lawyer.

A will can include your wishes concerning the guardianship of your children. You can also designate that charitable organizations and/or your church's memorial fund receive all or part of your estate.

Enclosed with this workbook is a simple will form that is legal in all fifty states.

Designation of Legal Guardianship for Minor Children

If one has minor children or has **legal guardianship of minor children** and would like to have some say in who will be their legal guardians should they become no longer able to carry out those duties, one must communicate those wishes to the courts.

Enclosed with this workbook is a document for Designation for Legal Guardianship for Minor Children. Fill it out and place a copy with your will and one with the people whom you have chosen.

Living Wills (Statement of Personal Desires)

A **Living Will** is a document that gives instructions to your medical providers should you ever be in a position where you can not communicate clearly.

In California a Living Will is not legally binding. It can be made legally binding in California by including it with the Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care.

Everyone should have a Living Will however, it is particularly important, that the elderly have a Living Will in place. Should it become necessary to make medical decisions concerning allowing life to end, it is a great kindness to one's loved ones (those on whom the decision will fall) if one's wishes have been communicated in written, legal form to the doctor.

Enclosed with this work book is a Living Will. Take time to fill it out and discuss it with your family.

Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care

This is the newest and best California document. It allows you to **name an agent to carry out your health care wishes**. Your agent will talk to your doctor for you when you are not able to speak for yourself.

Enclosed with this work book is a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. Take time to fill it out and discuss it with your family. Place a copy with your will and give a copy to the person whom you have chosen as your agent.

Revocable Trusts

One way to avoid probate, many of the inheritance taxes, and much of the legal delays, costs and entanglements that can occur when one dies, is to set up a **Revocable Trust** in which to place all of one's assets. One then becomes the trustee of the Trust until one's death when the person designated becomes the trustee.

This is becoming a widely used device, however, you will need the help of a lawyer to decide if a trust is appropriate for you and to set it up.

PREPAID FUNERALS AND FUNERAL INSURANCE

Prepaid Funerals

There are many people making a living by trying to sell you a prepaid funeral. They market it as a way to "not be a burden on your loved ones." Here is what generally happens:

The salesperson asks a few questions about the funeral service for which you would like to prepay. (eg. Which casket would you like? Do you want the use of a limo?) He or she will then figure out how much that funeral would cost if it were today. You then invest that amount of money through them and when you die, they guarantee that account will pay for the funeral you ordered. (There are many variations on this scenario, but this one is representative.)

It sounds good, even caring. **Should you do it? I believe, no,** and here is why.

- 1) If you take that same amount of money and put it in a bank your survivors will have plenty to pay for your service and, chances are, have enough left over to make a donation to your favorite charity,
- 2) If you leave your wishes about your funeral service with your pastor, you can be assured that you will receive the service you want, and,
- 3) Prepaid funeral salespeople are commissioned. Their primary concern is to get your money, and the more the better. More often than not, the paperwork is incomplete or poorly done and your survivors are forced to remake all the decisions that you pre-made.

If you would like to pre-pay for your funeral, it would be better for you, in my opinion, to take \$5,000.00 and put it in a timed savings account in your and your executor's name, and give the pass book to your executor. Tell him/her that your pastor knows what you want in a funeral service and to give any monies that are left over to your favorite charity.

Funeral Insurance

Funeral insurance is nothing more than term life insurance sold in a fancy, quilt provoking, package. If you would like to help pay for your own funeral and you don't have savings to cover it, call your AAL or LB agent (They have term life insurance for Lutherans at the industry's best rates) and take out \$5,000.00 in term life. You will be money ahead and be doing business with a company that cares about you and yours.

THE SERVICES FOR THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Funeral Chapel, Church, or Gravesite only

The normal place of worship for a Christian is the **Church**. The church is where we were baptized, confirmed, married, and communed. It is there that we should be put to rest.

Sometimes the **Funeral Chapel** is considered, despite the added expense, for logistical reasons or for its proximity to the gravesite. The Funeral Chapel is sometimes thought, erroneously, to be more appropriate for the unbeliever. However, the message of Jesus Christ, His resurrection and ours, and being in the house of His worship are just as important at the services of a non-believer as at those of a believer.

A **Rest Home Hall** may also be used to facilitate more friends attending.

The service of committal, if there is one, is always held at the **gravesite**. For reasons of logistics it can also be appropriate if all the services take place at the gravesite resulting in a less formal, simpler service referred to as Graveside Services.

Funeral Service, Memorial Service

After deciding whether or not to use the church or the funeral chapel, one must now decide what type of services to have conducted. At a Funeral Service the casket is present. At a Memorial Service it is not. Both services are very similar except in this aspect. Because the casket is not present at a memorial service it is easier for the congregation to focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sure and certain hope of eternal life. Because the casket is present at a funeral service, it is easier for the congregation to focus on the death of their loved one and his or her life. Both of these issues are dealt with at both services. It is only an issue of focus or emphasis.

There are four usual ways of conducting the services for the burial of the dead:

- A) A memorial or funeral service followed by a graveside committal service. *(This is the most formal and traditional.)*
- B) A private graveside committal service followed by a memorial service. *(A very close-knit family might choose this to allow time to mourn together.)*
- C) A memorial or funeral service only. *(Perhaps the gravesite is out-of-town or the body was cremated)*
- D) A graveside service only. *(A less formal, simpler service is possible. Also, non-religious people often feel more comfortable with this.)*

In making this decision, consider those who will be attending the service as well as the deceased and his or her family. There are no rules nor right and wrong, only issues to consider. All services conducted by your pastor will be Lutheran Christian worship services.

Music

Regardless of where a service is held, a Lutheran Christian service for the burial of the dead is always a place where Christian music is appropriate. Music is one of God's best ways of healing and comforting. The music needs to be selected carefully. There is no place during a Christian burial service for secular music as it draws us away from Jesus and his resurrection. A person's "favorite song" or other non-Christian music could be played before the service begins as long as it does not present an anti-Christian message.

A normal Lutheran funeral or memorial service has one or two solos and one or two hymns sung by the congregation.

Gravestone, Graves, and Body Shipping

Gravestones are normally purchased by the family. One can be purchased directly from a gravestone manufacturer (look in the yellow pages under "Monuments") or through your funeral director. Most cemeteries have restrictions on the size and shape of the grave marker so one needs to consult with the cemetery before making a purchase.

The **gravesite** is purchased directly from the cemetery. The funeral director can help with communicating your need to the cemetery personnel but generally it will be necessary for the plot to be purchased at the cemetery. At the time of the death there is also a fee for opening and closing the grave, paid to the cemetery.

It happens from time to time that a person dies a significant distance from where he or she will be interred. The funeral director needs to handle all of the arrangements for this as there are special laws regulating the **shipping of a body**.

Obituaries, Eulogies

It is appropriate at the burial services to remember the life of the deceased. It helps one to grieve and come to grips with the reality of the death. There are two vehicles used to accomplish this.

The **obituary** is a brief listing of the major events of the deceased's life. Usually included in this are:

- The date and place of birth,
- The date and place of baptism, (if applicable)
- The date and place of marriage, (if applicable),
- The names of family members surviving, (if applicable)
- The major accomplishments,
- The occupation(s), and
- The church and organization involvement.

The pastor usually reads the obituary at the beginning of the service.

The **eulogy** also remembers the deceased, however, in a much more

personal, anecdotal way. A close friend or family member may reflect on his or her favorite memory with the deceased or reflect on how the deceased will be remembered.

This is not a time for remembering negative behaviors or attributes.

This is best given by a friend or relative, someone who knew the deceased well. The pastor could give the eulogy if he/she knew the deceased well or read one prepared by someone else. Eulogies usually are given at the very beginning of the service.

It is **not appropriate**, however, for either the obituary nor the eulogy to be too long or to dominate the service. The main purpose of the burial services is to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the sure and certain hope of life everlasting. A brief obituary and a eulogy of no more than five minutes is acceptable.

Caskets, Casket Sprays, and the Casket Pall

One of the most difficult and emotionally confusing times in the entire process is when the family is asked to pick out a **casket**. One is usually led into a room by the funeral director which is filled with coffins. They are made of many different materials and vary greatly in cost. Some are metal, some are wood and some are cloth-covered particle board. Some seal and some don't. Some have moveable handles and brick-a-brack. Some come with 25 or 50 year guarantees. **Most of the differences (or perhaps all of them) are irrelevant to our Christian beliefs.** There is no right nor wrong choice. Make a choice that you are comfortable with.

The flowers that are placed on the casket are called a **casket spray**. It is usual that the family purchase it. An alternative to the casket spray is the **casket pall**. This is a white altar cloth that is placed over the casket before and during the services.

Scripture

There are many scriptures that lend themselves well to be used at a service for the burial of the dead. Perhaps the most important would be the deceased's favorite Bible story or verse, one known by heart or with special significance. Verses that are commonly used are:

Psalms 16, 23, 42, 46, 90, 103, 118, 121, 143,

Matt. 11: 25-30, 25: 1-13,

Luke 12: 35-40,

John 5: 24-29, 6: 37-40, 11: 21-27, 14: 1-6,

Romans 5: 1-11, 17-21, 8: 31-39,

1 Cor. 15: 12-26,

1 Pet. 1: 3-9,

Revelation 7: 9-17, 21: 2-7,

Job 19: 23-27, and,

Isaiah 25: 6-9, 61: 1-3.

Your pastor can be a big help with this.

Outside Organizations

Many people belong to social, fraternal, or civic groups that would like to conduct short ceremonies at the death of one of their faithful members. Though there is no place for these rites in the church or during a Christian worship service, it can be arranged for their secular rites to be conducted at the funeral chapel before the Christian memorial service begins or at the graveside either prior to or after the committal service.

Please contact your pastor before making any arrangements.

Flowers, No Flowers, and Memorials

Many people would like to show their condolences by remembering the deceased with **flowers** or a contribution to the deceased church or favorite charity.

If the decision is not made prior to death it falls on the family to decide if "**no flowers**" will be requested or where **memorials** should be sent. Some choose "no flowers" (this generally does not include the casket spray, that is normally purchased by the family) because they feel that a more appropriate memorial gift would be one that supported the church or charity that was important to the deceased in life.

Immanuel, like most churches, has a Memorial Fund out of which special items are purchased at the church council's discretion as special needs arise.

Meal Afterwards

Especially when mourners come from out-of-town, but also after any burial service, it is appropriate that there be a place and time of fellowship and remembering. Many people have come long distances and haven't seen each other for long periods of time. Many also would like a time to speak their condolences to the family. It has become normal to invite the mourners to a light meal or refreshments after the services.

The responsibility for this generally falls on the family. Please know that Immanuel's social hall is virtually always available without cost and that the Women's group at Immanuel is open to serving either donated or catered food. Some choose, for convenience or logistics, to use a family member's home and this too is appropriate.

Casket, Open or Closed

At a Christian service the emphasis is on the imperishable spiritual body and not the physical body. It is inappropriate, therefore, to have the casket open during the funeral service because it constantly draws the mourners thoughts toward the physical and away from the spiritual.

When a funeral service at the church precedes the committal, it can be decided to have the **casket opened** and in the back of the church preceding the service so that mourners can pay their last respects while entering the sanctuary.

When both the memorial service and the committal service are at the gravesite, the casket can be opened prior to the service and then **closed** to begin the service, or closed the entire time.

Visitation; Viewing the Body

Psychologists who deal with the issues of death and dying, tell us that **it is easier for us to deal with the reality of the death of a loved one if we have actually seen his or her dead body**. As harsh as this sounds, it is true. It is also true that for those who are left, life goes on. We must lay our loved one to rest in the ground but also in our hearts so that we can get on with our lives.

It is only when the death of our loved one becomes real to us that we can properly deal with its impact on us. For this reason, a time of **visitation** (usually the day prior to the services) can be very healthy for those who were close to the deceased. It can be a time of deep mourning and sadness. You may want to ask loved ones or your pastor to be there with you to support you and share your sadness.

Children and Death

My son's rodent died recently. He was devastated. He mourned as you and I might mourn a close friend. I had read that it is good for children to experience the death of a pet without parents jumping in to save them. (eg. going out immediately and buying a new one, or trying to take their minds off of it with games or presents or trips.) In experiencing mourning on this scale, children learn that grief is something that with time and hugs can be overcome and lived through.

This made sense to me, so I escorted my sons and a neighborhood friend out to the back yard for the rodent's funeral. He wept as he dug the grave and drove the cross into the ground, but the real grieving came as each one of us said, "Good bye. Thank-you for being my friend." I was asked if there was an animal heaven and said that I hoped so. It was a sad time, even I got wrapped up into the sadness.

Experiencing this helped my children learn many things. My sons now know that they are strong enough to survive sadness. They also understand a little about funerals and mourning. They know that dead is gone from this earth and that family and friends can help. They know that time heals.

Every child is different and every child's family is different. There are no rules that apply to every child. Some good advice would be to listen to your child and base your decisions and actions and statements around the child's needs and not your own.

CHECKLIST FOR THE FUNERAL HOME VISIT

Legal name _____

Nick Name _____

Address _____

Occupation _____

Highest Level of Education Achieved _____

Place of Birth _____

Date of Birth _____

Social Security Number _____

Father's Name _____

Place of Birth _____

Mother's Name _____

Place of Birth _____

_____ Clothes to be worn in the casket

_____ Jewelry to be worn in the casket

_____ Recent picture

Military ID Number _____

Military Discharge Date _____

Name of Spouse _____ of _____

Names of Children _____ of _____

Names of Siblings _____ of _____

of Grandchildren _____ # of Great Grandchildren _____

Pall Bearers _____, _____, _____,
_____, _____, _____.

Designation of Memorials _____

_____ Worksheet/Pre-planner for the Services