

# A Guide to Understanding Christian Funerals

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## INTRODUCTION

A funeral is often a very difficult time for families. This funeral guide is intended to help in the pre-planning of a funeral, or to help families who are presently dealing with a funeral, so that they might be better prepared when they meet with the Pastors to design a funeral service.

It is helpful to remember that a funeral is, first and foremost, a worship service. As in any worship service held at Peace Lutheran Church or led by its Pastors, the primary focus is on our Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. In the context of this we also remember the one who has died. Our prayer for every funeral is that faith in Jesus Christ would be renewed and that God would be glorified.

## ARRANGEMENTS

When a loved one dies or is close to death usually the Pastor is called to make a visit. The Pastor brings the comfort of God's Word to the dying and the surviving in the presence of the shadow of death. If the occasion permits, the family can make preliminary arrangements for a funeral with the Pastor at that time. When the Pastor is available, when the church is available and/or the fellowship hall, when the funeral home will have the body ready, cemetery arrangements for the committal, reception arrangements all have to be coordinated. So giving some pre-thought to what Funeral Home, cemetery to use, and where the reception might be, and where the food will come from, can certainly help in preparing for this difficult time. Sometime when death comes unexpectedly, the family is left scrambling to make arrangements, or the funeral is delayed until all the arrangements have been made. Sometimes the arrangements become so important that the family does not have time to properly grieve. So keeping things as simple as possible, as timely as possible, is the best way to go. We encourage families to talk to their Pastor a head of time

## BURIAL OR CREMATION

Both are acceptable practices today. What is important is that God is thanked for the body and that the body is returned to the place from which it came, that is, 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. Burying the remains has always been a great Christian tradition because it reminds us of the Biblical image of sowing or planting a seed, and then that seed coming back to life, in the resurrection. For some families having the body prepared for a viewing before the funeral service is important to provide closure to those who might need it. For others, they want to remember their loved ones as living. Whatever the case, the body or remains should not be kept. They belong to the Lord and thus should be returned and buried in anticipation of the resurrection.

## STRUCTURE OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE

A funeral service at Peace Lutheran Church includes the following basic elements.

**Songs** - A funeral service normally has three or four hymns or songs. Why? Because it is a Christian tradition to sing in the face of death. This goes way back to when Paul and Silas were imprisoned in a dungeon in Philippi awaiting their execution. "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them." (Acts 16:25) Special music such as solos are fine as long as the song selection is approved by the Pastor. The Pastor can provide a list of suitable songs for a Christian funeral.

**Remembrance** – Often called a eulogy, or a tribute. This is often done by the family, or prepared by the family and read by the Pastor. It should be short and to the point. Remembrances are not required elements in a Lutheran funeral service. However, the goal of a eulogy, if present, is to give a brief summary of the individual's life in Christ and present the hope and faith they had in life. Should the family desire such a tribute, it is understood that it's content be approved by the Pastor before the funeral. Some families like to do a slide show before the service. This is quite fine, as long as it is not too long. If the family wishes to have a number of people give tributes and/or tell stories of their loved one, that is a longer time for remembrance, then that could be done during the luncheon in the fellowship hall after the service.

**The Word of God** in its various forms: Liturgy, readings, the Apostles' Creed – (which is brief statement of the Christian faith), Pastor's Message, Prayers and Lord's Prayer, Blessing are all essentials to a funeral service.

A note about the internment or cremation is usually printed in the worship folder. A note about memorials helps family and friends direct memorial gifts according to the family's wishes.

### **A Note on Christian Estate Planning**

In the Holy Scriptures, God's people are encouraged to set aside a portion of their resources as thanks to Him for the many rich blessings He provides. As part of this process, many of God's people also set aside a portion of their estate for the Lord's work. These resources represent a portion of what the Lord has enabled them to acquire during their lifetime. As Christians, our greatest blessing is living each day with the promise of eternal life, made available to us through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Given all these blessings, it's natural to give thanks all the way through our life's journey. Setting aside a gift for the Lord's work as part of our estate planning is a way of saying thanks to our Lord one final time, and a way of sharing God's blessings with ministries that are important to us. Our planned gift allows us to contribute to a ministry that's important to us, so that these ministries might continue their work for years to come.

You May Find The Following Helpful:

(1) Information on wills and estates in the form of a wills check-up helps establish a clear plan with regard to the steps to take in completing your estate planning. [Wills Checkup](#)

(2) Some Christians choose to include a Christian preamble as an opening paragraph in their will. This is a simple way of witnessing to your faith at a critical time.

(3) Power of attorney issues are an important consideration. This has to do with having a trusted individual deal with your business and financial affairs should you be unable to do so yourself. This is an area where the assistance of a lawyer is very helpful.

(4) A Healthcare Directive enables health care professionals to know your preferences in terms how you would like your medical care to be handled should you be critically ill. A lawyer's assistance is not required with this document. ([Link to Health\\_Care\\_Directive / Health\\_Care\\_Directive\\_pt2](#)

(5) The Lutheran Foundation Canada has some excellent planned giving tools on their website. It's located at [www.lutheranfoundation.ca](http://www.lutheranfoundation.ca). Examples of planned gifts are found [here](#). This site notes the process by which publicly traded shares may be gifted to an organization. In 2006, the Canadian federal government removed the capital gains tax on publicly traded shares when they are gifted to a registered charity.

(6) The Lutheran Foundation Canada also has gift coordinators available to assist you in your planned giving. There is no cost for this service. The website has more information.