

# A FUNERAL SERVICE



## ***How To Conduct A Funeral***

A good funeral requires the sensitivity and comfort only a minister can provide. Families have just lost loved ones, either tragically taken or have suffered through long illnesses. They are searching for comfort. No matter how old a person has lived or how long a family has prepared for the departure of their loved ones, it is still “too sudden” for many family members.

There are times in the minister’s life when they called upon him to comfort a family. These may be during times of disasters, senseless deaths involving crimes, the death of a child, the loss of the main provider in the home, wartime casualties, etc. Family member often are looking for answers or reasons why this has just happened, as well as seeking comfort.

The role of the pastor is vital during these crucial times. A pastor’s role is more than just speaking words of comfort, it is listening and being there when family members need you the most.

New pastors often feel uncomfortable and unsure whether their words will bring comfort. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you along the way. The most important thing you can do is to allow them to know you care and are there for them. Before leaving their home, hospital, or funeral home, make sure you have a time of prayer with them.

Listed below are ideas that may be able to help you during this time. Again, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you prepare for this homecoming ceremony.

- Meet with the family. Tell them who you are in case they are not all familiar with you. Let them know that you will be conducting the ceremony.



- If you are not familiar with the person you are conducting the service for, get to know them. Spend time with the family. Allow them to share things about the deceased person. It is good for people to talk. It allows people to grieve and honour that person. Visit with friends of the deceased and ask them for special stories or memories of the deceased, this will help you get a better idea of who the person was and give you materials for your message.
- Personalize your message! This is not a 3 part sermon. Use stories and illustrations that family and friends have shared. Funerals are more about the living and helping them. It is also a time to honour their loved one.
- Look at all the elements that go into a service and see what the family wants to include and not include. These are the elements, other pastors they want to be involved in the service, special songs, music, poems, or scripture readings, obituary, testimonials, sermon, and benediction.
- Decide on scripture readings that either meant something to the person who died or that you think will bring comfort to the family. In some cases you will want to use both of these types of scriptures.
- Before the service, ask the family if there is anyone who wants to give a testimony or eulogy about the person who has died. Be sure to give that person as much help as he or she wants or needs.
- Choose music that will lift the spirits of those in the congregation. Also be mindful that if there was a special hymn that meant something to the person who died and is appropriate, use it.
- Be mindful in your sermon that this is a time to express what the person meant to his family as well as, how much his family meant to him. Share the stories of the deceased life's at this time.



- Before the actual service, have a special prayer with the family.
- Seating will be conducted by the funeral home. Be sure to ask the congregation to stand when family members are being seated to honour them. You can do this by standing and using your hands to signal for congregation to stand and when to sit down.
- Don't be jealous or insecure when working with other ministers. Get to know them before the service. Be sure you pronounce their name correctly.
- Be sure you pronounce all family names properly. Go over the obituary beforehand and ask family members how to pronounce other family member's names. Make notes to ensure the correctness.
- After the service has concluded, the funeral home directors will either open the casket or take it out to the foyer or cemetery. If there is an open casket, it is customary for the minister to stand and greet the people viewing the deceased for the last time. A minister will be standing at the end of the open casket.
- After the viewing has been completed and the funeral directors have closed the casket, lead those carrying the casket out to the hearse. Sometimes you may be the one to open the door of the hearse. Sometimes the minister will ride in the hearse to the cemetery. Driving your personal car is permitted.
- Again, lead the ones carrying the casket to the burial plot. At the burial plot, stand at the head of the casket if possible. (Be careful of where you step and stand. The ground may be soft.)
- At the cemetery, allow time for everyone to be seated before beginning. Sometimes the funeral director will indicate when it is time to begin. Be mindful of the weather. If there is a tent, get as many people under the tent as possible.



- A short message at the cemetery is customary. If more than one minister conducts the service with you, allow them to give scripture, recite a poem, or perhaps sing a hymn. Provide a short message, such as reading Psalms 23 and sharing additional words of comfort. Most ministers suggest a message of about 5 minutes.
- Be sure to shake hands and give encouraging words with immediate family members. Remain to greet others and be available for family members. Give them your card and ask them to call if they need you.

## **TIPS:**

- It is customary for the church to provide a meal. Delegate this to someone in charge. Mention this to the family during the process of gathering stories or comforting the family.
- Talk slowly and be sensitive of their loss. People grieve differently. Offer the assurance and comfort through Jesus Christ.
- Check back with family members the days before the funeral as well as after the funeral. Allow them to know you and tell them that the church cares for their feelings and loss.
- Provide materials/books on grieving if needed. Provide counselling or suggest a Christian counsellor if needed.



# A FUNERAL SERVICE

## Preparation

The preparation for a funeral is the most important part of that a minister of the gospel can be involved with. The following is a general approach that can help you step into what is always a difficult situation.



### **1Talk to the family.**

Call the family and arrange to meet them, preferably in their home. Meeting them in public is OK in a bind, but if that's the arrangement, try not to meet more than two to three people. If a funeral home is taking care of other arrangements, the funeral directors may have space at the funeral home where you could meet. Invite the family to have other family members and close friends present if they wish, but be sensitive to their needs and to the space considerations.

### **2Discuss plans for the service.**

When you meet the family, let them know what you have in mind for the service. If they have their own ideas about what they want to see done or not done, make every effort to incorporate those ideas. However, don't



leave them with a lot of open-ended questions about decisions that they need to make. You are there to help guide them, not to further complicate the process.



### 3Take notes.

Bring a notebook and be prepared to take many notes about the loved one that has passed away. Get as much information as you can so that you can present a story of the person's life from birth to death. Be sure to obtain the particulars such as birthday, school

information, marriage, work

history, children and grandchildren, and accomplishments. Pay special attention to the anecdotal memories that the family shares, especially stories that bring smiles. Ask them if there is music or any special readings that they would like to have incorporated into the service. Encourage them not to pick more than two or three songs, since those can be an emotional overload. Also let them know that you are available to read poems or letters that they've written in case they find that they can't share on the day of the service.



**4Get family addresses and contact info.** Thank the family and make arrangements to send a copy of your eulogy so that they can review it and make sure it is accurate. Obviously, sending a eulogy by e-

mail is the easiest way to accomplish this, but delivering it in person or faxing it are other possibilities. Ask them if there's a gathering afterwards that they would like you to announce.



## 5 Write a eulogy, using your notes.

Make it positive in tone, but don't be afraid to mention less-than-happy things if they contributed to the person's life. Be sure that you read the eulogy aloud to measure the amount of time that it takes to deliver it and to make sure that you establish your rhythm. Two to three pages of written text should be sufficient.



## 6 Arrive early for the service.

On the day of the service, arrive at least half an hour early with the final draft of the eulogy. Be available for any last minute words or arrangements that the family may have,

but give them space to grieve. This can be a very trying day for them.





## **7 Conduct the service.**

You may want to open with one of the pieces of music that they've chosen. Then, welcome the family and open with a word of prayer or remembrance. After the prayer, read the obituary as a way to acknowledge the family members that



are included in it. Deliver the eulogy. After the eulogy, invite the friends and family to come forward and share their own thoughts. This is a perfect place to insert a song to give them time to think. If, after about half a minute, no one comes forward, then make some light comment about how difficult it can be to speak at a funeral, and finish by closing the service with prayer.



## **8 Stay afterwards.**

Make yourself available to the family and friends afterward, but unless you know the family personally, you may want to gracefully excuse yourself shortly after and give them space.



## THE GATHERING

*1. The minister greets the congregation and says one or more of these or other appropriate texts*

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. John 11:25–26

The Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Revelation 7:17

The Lord God will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arms, He will carry them close to His heart. Isaiah 40:11

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I go 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, that you also may be where I am. John 14:1–3

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither things present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38–39

What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived, God has prepared for those who love Him. 1 Corinthians 2:9

If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Romans 14:8–9



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3

We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. 1 Timothy 6:7; Job 1:21

## *2. The minister may say*

We have come together to thank God for the life of N....., to mourn and honour him/her, to lay to rest his/her mortal body, and to support one another in grief. We face the certainty of our own death and judgment. Those who die in Christ share eternal life with him. Therefore in faith and hope we turn to God, who created and sustains us all.

### *or at the funeral of a child*

We gather today in the face of terrible loss. We are overwhelmed by the mystery of life and death that we have experienced in N..... We come together as family and friends to support each other by our love and prayers. We grieve over the ending of N.....'s life so near its beginning.

Jesus encouraged us to bring our children to him and taught that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. He died and rose to make it possible for each of us to receive the kingdom of God as a little child and enter it. And so we celebrate God's mercy and love for us, even in the face of death and disappointment of hope.

## *3. The minister prays*

God our Father, you alone are holy. Forgive us all our sins and failures. Uphold us by your Spirit now. Enable us to show Your compassion. Give us in our sorrow the calm of Your peace. Comfort us in our grief through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*or*



Heavenly Father, in Your Son Jesus Christ you have given us a true faith and a sure hope. Help us to live as those who believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen  
*or*

Loving God, you alone are the source of life. May Your life-giving Spirit flow through us and fill us with compassion, one for another. In our sorrow give us the calm of Your peace. Kindle our hope and let our grief give way to joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*4. Members of the family or close friends may be invited to give brief words of appreciation about the deceased.*

*5. A hymn may be sung.*

## **HEARING GOD'S WORD**

*6. Psalms 23, 46, 90, 121, or 130 may be said.*

*7. Suitable passages of Scripture such as John 14:1–6; 20:11–18; Romans 6:3–9; 1 Corinthians 15:20–58; 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10; Philippians 3:10–16, 20–21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; or Revelation 21:1–7 may be read.*

*8. A sermon may be given here.*



## PRAYING TOGETHER

9. The minister gives thanks for the deceased. Holy and loving Father, You gave us life when You created us, and in Your redeeming love You have offered us new life in Your Son, Jesus Christ. We thank you for

N..... We entrust him/her to you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, who died and rose again to save us, who now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, in glory for ever. Amen.

*or,*

At the funeral of a child, Gracious Father, Your love for us is strong and enduring, even when one so precious is taken from us. We thank You for the gift of

N..... We entrust him/her to You, in the name of the Lord Jesus, who died and rose again to save us, who now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, in glory for ever. Amen.

### *10. Prayers for the bereaved are offered.*

Almighty God, Father of all mercies and giver of all comfort, deal graciously, we pray, with those who mourn for

N..... Casting all their care on You, may they know the consolation of Your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*or*

Loving God, we pray for

N.....'s family and friends, whose loss is so keen, remembering

N..... When we cannot understand what happens, and are weighed down by grief and loneliness, uphold us in Your love.

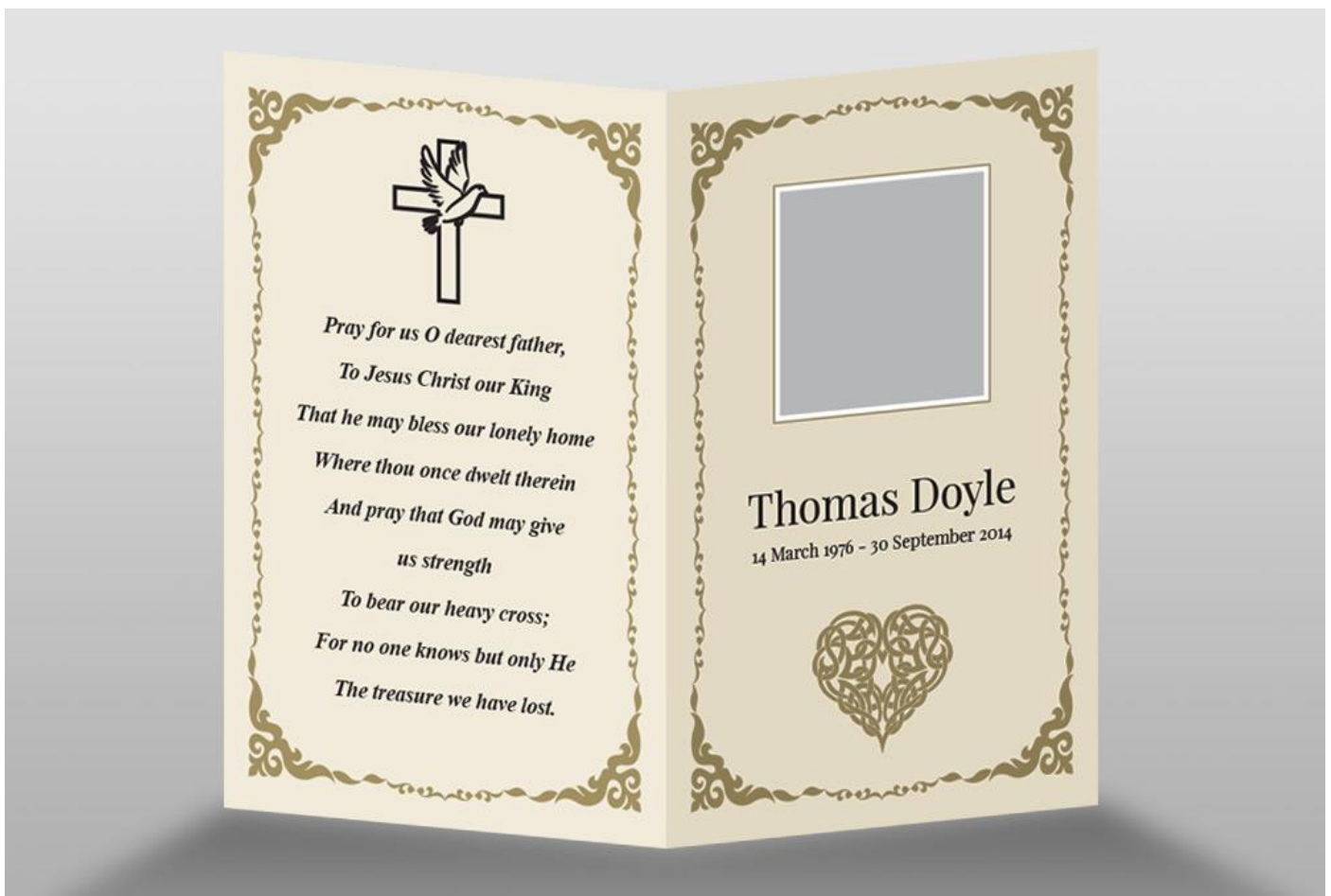
Give us the assurance of Your constant care and presence with us, that we may have courage for the days ahead, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



11. The prayers may conclude in this way

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the resurrection and the life of all who believe in You. You have taught us not to grieve as people without hope for those who die trusting in You. Raise us, we pray, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that when we depart this life, we may rest in You, as our hope is our brother/sister does, and at the resurrection on the last day, we may be found acceptable to You, and receive the kingdom prepared for all who love and fear You. Amen.

12. A hymn may be sung.



## THE COMMITTAL

*13. At the place of burial or cremation the minister may say one or more of the appropriate texts.*

Then these words are said: We have but a short time to live. Like a flower we blossom and then wither; like a shadow we flee and never stay.

*or*

Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and withers. He passes like a shadow and does not stay.

Let us pray.

In the midst of life we are in death. From whom may we seek for help, but from You, Lord God, though You are justly displeased on account of our sins?

And yet, Lord God almighty, most holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us from the bitterness of eternal death.

You know the secrets of our hearts; mercifully hear us, most worthy judge eternal; keep us, at our last hour, in the consolation of Your love.

*or these words from Psalm 103:8, 13–17, may be read*

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 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.

Our life is like grass, we flourish like a flower of the field; the wind goes 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.



*14. At a burial while earth is cast upon the body, or at a cremation while the body is removed, or at a burial at sea, the minister says*

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you have given us a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. In Your keeping are all those who have departed in Christ. We here commit the mortal body of

N..... to be cremated/to be buried in the ground/to the deep: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, and who shall change our mortal body that it may be like His glorious body. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.





## CONCLUDING PRAYERS

*15. The minister may say Scripture,*

‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord’: ‘they will rest from their labour’. Revelation 14:13

*The minister may add*

Let us say the Lord’s Prayer together. 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.

*16. The minister continues with one of these prayers*

Eternal Father, God of all consolation, in Your unending love and mercy for us you turn the darkness of death into the dawn of new life. Be our refuge and strength in sorrow. Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, conquered death by dying for us, and opened the gate to eternal life by rising again.

Enable us to walk by faith, so that after our life on earth, we may share the life of your kingdom, where every tear will be wiped away. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*17. The minister concludes*

Now to Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with everlasting joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

*or*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.



## INTERMENT OF THE ASHES

*1. The minister reads one or more of the biblical texts, or one of the following*

Since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives He lives to God.

Romans 6:9-10

We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. 1 Thessalonians 4:14

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4



*2. As the ashes are interred, the minister says,*

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you have given us a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

In your keeping are all those who have departed in Christ. We here commit the ashes of

N..... to their resting place, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, and who shall change our mortal body that it may be like His glorious body. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*3. The minister prays*

Merciful God, our Maker and Redeemer, we pray for the coming of Your kingdom, that in the last day, when You bring together all things in Christ, we with all who have died in Him may enjoy the fulfilment of Your promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*4. The minister concludes*

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all. Amen.



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