



## **When a Loved One Dies...**

The First Congregational Church of Falmouth, MA  
of the United Church of Christ

## Forward

When a loved one dies, a family is suddenly confronted with a multitude of decisions which must be made quickly and with care. Many of these decisions relate to the planning of a Christian service of worship to mark the passing of the deceased. To help families with some of these decisions, we offer this booklet.

Some may wish to discuss the contents of this booklet with their families well in advance.

Others may refer to this booklet after the death of a loved one and prior to meeting with a minister of our church to discuss service arrangements.

In their time of grief, some families will prefer to have the minister conducting their loved one's service select the hymns and scriptures for it. Others will prefer to make a few, or all, of their own selections. For the latter, we have included in this booklet, lists of some suitable hymns and scripture passages.

In all such planning, it should be recognized that there is no single, "right" way to conduct a meaningful Funeral or Memorial service. Circumstances, customs, and personal preferences can vary widely. In our view, such services should be planned to reflect the special needs and interests of individuals and their families.

# When a Loved One Dies...

Planning a Memorial or Funeral Service

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# Contents

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Scheduling. ....                 | 2  |
| Alternate and Guest Clergy. .... | 2  |
| Honoraria . ....                 | 3  |
| Types of Services . ....         | 3  |
| After Service Gathering . ....   | 4  |
| Purposes of Service. ....        | 4  |
| Service Order . ....             | 5  |
| Hymn Selections . ....           | 7  |
| Scripture Selections . ....      | 8  |
| Soloists . ....                  | 9  |
| Remembrances . ....              | 10 |
| Memorial Gifts . ....            | 11 |
| Pre-planning . ....              | 11 |

## SCHEDULING

Following a death, either the funeral home contacts our church on behalf of the grieving family to set the date, time, and location of the service; occasionally the family contacts us. Usually this is done as soon as possible to meet newspaper and other deadlines. Parishioners are invited to request any of our church's settled or honorary ministers to conduct the service. For services held in our church, we will, upon request by the family, secure our church Organist.

Following this initial contact, the minister conducting the service will consult with the family to minister to their needs at this difficult time, including planning the service.

If the primary funeral service occurs out of the area, it is usually the family which contacts us directly to arrange for a later memorial service in our church.

## OUR CHURCH

Please know that our parishioners and their families are certainly welcome to have their services conducted in our church.

Services of all sizes are held in the sanctuary. Grieving families tend to underestimate the number of people who will attend a public service to demonstrate support and "pay respects."

## ALTERNATE and GUEST CLERGY

For services not held in our church, the funeral home can provide the names of additional clergy.

If requested by the family, other clergy are welcome to assist our ministers in conducting the service. When other clergy have known the deceased well, we are quite willing to have them present the more personal, "Remembrance" portion of the service.

## **HONORARIA**

As part of its ministry to grieving families, our church provides the use of its sanctuary without charge. While the church does not charge for the use of its building for funerals or memorial services, there are services associated with them which call for an honoraria to be given to the person providing the service. As set by our Church Council, they are:

Minister - \$250

Organist - \$200

Sexton - \$150

When a funeral or memorial service is planned through a funeral home, these honoraria are often included in the funeral home's costs. The family pays the funeral home and the funeral home in turn provides checks to the church for the honoraria.

When a funeral or memorial services is planned directly with the church, the family should make out the individual honoraria checks and bring them to the church office as soon as is convenient. Upon request the church office will provide the names for the individual honoraria checks.

## **TYPES OF SERVICES**

A Funeral Service takes place with the embalmed or cremated remains of the deceased present. Such services are usually held at our church, at the grave, or at the funeral home. When the service is conducted in our church, it is requested that coffins remain closed.

A Memorial Service takes place when the remains of the deceased are not present. Such services are almost always held at our church. Except for providing a guest registry, funeral home involvement is not usually required.

A Committal Service takes place in conjunction with the interment of the embalmed or cremated remains of the deceased. This brief service may be combined with either of the above services, or held at a time totally separate from them.

## **OPTIONS FOR SCHEDULING**

Local Funeral Service--The service is conducted locally, immediately after which the remains are taken to a local cemetery where either a public or private committal service is conducted.

Local Memorial Service--The service is generally conducted in our church. A Committal Service is held at a different time -- generally private and at a time prior to the Memorial Service.

Some Memorial Services in our church are preceded or followed by complete funeral services for the deceased held elsewhere, particularly out-of-state.

Non-Local Services--We regret that, due to time restrictions, our clergy are not usually able to conduct services off-Cape.

When an off-Cape interment is required in conjunction with a local service, the funeral home will arrange for an on-site clergy person to conduct an appropriate committal service. In such cases, the words of committal can also be included in the local service to provide a sense of "completeness" for those not attending the interment.

## **AFTER-SERVICE GATHERING**

As part of its ministry, our church's Reception Committee will sponsor a reception in our church's Fellowship Hall or parlor following memorial or funeral services held in our church. In some instances, particularly for a large service, the family may need to employ the services of a caterer. More details on reception planning are available through our church office.

Our Women's Union will, if requested, host this same after-service gathering for deceased members or their spouses.

## **PURPOSES OF A CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

The Christian faith triumphantly proclaims the victorious passage from bitter death to eternal life in God's keeping. It also bears witness to the redemptive love of God which stands with us, and cries with us, when we who are left behind must face the painful partings and tragedies of this earthly life.

Through appropriate Biblical passages, prayers, and hymns, a Christian Funeral or Memorial service should help grieving families and friends get in touch with these vital truths of our faith--and derive hope and comfort from them.

Thanksgiving is another important aspect of a Christian service: Thanksgiving to God for the earthly life of the deceased, and thanksgiving for all that person has meant over the years to beloved family and friends. Christianity teaches that individual persons are both unique and precious to God. As such, in death as in life, it is important that we honor them, and bear witness to our thankfulness for them.

Also, the service should help a family commend their loved one into God's keeping. It should help them find a sense of peace, as they shift their focus from the earthly to the eternal spiritual identity of their loved one.

## **SERVICE ORDER**

Like all worship services, a Funeral or Memorial Service should convey a sense of inter-connectedness and progression in achieving its purposes. Here is the basic order we often use for both kinds of services. Certainly this order is open to modification to suit personal preferences.

With hymns, and without additional speakers, this service lasts about 25 minutes. The Committal service lasts under 5 minutes.

Services in our church often include hymns. (Hymns are not usually used at the funeral home or a grave site.)

## **Memorial or Funeral Service**

Organ Prelude  
Welcome  
Prayer of Invocation and Lord's Prayer  
Hymn  
Scripture Readings  
Solo (occasional)  
Sharing of Memories  
Hymn (optional)  
Homily  
Tolling of the church bell  
Commendation  
Hymn  
Benediction  
Organ Postlude

## **Graveside Committal**

Psalm 121  
Statement of Committal  
Prayer  
Benediction

## **HYMNS**

There are many hymns in our *Hymns of Truth and Light* which are appropriate for use in Funeral or Memorial services. Here is a partial list which includes both solemn and triumphant expressions of our Christian faith and hope. Very often the hymn chosen to conclude the service is triumphant in tone. Not all verses of a hymn need be sung.

- A-9 *How Great Thou Art*
- A-12 *In the Garden*
- A-14 *It is Well With My Soul*
- A-18 *On Eagle's Wings*
- A-20 *The Old Rugged Cross*
- 80 *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*
- 95 *Be Still, My Soul*
- 224 *Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart*
- 263 *Now the Day Is Over*
- 275 *Dear Lord, Who Loves All Humankind*
- 334 *Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name*
- 345 *God Be With You Till We Meet Again*
- 368 *Blest Be the Tie That Binds*
- 404 *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*
- 425 *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*
- 465 *O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee*
- 469 *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*
- 472 *I Would Be True*
- 473 *O Jesus, I Have Promised*
- 477 *God of Grace and God of Glory*
- 486 *For All the Saints*
- 487 *Abide With Me*
- 488 *Nearer My God To Thee*
- 535 *Eternal Father, Strong to Save* (The Navy Hymn)

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Biblical scripture is that inspiring voice, beyond ourselves and our personal grief, which rings down through the centuries to remind us of the eternal God who has been--and remains--the blessed hope and "mighty fortress" of countless generations of humanity.

Here are some of the more familiar Old Testament passages:

[Note: "a" indicates first part of verse only.]

- Psalm 23 . . . . . "The Lord is my shepherd"
- Psalm 25:1,2a,4-10 . . . . . "To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul"
- Psalm 27:1,4-9,13,14 "The Lord is my light and my salvation"
- Psalm 46:1-5,10 . . . . . "God is our refuge and strength"
- Psalm 84 . . . . . "How lovely is thy dwelling place"
  
- Psalm 95:1-7 . . . . . "O come, let us sing unto the Lord"
- Psalm 100 . . . . . "Make a joyful noise to the Lord"
- Psalm 139:1-12  
"O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!"
- Psalm 147:1-12 . . . . . "Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing"
- Isaiah 40:1,2a,28-31 . . . . . "Comfort, comfort my people"

Additional Old Testament passages:

- Psalm 1:1-3
- Psalm 8:1a,3-8
- Psalm 24:1-6
- Psalm 34:1-10,15,17-19,22a
- Psalm 36:5-10
- Psalms 61-62 (selected)
- Proverbs 31:10-31 (wife/mother)
- Deuteronomy 32:1-3,7,9-12; 33:26-27a
- Psalm 103 (selected)
- Psalm 104 (selected)
- Psalm 107 (selected)
- Psalm 130
- Psalm 145 (selected)
- Psalm 148:1-13
- Isaiah 25:1,4,8-9; 26:3-4
- Psalm 63:1-8

Here are some of the more familiar New Testament passages:

- Matthew 5:1-12 . . . . . "Blessed are the poor in spirit"
- Matthew 6:19-21,25-34 . . . . . "Consider the lilies of the field"
- John 10:7-16 . . . . . "I am the good shepherd"
- John 11:11-26a . . . . . "I am the resurrection and the life"
- John 14:1-6a,23 . . . . . "In my Father's house are many rooms"
- Romans 8:14-18,28a,31-32,35,37-39  
"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"
- Romans 14:7-9 . . . . . "None of us lives to himself"
- I Corinthians 15:50-58 . . . . . "O death, where is thy victory?"
- II Corinthians 4:16-5:5 . . . . . "We never become discouraged"
- I John 4:7-16 . . . . . "Beloved, let us love one another"

Here are additional New Testament passages:

- |                       |                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Mark 10:13-16 (child) | I Thessalonians 4:13-18   |
| John 3:16             | II Timothy 4:7-8          |
| I Corinthians 13      | I Peter 1:3-9             |
| Ephesians 3:14-21     | Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1,5 |
| Philippians 2:5-11    |                           |

**SOLOIST**

Our church organist can provide a list of soloists when one is desired for a Funeral or Memorial service held in our church. All musical selections are subject to approval by the minister from our church conducting the service.

**REMEMBRANCES**

This portion of the service is often better when it seeks to be suggestive, rather than exhaustive, in commemorating and giving thanks for the life of the deceased. Here are several ways to add a more personal note to the service. A single item can be used, or several approaches can be combined.

- A special poem(s) read in honor of the deceased  
[An assortment of poems is available in our church office]
- Statements of remembrance presented by family or friends--or read by the minister on their behalf.
- Eulogy by the minister, developed from information provided by the family.
- Biographical information, such as might be contained in an obituary
- An open invitation to the congregation for impromptu statements of remembrance
- A moment of individual reflection, in silence or as the organist softly plays one or two stanzas of special music.
- Excerpts from family letters written by or to the deceased
- Excerpts from "sympathy" letters received following the death

## **MEMORIAL GIFTS**

Special gifts to the church in memory of loved ones may be made to:

"The Memorial Fund"--Donations to this Fund are used to finance special items or projects to benefit the Church. At an appropriate time, family preferences will be sought in determining the expenditure of Memorial Fund contributions received in memory of their loved one. The church can provide a "wish list" of needs.

"The Permanent Endowment Fund"--The interest from this Fund provides support for the Church's annual budget. The principle of this Fund is preserved in a highly-restricted account, as mandated by our church By-laws, to insure the Fund's permanence.

Other Church Funds--Gifts in memory of loved ones may be made to any established fund in the church.

All gifts to our church in memory of loved ones will be acknowledged. Donors will receive cards of thanks from the church. Families will be given a list of all donors and the total amount received. Individual gift amounts will not be disclosed.

## **PRE-PLANNING**

We keep a special file in our church office for any who might wish to have their personal preferences recorded.

A word of caution: Pre-planning should not be so inflexible that it puts an undue burden on the surviving family -- particularly as unforeseen circumstances can arise at the time when death actually occurs. It is better to leave one's family with a sense of direction and personal preferences, than with rigid mandates.



*Love like the ocean is vast  
and forever,  
And sorrow but a shadow  
that moves over the sea.  
May the forever of Love,  
soon bear the grief  
of this hour  
Away from your hearts.*