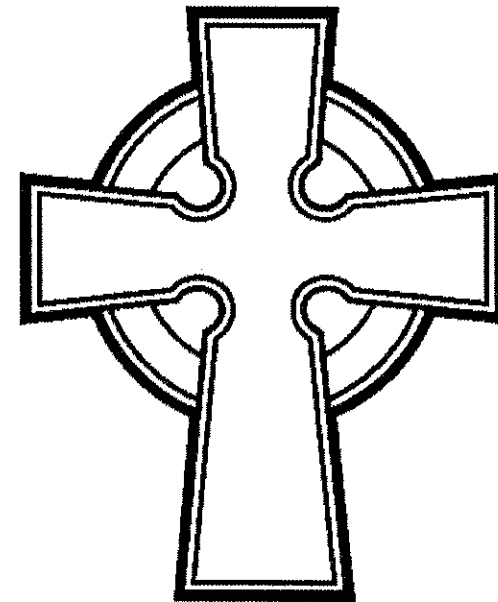


Funerals and Memorial Services



The following is designed to answer some questions that have arisen concerning funerals and memorial services as understood by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and here at St. Paul.

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Q: Why is this information important?

A: *The time of a person's death is not the time to discuss these things.*

This information is offered to the members of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church as an explanation of what one should expect when a funeral service or memorial service is held at the church or some other appropriate place. It is hoped that this will answer some questions and may raise some more as you think and plan ahead. It is important, although not easy, to have your wishes and ideas made known to your family, friends, and pastor so that when the time comes, there are few if any questions to be raised. The pastor is available to help you as you ponder these things and rejoice that in death we know life!

Q: How does the Lutheran Church understand funerals and memorial services?

A: *Funerals are celebrations of the promised hope given to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.*

A funeral is a time in a person's or family's life that requires prayer and consolation from the church. Just as the church spoke when we were reborn as children of God through Holy Baptism and received the promise of eternal life, so now the Church speaks again when the promise comes to its completion at the point of death. As Lutheran Christians, we believe that the resurrection of Jesus has secured for us our own eternal resurrection. It is this certain hope that allows us to mourn and yet rejoice when a loved one dies.

Q: The term "Celebration of Life" is often used these days to talk about funerals and memorial services. Does the Lutheran Church have anything to say about this?

A: *As Lutherans we understand the funeral or memorial service to be a time of worship.*

course with friends providing side dishes.

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O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer at the Committal - - Evangelical Lutheran Worship page 284

I am the Resurrection and the Life, says the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

July, 2011
January 2020

Therefore, it is the Life of Christ and the victory over death won for us by him which we celebrate on such occasions. During the time we share together in worship, we give thanks to God -- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In this worship, we recall the life of the deceased, but we place such a life in the context of Jesus' death and resurrection -- our death and promised eternity.

Q: Why all the emphasis on Jesus and his death and resurrection? Isn't the day all about the one who's died?

A: ***The Savior of the world makes the time of sorrow and mourning bearable and it is to him that honor and glory must be given.***

This is not to diminish or to escape the need to remember and recall the life of the one who has died. We as God's children must face death boldly and directly. We cannot ignore our sorrow and hurt and loss. Even our Lord wept at the grave of his best friend Lazarus. But thanks be to God who offers us the victory so that in death we can see life.

Q: Are tributes, whether in the form of spoken words, videos, or other means to be a part of this sacred worship?

A: ***Reflections on one's life are important and need to be shared.***

However, such important remembrances are most appropriate at a viewing, visitation, or perhaps at the reception following the service. We must keep in mind that the focus of the worship is the One who offers us the hope we need to live through the sadness in our lives.

Q: What about music? How does the church view this important part of our worship life in the context of a funeral or

memorial service?

A: *Music is always a necessary part of worship and is to be sacred in nature.*

Pop songs and non-sacred music have no place in the service of worship. Such important music to a family is best reserved for another time when the focus can be and should be on the deceased. Congregational singing is preferred, as this service is for all gathered. Participation by the assembly is important. They have not come only to “view” the worship but to be active participants in the joyful expression of Christian hope. Solos and other music appropriate to the day and nature of the worship are also appropriate.

Q: What about eulogies?

A: *Eulogies are best read or shared when friends and family are gathered together at another time and place.*

The appropriate time would be at a viewing and/or reception following the worship service and committal. Let it be said, however that the *service should not become a cold, impersonal event.*

Remembrances and reflections of the deceased’s life are often integral parts of the pastor’s sermon (homily). There is a necessary part of the funeral that *calls into remembrance the life of the deceased especially their baptism into the faith and their witness as one of God’s saints.* Thus the church speaks to the reality of death but the church also announces the wonder and mystery of resurrected life - - the sure and certain hope - - to which we cling as people of God.

Q: How does the Church understand viewings?

A: *Many people will want to have a time for viewing and/or*

A: *The same reverence for the Gospel’s message of hope will be exercised if the service takes place in a funeral home, home, or at a burial place.*

The place is not as important as *the proclamation of the Hope and Promise won for us by Christ Jesus.*

Q: What happens at the cemetery or place of burial?

A: *When arriving at the place of interment - - whether it be a cemetery, memorial garden, mausoleum, sea, or some other place for the final repose of the deceased, the Word of God is heard again.*

To enlighten those gathered to the sacredness of the burial ground and to listen for the final shout of God’s victory over death, words from Holy Scripture are read. There is no other time when the reality of death is quite as obvious as when we gather in a cemetery or place of burial. But it is also in this very place where the *shout of Christ’s resurrection* is heard and must be announced, for out of the grave our Savior was raised and so shall we be raised to glory.

Q: Is there the possibility of a reception following the burial?

A: *Following the burial, many people enjoy a time of reflection and refreshment.*

It is good for the family and for those who have gathered to have time to talk and to reflect. This is a good time for *sharing memories and thoughts; videos and pictures.*

Q: Who plans the reception?

A: *Often the members of the church will provide the help needed to hold a reception.*

The family usually makes provision for the main

tice because people who attend funerals may not be familiar with receiving the Holy Sacrament and may feel uncomfortable. This is understandable. But when planning your funeral, perhaps you might *consider the importance of the Meal, both for your family and for those who attend, as a sacred foretaste of the Feast to come for us all.*]

Just before leaving the Church, the congregation joins in the **Commendation**.

The commendation is that part of the funeral rite which *announces our certain hope that God will take the deceased and bring her/him into the glorious kingdom with all the saints in light.*

If there is to be a burial or an interment of the body or cremains following the service, a **Sending hymn** is usually sung and the procession moves forth from the church to the place of burial.

Q: What is the difference between a memorial service and a funeral?

A: *The differences are very small.*

The obvious difference is that at a memorial service the body or cremains are not present and a burial will have taken place or will take place at a later time. With a few minor adjustments, the same pattern of worship is followed.

Q: What if the funeral is held in a funeral home, home, mountain top, on the prairie, or another appropriate place?

visitation prior to the funeral service.

Often this occurs the evening before the funeral and again just prior to the worship service. It is customary that the coffin is closed following the family's final viewing of the deceased. The coffin is never left open during the funeral service as our focus is to be on the crucified and risen Christ not on the deceased. As we gather, there should be nothing to distract us from the central figure of Christ died and risen. Occasionally, a family will request one more viewing following the worship service. Should a family request another viewing, the coffin will be opened once again at the rear of the Nave.

Q: Who presides at funerals?

A: *As with all worship services at the church, the pastor of the congregation presides.*

It is the responsibility of the congregation's pastor to preach the Word and announce the certain hope of eternal life. When the local pastor is unavailable, another Lutheran pastor will be asked to preside in her/his stead.

Q: Can ministers or pastors from other Christian denominations preside at the funeral service?

A: *Other ministers and preachers; chaplains or close friends may be asked to speak at a viewing, visitation, or reception.*

Q: What is the outline of the service itself?

A: *The pattern of worship is printed on pages 274-275 in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

Q: What does the worship service look like? How does it unfold?

A: *When a body or a person's remains are returned to the church for burial, the service begins with a Remembrance of Baptism.* We recall the promise made to the deceased when a crown of glory was promised her/him and she/he was clothed in the robe of God's righteousness through water and the Word. While St. Paul Lutheran Church does not presently have a **pall**, it is an important symbol. The white cloth which covers the coffin is a reminder of the baptismal garment worn when the deceased became a child of God through Holy Baptism. The pall announces that this saint of God has indeed been dressed in the robe of eternal life, the eternal garment promised in the Holy Bath.

A **procession** may follow with the pastor leading the coffin to the front of the Nave. The paschal candle and/or a processional cross may be carried by other servers - - acolytes or assisting ministers - - as a reminder that Christ is present among the gathered and salvation has been won through the victory of life over death when Christ gave up his life and took it up again for us - - the paschal mystery.

Following the **Prayer of the Day**, readings from **Holy Scripture** are read. These readings may be selected by the family and/or pastor and often include the deceased's favorite or those passages that bring most comfort and hope to those who mourn. An *Old Testament* scripture is always read. A *Psalm* is often read or sung by the congregation. A reading from the *New Testament Writings* is read and there is always a section of the *Holy Gospel* proclaimed.

The **sermon** (homily) will focus on the *hope* we have in Christ Jesus; *to offer the sure and certain hope of the resurrection for all who believe and to bring this hope in no uncertain*

terms to those who have gathered. Remembrances of the deceased, as they pertain to the promise we celebrate, will often be included in the pastor's homily.

A **hymn** appropriate for the day is sung. Hymns are selected by the family and pastor. Often favorites are chosen. These hymns will convey the promise of life eternal granted to us.

With great boldness, we proclaim our faith using the words of the **Apostles' Creed**, also known as the Baptismal Creed, because it is spoken at baptisms and it is the confession of faith into which we are baptized. We confess our faith at funerals declaring our faith - - a *faith that trusts what we are doing in this time together is not some ritual founded on nothing, but a gathering of people who confess God as Father/Creator, Jesus as Son/Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Comforter.*

The **Prayers of the Church** follow. In these prayers we ask God to remember those who mourn and to remind us of the resurrection and the hope we share. We conclude these prayers with the **Lord's Prayer**.

[It is very *appropriate* for **Holy Communion** to be offered and celebrated at funerals. For it is **in this sacred and Holy Meal, that we find Christ truly present in the bread and wine and in our living and our dying.** Holy Communion is for all who have gathered. All are invited to God's table of grace and mercy. Often families shy away from this prac-