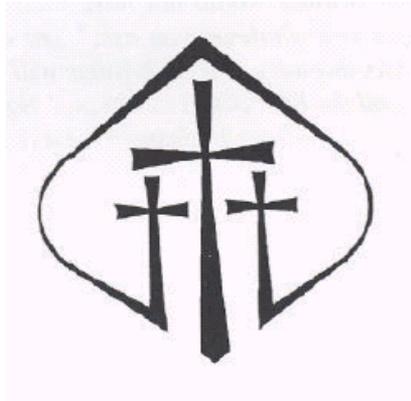


# *Funeral Guidelines*



Calvary Lutheran Church  
Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

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Some information from:

<http://www.lcmsdistricts.org/graphics/assets/media/Minnesota%20North/funeralguidelines.pdf>

Northern Minnesota District LC--MS

## **Introduction:**

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Martha went out to meet Jesus and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask " The comforting words which Christ said to Martha were, "Your brother will rise again. . . for I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:21-25 NIV).

So, too, will all be raised who, by the grace of God, believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. In the spirit of this promise of our Lord these guidelines have been prepared for the individual or family preplanning a funeral and/or the family who has lost a loved one.

These guidelines seek to: 1. Provide an opportunity for a family or individual to help plan a worship service (funeral) that is God pleasing and will be comforting to those who attend. 2. Show how a funeral is one of the greatest evangelism (sharing the good news about Jesus) opportunities a person may have towards family and friends. 3. Explain the meaning of the elements of a funeral service that may be unfamiliar.

## **Why Have a Funeral?**

A funeral according to Meriam Webster is the "observances held for a dead person before burial or cremation." We might think of a funeral as a public way of dealing with grief. Grief according to John W. Santrock is, "The emotional numbness, disbelief, separation anxiety, despair, sadness, and loneliness that accompany the loss of someone we love." The funeral is meant to help people come to grips with the reality of grief and accept the reality of death. Funerals are common in many cultures.

Funeral observances in the Bible were far different from those which we are accustomed to in the United States. A common element among them was having an extended time of mourning. For example, when Moses died, "The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over." Another characteristic was to have a funeral procession where people wailed and the body was carried off to the grave. In fact, it was common to pay people to cry out aloud (professional mourners).

Loss brings pain and crying. Even Jesus cried when Lazerus died, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). It is healthy to mourn the loss of a loved one. Telling stories about the good and bad times we have had with the person may help with grief. In fact, the "wake" or "visitation" is simply a time set aside to talk about the person and to cry together as a group. The wake is usually filled with tributes, photographs, videos, and acalades for and about the person. Such bring many tears to our eyes as we remember a person. This is why it is important to have visitation, fellowship, to get out and talk with fellow family. It is healthy to cry. We can put grief off but we can not stop it from hitting. In fact, it has become custom in our country for the funeral to be a continuation of the wake.

As Christians we need not ignore the grieving process or to pretend it does not exist. We should participate, but we have an opportunity to do something different, that no other group of people can do: to have a worship service during this time of grieving. A time to *not* focus on the person who has died but upon our God who has done something for the person has died and for us who are still alive.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18, "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. . . . Therefore encourage each other with these words." These words describe what Paul would have us say at the time of death, namely encouraging one another with the words of truth that come from scripture concerning the resurrection, etc.

### **Funeral Service as Worship**

Most questions about what should or should not go on in a funeral service for a Christian are answered quickly when we realize a funeral for Lutherans is a worship service. (This is also true for most Anglicans and Catholics)

"The word 'worship' means 'worthy.' God the Heavenly Father is worthy of our praise at death because He created the person who died. God the Son is worthy for He has redeemed this person. God the Holy Spirit is worthy since by Holy Baptism He has sanctified this created, redeemed person. The Triune God gave physical life to this person and gives eternal life even now (John

11:25 NV). So God is to be the center of our worship at this service, as at any worship service, for He is worthy of it. Because this service is clearly Worship of God, we must be careful not to overemphasize the life of the Christian with special eulogies, floral arrangements, memorial gifts, or musical renditions, especially if we do so at the expense of God's Word and the prayers we offer Him. Several sections of Scripture concerning death and God's worthiness are Matthew 22:29-32, Luke 9:59-62, and Acts 10:39-43." (Quoted from Funeral Guidelines from the Northern Minnesota District of the LCMS).

Worship, then is clearly about what God gives to us and our response to him. Therefore, the worship service that we attend ought to bring all praise and glory to God.

### **Funeral as Evangelism**

The primary purpose of a Christian Worship Service at the time of death (funeral) is for God to give his Word of comfort to Christians as they mourn. Yet, a secondary purpose is to allow those who have not heard the good news of Jesus to have such a chance. First, over half the people in the United States do not profess to believing in Jesus or have wandered from him. Second, people are more receptive to Jesus at times of death because they can see the full consequences of sin when they encounter the death of a loved one.

Some Christians try to plan funerals that will not offend anyone. To do so they must remove all words about Jesus, about, "the wages of sin is death," about the necessity of repentance and faith. The result is a service that is merely a tribute to the person (nolonger a worship service).

Yet, Jesus challenges us by saying, "In the world but not of the world." Jesus is calling us to live as, "Resident Aliens" in this world. As a result, our life is different. Unbelievers should step back and say of us, "They are different. They live like aliens! Why do they do that?" As a result, we dare not conform a Christian funeral to the ways of the world. We want it to be different on purpose!

This truth provides an opportunity for God's Word to reach the ears of those who do not know Jesus. This is why it is important to choose scripture and hymns that not only bring comfort to the family of believers, but also passages that make it clear to

unbelievers where our hope comes. Peter says in the first book that bears his name, " Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect," (I Peter 3:15). A funeral is a time to give this message with gentleness and respect.

### **Elements of a Worship Service (Funeral)**

The scripture gives the example of early church worship services, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." These words refer to reading scripture, preaching/teaching, the Lord's Supper, and encouraging one another. Other verses describe Christians singing hymns, prayer, preaching, giving offerings, etc. in public worship (Matthew 28:19; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11; Ephesians 5:19-20; I Timothy 4:13;). Celebrating the Lord's Supper at a funeral is a possibility! Based on these passages, the funeral service follows a simplified version of the Sunday morning service which is close to a 2000 year old pattern:

PROCESSION INTO CHURCH  
HYMN/SOLO TO GOD (Optional)  
INVOCATION (Calling on the Truine God)  
RECOGNITION OF BAPTISM  
READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE  
CREED  
HYMN/SOLOS TO GOD (Optional)  
MESSAGE  
PRAYERS  
LORD'S PRAYER  
COMMENDING OF THE BELOVED TO GOD  
HYMN (Optional)  
PROCESSION TO THE CEMETARY  
FUNERAL LUNCHEON

### **Choosing Hymns for a Funeral**

Hymns, songs, and spiritual songs fit in a variety of locations in the funeral. They can be sung during to procession, between readings, before and after the sermon, and at the closing. What is important, is that they give glory to God and not to the person. A general

suggestion is to pick hymns and music that focuses on the Resurrection (i.e. Easter Hymns)! Check with the Pastor if you are not sure if a hymn would be appropriate.

| <i>Hymn</i>                       | <i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i> | <i>Lutheran Worship</i> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| A Pilgrim and A Stranger          | 586                        | -                       |
| Abide With Me                     | 552                        | 490                     |
| Amazing Grace                     | -                          | 509                     |
| Asleep In Jesus! Blessed Sleep    | 587                        | -                       |
| At The Lamb's High Feast          | -                          | 126                     |
| Awake My Heart With Gladness      | 192                        | 128                     |
| Be Still My Soul                  | 651                        | 510                     |
| Beautiful Savior                  | 657                        | 507                     |
| Behold A Host, Arrayed In White   | 656                        | 192                     |
| Christ The Lord Is Risen Today    | 193                        | 142                     |
| Christ The Lord Is Risen Today    | 191                        | 137                     |
| Dear Christians, One and All      | 387                        | 353                     |
| For All The Saints                | 463                        | 191                     |
| For All the (Your) Saints, O Lord | 468                        | 195                     |
| For Me to Live is Jesus           | 597                        | 267                     |
| Good Christian Friends, Rejoice   | -                          | 129                     |
| He's Risen, He's Risen, Christ    | 198                        | 138                     |
| How Great Thou Art                | -                          | 519                     |
| I Am Content! My Jesus            | 196                        | 145                     |
| I Know That My Redeemer Lives     | 200                        | 264                     |
| I Leave All Things To God's       | 529                        | 429                     |
| If You But Trust In God To Guide  | -                          | 420                     |
| I'm But A Stranger Here           | 660                        | 515                     |
| In the Very Midst of Life         | -                          | 265                     |
| Jerusalem My Happy Home           | 618                        | 307                     |
| Jesus Christ Is Risen Today       | 199                        | 127                     |
| Jesus Christ My Sure Defense      | 206                        | 266                     |
| Jesus Lead Thou On                | 410                        | 386                     |
| Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won    | 201                        | 139                     |
| Jesus Savior, Pilot Me            | 649                        | 513                     |
| Just As I Am                      | 388                        | 359                     |
| Lord Take My Hand And Lead        | -                          | 512                     |
| Lord Thee I Love With All My      | 429                        | 413                     |
| My Faith Looks Up To Thee         | 394                        | 378                     |
| Nearer, My God, To Thee           | 533                        | 514                     |

| <i>Hymn</i>                   | <i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i> | <i>Lutheran Worship</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Oh How Blest Are Ye (You)     | 589                        | 268                     |
| Salvation Unto Us Has Come    | 377                        | 355                     |
| Sent Forth By God's Blessing  | -                          | 247                     |
| The Day of Resurrection       | 205                        | 133                     |
| The King of Love, My Shepherd | 431                        | 412                     |
| The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll  | 436                        | 416                     |
| The Willof God is Always      | 517                        | 425                     |
| What A Friend We Have         | 457                        | 516                     |
| What God Ordains is Always    | 521                        | 422                     |
| When in the Hour of Deepest   | 522                        | 428                     |
| With High Delight             | -                          | 134                     |

### **Additional Hymns For Funerals**

Children of the Heavenly Father Lina Sandall Berg

Have Thine Own Way, Lord Pollard & Stebbins

In the Garden C. Austin Miles - Lutheran Verses by Gary Scharrer

I Was There To Hear Your Borning Cry John Ylvisaker

Jesus Loves Me

On Eagle's Wings Michael Joncas

The Old Rugged Cross George Bennard

### **Choosing Scripture Passages**

There are numerous passages appropriate for a funeral. For example the passages from the previous Sunday, confirmation verses, favorite passages, etc. A pastor can provide a much more extensive list, but the following include some that are favorites:

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Psalm 23                | Revelation 7:9-17 |
| Psalm 46                | Revelation 14:13  |
| Psalm 130               | Revelation 21:1-7 |
| Job 19:21-27            | Matthew 5:1-12    |
| Isaiah 25:6-9           | Mark 10:13-16     |
| Isaiah 61:1-3, 10       | Luke 2:25-32      |
| Lamentations 3:22-33    | John 5:24-30      |
| Romans 8:31-39          | John 6:27-10      |
| I Corinthians 15:20-26  | John 10:11-16     |
| I Corinthians 15:51-57  | John 14:1-6       |
| I Thessalonians 4:13-18 |                   |
| I Peter 1:3-9           |                   |
| I John 3:1-2            |                   |

## **The Funeral Pall**

"A funeral pall may cover the casket/urn while it is in the church. Calvary has a pall if the family would like it used.

"A funeral pall is used to recall Holy Baptism. It is a brocade or damask cloth, churchly in pattern, with a Christian symbol of the resurrection or eternal life on it. Generally, it is six by nine feet and white in color (though other colors following the church year may also be appropriate). The pall is placed over the casket (in the place of flowers) before the Funeral Service.

"Other paraments (e.g. the altar cloth) should not be altered for the funeral of any congregational member. The color of the church season takes precedence over any other color use. The Christian's life, even in death, circles around the seasons of the church. (Taken from Guidelines for a Funeral by the Minnesota North District)

## **Eulogies**

It has become the custom of some churches to include eulogies (Good Words) or tributes to the person within the church service.

A distinction should be made between a pastor using the persons life to glorify God and simply praising the person leaving Christ out of the picture. The former is appropriate in the church. An example, might include reading the obituary after the sermon. Pastor's usually modify obituaries to make them appropriate for church.

General tributes thus are not appropriate for worship. Instead, they are appropriate for the "wake" (visitation) or for after the service when the family gathers to fellowship with oneanother. For example David gave a eulogy in II Samuel 1:19-27 concerning Saul and son Jonathon after they died. This eulogy though not appropriate for worship is appropriate for the Christian life.

## **Children Attending a Funeral Service**

Parents often wonder if a young child should ever participate in such a worship service. In general, this depends on the circumstances of the loved one's death, age of the child, and the child's attitude. Parents know their own children better than anyone else and they must prayerfully decide what to do. Perhaps, the

Funeral Service may be the best time for parents to express their faith in Jesus to their children, explain how we'll see "Grandma or Grandpa" again, and illuminate the fear of death. Remember "death has been swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:54 NIV). Share the victory we have in Jesus Christ with your children.

### **Preplanning for a Funeral**

Although preplanning for a Christian Worship Service at one's death is not necessary, some Christians enjoy taking part in preparing for this service. Such personalizations make it clear to everyone that faith in Christ Jesus is important. It makes it clear that the person who has died wants everyone to know the truth about Jesus also. If you would like to fill the following form out the church can file it for you so that these decisions might be honored.

Remember that the funeral home or church also can help you to prepare a Christian obituary. Keep in mind that the pastor ultimately must make decisions on what is most suitable for the worship service.

***The Funeral Service***

*Scripture Texts* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Sermon Theme & Text* \_\_\_\_\_

*Hymn(s)* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Special Music* \_\_\_\_\_

*Organist Other Musicians* \_\_\_\_\_

***Concerning The Child of God***

*Full Name* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date of Birth* \_\_\_\_\_

*Place of Birth* \_\_\_\_\_

*Father Mother(with maiden name)* \_\_\_\_\_

*Baptism date* \_\_\_\_\_ *Baptism place* \_\_\_\_\_

*Confirmation date* \_\_\_\_\_ *Confirmation place* \_\_\_\_\_

*Confirmation verse* \_\_\_\_\_

*Marriage date* \_\_\_\_\_ *Marriage place* \_\_\_\_\_

*Word's that you would like to have shared at the funeral about Jesus:*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_