



Preparing for a Funeral

St. Luke's Lutheran Church
Waukesha, WI

Background and Purpose

The care of a loved one following death has long been tied to religious ritual. Christians hold that in Holy Baptism, God joins us to Christ's death and resurrection. This gives us hope that we will rise in the last day with all who have died in Christ. We will be the resurrected body of Christ. Faith in the promises of God give us hope. We cling to this hope at the time of death. A Christian Burial expresses the hope we have while encouraging us to hold onto the promises of God as the source of comfort and life.

The material set out in this document are offered to help guide people as they prepare for or think about a Christian funeral. It is offered from a particular point of view: as a Lutheran Christian understanding of life-passage rituals at the time of death. Some of what is included is even more

particular. Parts of this document give instruction and guidance for funerals in a particular congregation: St Luke's Lutheran in Waukesha, WI. Much of what is offered in this document is transferrable to funerals in other settings. Some parts, though specific to ELCA Lutheran Christians and/or St. Luke's Lutheran, might prompt discussion and thought as you prepare for Christian burials in other contexts.

Preparing for Death

Christians are encouraged to prepare for death and to consider death as a gate to eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each year, the community of faith gathers on Ash Wednesday to remind one another of our frailty. As ashes smudge foreheads in the shape of the cross, the message is proclaimed: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." In this way, we enter into a forty-day (not including Sundays) journey of contemplation on the role of faith in our lives.

It is good for Christians to think about their death, especially in light of the hoped for resurrection that will be ours in Jesus Christ. With confidence in the resurrection, we can talk about the day of our death more easily. We can plan it and think of it as a day of joy. Certainly, the death of a Christian brings grief to those who are left behind and those who are dying will grieve that they will no longer be in the company of the loved ones they are leaving behind. For this reason, reminders of Christian hope are especially important during such times.

Pastoral Ministry Prior to Death

St. Luke's Lutheran provides pastoral care for people walking the valleys of the shadow of death. This ministry is a partnership of clergy and lay ministers in the congregation. St. Luke's encourages families to contact our pastor when a person is ill, when an announcement of an imminent death is received, or whenever there is distress. In such situations, pastoral ministry seeks to bring comfort through the reading of scripture, the sacrament of Holy Communion, prayer, and the ministry of being present.

Call the Pastor

Contacting our pastors is easy at all hours of the day or night. Our congregation equips our pastor(s) with cell phones to make sure that s/he is available during such times. Of course, there are days when the pastor is away from the area because of other pastoral events and/or vacation. Most of the time, however, our pastor is available to provide care at any hour.

Congregants and family members are encouraged to call our pastor. His/Her emergency cell phone number is kept on the church answering machine. Our pastor regularly gives out his/her emergency cell phone number to be available for you. Together, we provide this ministry for our people, so that in times of trouble or grief, our pastor can walk with you.

It is important for you to tell the pastor what you need from him/her. Remember that pastors will not know this without your input. If there is a time you wish our pastor to stop by, pick up that phone and give a call. It is common for pastors to walk with people as they die. Pastors are regularly in the home when invited in, to help people as they near death. A pastor will come to you at the time of death, if you ask him/her to be present.

Preplanning a Funeral

St. Luke's pastors are available to talk about funeral plans prior to death. When people make plans with a pastor those plans are placed in a folder to be available when needed. We have prepared and made available planning materials to help people think about these things. This document is one such resource. Others are available through the church office and on the church's website: www.stlukeslutheran.org They are free for anyone to use.

Our pastoral ministry is not limited to people who are members of St. Luke's. Pastors regularly support family of members or others who are not known within St. Luke's. We are a ministry for the community. We are available to support those who are not Lutheran, those who struggle with faith, and those who doubt or do not believe.

When a Loved One Dies

The death of a Christian is a holy moment. Though a time of grief, it is also a time of victory. For in the moment of death, the person is set free to live in the resurrection. It is appropriate for this grief to be expressed in many ways.

Call the Pastor

As a person nears death, or just after a person dies, it is appropriate to call a pastor. When the pastor comes s/he will listen to your stories, share your grief and joy, proclaim the gospel for you. S/he will pray with you and give thanks for the person who has died while asking God's support for those who live beyond the death.

If the death of your loved one happens in a nursing home, hospital, hospice or other medical or support facility, the staff of that organization will help you contact one of our pastors, if asked. You may also call him/her directly, no matter the hour. The facility will also contact the funeral home of your choice and begin any other processes needed, such as calling municipal officers appropriate to the situation.

If your Loved One Dies at Home

The family may call one of our pastors, no matter the hour. If hospice has been a part of your home health team, a call to them should also be made right away. Proper municipal authorities should also be notified. You will also need to call your preferred funeral home.

Making Plans at the Funeral Home

Our pastor(s) regularly meets with families as plans are made with the funeral home. Inviting him/her to the table will help facilitate funeral or memorial service planning. A pastor will come to be with you and to help coordinate dates and times for services. S/he will also begin processes leading to the funeral services, asking you which hymns, scriptures, and people you wish to include in the service.

About Funerals or Memorial Services

It is a common misconception that a funeral service is for the person who has died. This is true for people of certain Christian faiths. However, in Lutheran Christian understanding, the funeral service is for the living left behind. It is for those who grieve.

The Five Purposes

The funeral/memorial service is a ritual to help people:

- 1) give thanks to God for the life of the one who has died,
- 2) to call on God to bring comfort in the midst of confusion and grief,
- 3) to remember the promises of God concerning the resurrection,
- 4) to announce the Gospel for the purpose of faith, and
- 5) to give appropriate honor to the one who has died.

It is important to Lutheran Christians to plan a funeral or memorial service that addresses the five purposes listed above. The first four purposes remind us that such a service is first and foremost, a worship service. The fifth purpose reminds us that each service is particular and personal.

The Ritual

Funerals and memorial services at St. Luke's typically follow the burial rite, [Funeral](#), page 279 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. St. Luke's pastor will help the family personalize the funeral service to include scripture hymns and stories appropriate to the situation. Sometimes the person who has died expressed hopes for the service. Every attempt will be made to make those things happen, within reason and within the Lutheran Christian Heritage.

The Presiding Minister

It is the normal practice of Lutheran churches to have a St. Luke's pastor preside at all funerals and memorial services held at St. Luke's. Our pastor may invite others to serve alongside him/her, including other clergy, if the family so desires. Involving the pastor in ministry prior to the death of the person, when possible, will help the pastor better serve you and your family.

Baptism is at the Center

A Lutheran funeral or memorial service celebrates new life given by God to the believer in Christ through Holy Baptism. Central to our proclamation is that in Holy Baptism, God joins us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's action in Holy Baptism sets us free from sin and death. Through this sacrament God gives us eternal life as a free gift. Baptismal identity will be a central theme in the funeral ritual. The baptismal date of the deceased will be included in the worship bulletin, when it is known. This date may also be used in the sermon and in other ways.

The Funeral Pall

The funeral pall is a central symbol of our baptismal identity at a Christian burial. It reminds us that in Holy Baptism, we "put on Christ," or in other words, God joined us with Christ. The historic symbol of the white baptismal gown, worn at the baptismal font, is mimicked in the baptismal pall. The large white drape is placed across the casket as a sign that the baptized person lives in Christ, having put on Christ in Holy Baptism. This reminds us that when God looks at the one who has died, God sees Christ: the one to whom we are joined in Holy Baptism, the one who has been "put on us." The pall takes away all signs of status or prestige and reminds us that in death, we rely on the grace of God shown in Baptism.

The Use of Names

During a Christian funeral it is a long-held Christian tradition that only the first and middle names of the person who has died be used. This is done for theological reasons. We understand that in Holy Baptism, we become a part of the Kingdom of God and are made members of God's family. Our new family identity is: child of God. The surname, is therefore, left off to emphasize this new identity. We no longer belong to the family of our ancestors, but to the Christian family, members of the Kingdom of God. This pattern of naming is observed in Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination and a funeral.

Scripture

Scripture may be chosen by the family. It is normal that Scripture be read in a Christian funeral or memorial service. Usually, there is an Old Testament reading, a Psalm, a New Testament reading, and a Gospel reading. Additional readings can be included at the graveside. St. Luke's pastor will help guide the family in proper scripture choices when they are unsure what scripture to use.

Hymns

Most often, funerals or memorial services held at the church contain three hymns. These hymns usually reflect themes of the scripture being read, or express the hope we have in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first hymn is sung as the family makes their way into the sanctuary and typically reflects our baptismal identity. The second hymn is done just after the sermon and may carry forward themes related to the sermon. The final hymn comes at the close of the service. Easter hymns are especially appropriate for Christian burials. They express the joy and hope we have, while reminding us that God, who raised Jesus from the dead, will raise all who have been baptized into Christ and who believe.

Not all music is appropriate for use in a Christian service. Generally, a song is appropriate when it is found within *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* or another approved worship resource used in ELCA congregations. Certain songs from other Christian traditions are also acceptable, so long as they fit with the Lutheran witness to Christian hope. Songs from outside these sources are not normally appropriate for use in a Christian service. St. Luke's pastor(s) will guide families toward appropriate music.

Family Remembrance

Families are invited to share about the person who has died. This adds a nice time of remembrance, and gives personal testimony to gifts God has given in the life of the one who died. It is important that such remembrance be carefully planned. The family should decide who they wish to have speak. The number of speakers should be limited to no more than three. Each speaker should be prompted to speak from a script and for no more than three minutes. If the family wishes to have an open microphone for others to speak, such arrangements can be made for a time during the visitation prior to the service or during a time of fellowship following the service.

Other Participants in the Service

Often, families wish to have people involved in the service who are representative of the life of the person who has died. Such involvement is encouraged. These arrangements are made in advance, when planning is done with the pastor.

Family members and friends are welcome to:

- Serve as a crucifer (lead the family in and out of the service while holding a cross)
- Serve as lector by reading scripture,
- Assist with Holy Communion
- Offer a family remembrances,
- Serve as a soloist,
- provide a musical selection, and
- Other? If you have particular ways you'd like to involve family members, speak to the pastor(s).

Holy Communion

It is common for Holy Communion to be a part of a worship service held at the church, especially when the person who has died has been an active part of the faith community. Holy Communion is "a foretaste of the feast to come," a sharing in the heavenly banquet that awaits us in the resurrection. Therefore, it is very appropriate. When Holy Communion is included in the service, all baptized believers in Christ who are present will be invited to share in the meal, regardless of their church affiliation.

Other Rituals

Often, people belong to other groups and associations that have rituals done at the time of death. These rituals, provided they do not run counter to the Christian witness, are welcomed to be done during a

visitation prior to the service. Examples include: masonic rites, Nightingale observances for nurses, Eastern Star, etc. Such observances are not a part of services in the sanctuary or chapel.

Military Rites

St. Luke's Lutheran honors and thanks those who have served the country as part of their Christian vocation. Families and/or individuals wish to have military rites at the time of burial should talk to our pastor and the funeral home about these wishes. They are welcome and encouraged and will be conducted in accordance with Lutheran propers and military decorum.

The following describes how such rites are done at St. Luke's Lutheran Church. They are based on pastoral training and theological reflection. They conform to the practices recommended by a (now retired) military Chaplain, who served the US Navy in the rank of Captain, and is an active ELCA Pastor.

A military veteran and/or an active member of the military who has died, will be draped in the flag if this is their or their family's wish. This will happen prior to the visitation. As the service begins, the flag will be replaced with the church's funeral pall, lest the flag be dishonored by covering it up. The flag will be honorably placed in the church's narthex, keeping it ready for its use at the end of the ceremony.

Following the service, as the casket makes its way out of the sanctuary the funeral pall will be removed and the flag will be draped over the casket. The flag will remain on the casket until military rites are performed at the graveside, following committal. If the burial is not to be attended, military rites may be held outside the church's main doors, as the casket is readied for placement in the hearse.

Services at the Funeral Home

When a service is held at a funeral home, the service is modified to the situation. Such services are usually more abbreviated and do not include Holy Communion.

Possible Scripture Options for a Funeral

Old Testament Readings

Job 19:23-27a *I know that my Redeemer lives*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 *For everything there is a season*

Isaiah 25:6-9, *God will swallow up death forever*

Isaiah 40:1, 6-11 *God will gather the lambs*

Isaiah 40:1-11, 28-31 *Comfort my people, says your God*

Isaiah 43:1-3a, 5-7 *I have called you by name*

Isaiah 43:1-3a, 18-19 *I am about to do a new thing*

Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-13 *Every one who thirsts, come to the waters*

Isaiah 61:1-3 *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me*

Isaiah 65:17-20, 23-25 *A new heaven and a new earth*

Isaiah 66:10-14 *As a mother comforts her child*

Jeremiah 31:8-13 *I will turn their mourning into joy*

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33 *The steadfast love of the Lord*

Psalms

Psalm 23 *The Lord is my Shepherd*

Psalm 42:1-5, *As a deer longs for flowing streams*

Psalm 46:1-7, *God is our refuge and strength*

Psalm 121, *I lift up my eyes to the Hills*

Psalm 142:1-6 *I cry to the Lord with my voice*

Psalm 143 *Lord, hear my prayer*

New Testament

Romans 5:1-11 *Peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ*

Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 *Who will separate us from the love of Christ?*

1 Corinthians 15:12-26 *Christ, the first fruits, has been raised*

2 Corinthians 4:6-12, 16-18 *Treasure in clay jars*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 18 *Teaching about those who have died*

Hebrews 12:1-2 *Surrounded by a cloud of witnesses*

1 Peter 1:3-9 *A living hope through Jesus' resurrection*

1 John 3:1-2 *See what love the Father has given us*

Revelation 7:9-17 *God will wipe away every tear*

Revelation 21:2-7 *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem*

Revelation 22:1-5 *The Lord God will be their light*

Gospel

Matthew 5:1-10 *Blessed are those who mourn*

Matthew 11:25-30 *I will give you rest*

Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14 *A child is the greatest in the kingdom*

Mark 10:13-16 *Let the little children come*

Mark 16:1-7 *The resurrection of Christ*

Luke 24:1-9 *The resurrection of Christ*

John 1:1-5, 9-14 *The light shines in the darkness*

John 6:37-40 *I will raise them up on the last day*

John 10:11-16 *I am the good shepherd*

John 11:21-27 *I am the resurrection and the life*

John 14:1-6 *I prepare a place for you*

John 14:25-27 *Peace I leave with you*

Funeral Fees

There are fees associated with funerals. Sometimes they are paid to the church by the funeral home on a family's behalf and then incorporated into the funeral home's charges. Some families choose to cover these fees on their own, making payments on the day of the funeral.

Organist: \$150 Payable to the organist directly
(\$200 if not a member)
Soloist: \$100 Payable to the soloist directly
Pastor: \$250 Payable to the Pastor directly
Facility Use: \$200 Payable to St. Luke's Lutheran Church
(\$250 if not a member)

Fees for meals are separate and depend on what is ordered for funerals. Funeral luncheon fees are set on a case by case basis, depending on quantities of people served.