

FUNERAL AND
MEMORIAL
MINISTRY



CENTRAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH
4711 WESTSIDE DRIVE
DALLAS, TEXAS
214-526-7291
WWW.CCCDT.ORG

Whether with tragic prematurity, or as the gracious conclusion of a long life, the coming of death is always difficult. The season of grieving is of substantial spiritual significance. Faithful preparation draws the full value from this occasion. This material is provided to help those who want to communicate their funeral wishes as well as those who are currently making arrangements for the funeral of a loved one.

Purpose of a Christian Funeral or Memorial Service

- To worship God as the Lord of Life and the Hope for Eternity
- To bring comfort to the living from God's Word
- To celebrate with thanks the gift of the life of the one remembered
- To witness to the hope of resurrection through faith in Jesus Christ

Pastoral Ministry

The "ritual" of a funeral or memorial service affirms the value of every human life and enables those who are grieving to integrate their loss with the coming events of life. One of the values of the service is the opportunity it offers for caring conversation with the pastor.

Because of the importance of this ministry, the pastor of Central Christian Church will make every possible effort to accept every request to conduct a funeral or memorial service, whether for a member of the congregation or any other person regardless of the circumstances of their life or death. The pastor does not expect an honorarium for funerals. When the pastor receives honoraria for funerals, they are used to enhance his ministry.

Usually, the family makes arrangements with the funeral director and cemetery without the pastor being present. However, the pastor is available for advance consultation if desired. This can be helpful for families who have not made funeral arrangements before.

To facilitate this ministry, the pastor desires an appointment with the family or loved ones making the arrangements for the one being remembered. This will be of greatest benefit if this is

a day or two before the service. Besides helping the pastor prepare the service, it can have a healing effect on family and loved ones. If an appointment at the church or in the family home is not practical, a phone call can substitute.

At that gathering, the pastor will be asking for the following information.

Scripture

Two or three scripture passages are read in the service and become the core around which other elements revolve. Both Old and New Testaments are included. Often favorite passages of the deceased are chosen and may be better than traditional funeral passages. These are in addition to the 23rd Psalm, which is always included as an affirmation of faith.

Here are some commonly used passages you may wish to consider:

Job 19:23-27; Psalm 90; Isaiah 40:1-8; Matthew 5:1-12; John 11:17-27; John 14:1-6,27; John 20:11-18; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; Revelation 21:1-4

Reading of poetry or other material is generally discouraged so as not to distract from the comforting Word of God. When it is included, it will be read before the prayer that introduces the reading of Scripture.

Hymns

When the service is held in the church, two or three hymns are customarily sung by the congregation. Again, favorites of the deceased may be more effective than traditional funeral hymns. Hymns should be selected that glorify God and speak of faith, hope and the triumph of resurrection. Finishing the service with a strong, uplifting hymn is especially important for inspiring the mourners to head into life with expectation. Finding hymns that are not in *The Chalice Hymnal* cannot be assured.

Here are a few suggestions:

(2) *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*; (67) *O God Our Help in Ages Past*; (218) *Thine Is the Glory*; (562) *Because He Lives*; (595) *Be Thou My Vision*; (637) *For All the Saints*; (638) *In the Bulb There Is a Flower*.

Remembrances

To make the service as personal as possible, the pastor will want the family and loved ones to describe treasured memories which can then be worked into the meditation. Please point out anything that should be specifically included.

Sometimes a family member or close friend can share some personal remembrances in the service, but this may be emotionally taxing. Those making the arrangements need to be certain any one doing this is able to manage it with grace, especially if emotions overwhelm. Ordinarily, writing out these comments and practicing is a good idea. These comments should be concisely focused and brief, about 3 minutes is enough. An "open mic" will not be available for spontaneous comments.

Solos and Special Music

The church can arrange for a soloist to sing once or twice in the service. If a family member or friend is to be the soloist, it is important they are musically and emotionally able to handle the situation in a way that will contribute to the purpose of the service. An honorarium of at least \$100 is customary for a soloist.

Only the church's regular organist may play the organ for funerals or memorial services. As he considers this part of his ministry with the church, he does not expect an honorarium. However, it is acceptable to offer an honorarium to express your appreciation.

Place and Sequence of the Service

Central Christian Church makes its facilities available for funerals and memorial services at no cost. The sanctuary seats about 250 and the chapel about 35. Central Christian Church and its pastor encourages using the church for funerals and memorial services. Gathering to remember those who have been active members of the church where the church dedicates babies, baptizes new believers, performs weddings and weekly celebrates the Lord's Supper is especially appropriate. It is the place where Christians gather to invoke God's participation in life's important milestones. Of course, if a family prefers a

service at the funeral home or cemetery, the pastor is happy to preside.

Conventionally, “funeral” has implied a service with the casket present, and “memorial service” implies that no casket is present. Nothing else distinguishes between these two terms. While interment has traditionally followed the funeral service, an increasing proportion of families are choosing to have interment a couple of hours before the service at the church. The pastor will be happy to discuss these approaches. When the casket is present for the service at the church, it will be closed during the service.

Earth burial is not the only option for the disposition of the body of the deceased. Entombment, cremation and donation to medical science are other common choices. None of these preclude a memorial service. The pastor can discuss a variety of options.

Sometimes another pastor has had a special relationship to the family or the deceased. The pastor of Central Christian Church can give another pastor opportunity for things like scripture reading, praying and sharing personal remembrances. Advance coordination between pastors is essential to this participation.

Sometimes a ceremony of a fraternal or other organization is desired as part of the memorial process. These can be conducted at the funeral home or cemetery before and separate from the worship service. They will not be conducted at the church.

Flowers and Memorials

Most of the time families publish a notice with the obituary in the newspaper that in lieu of flowers, friends may make memorial donations to an appropriate charity. This may be a cause the deceased was interested in or that benefits a disease from which the deceased suffered. Of course, Central Christian Church happily receives memorial contributions, which is certainly appropriate for those who have been faithful, active members.

Advance Arrangements

All funeral directors and cemeteries will make pre-need arrangements. Besides having potential economic advantages, this can significantly reduce the stress on a family when the time for a funeral comes. The pastor can discuss when this is advantageous.

Whether or not pre-need arrangements are made with a funeral director, every adult church member is encouraged to prepare a written plan for their funeral wishes. Such a plan would list scripture readings, hymns, soloist and selection and someone to share remembrances. A brief biography with dates of important life milestones is also helpful. A copy of these plans should be given to each person who could be responsible for funeral arrangements (e.g. spouse, children, grandchildren) and with the church. If pre-need arrangements have been made with a funeral home, a copy can be filed with them as well. This will help insure that your wishes are honored.

Do not think of this as a morbid exercise but as a loving service to your family and loved ones and a way of articulating your faith in Christ after you have left his life and entered Christ's eternal presence.

Other Decisions at the End of Life

You can also help your family and protect yourself by preparing a medical power of attorney and other appropriate documents, such as instructions for organ donations, to specify your wishes should you become unable to make decisions for yourself. These are highly personal, emotional and spiritual issues. While they may be difficult to discuss, they can be critical. If you would like to explore them in a sensitive, confidential conversation, you may contact the pastor.

Also, as the end of life approaches, many people and their families can benefit from hospice care. Often people wait too long to engage hospice care to be able to receive its full benefits. The pastor is available to explore if and when hospice care may be right for you and your family.

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