

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

(Romans 8:38-39)

We Belong to God

A guide for planning funerals and memorial services



Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26). As Christians, we believe this promise to be true, and we proclaim this good news even in the face of death.

In the Presbyterian tradition, funerals and memorial services are described as Services of Witness to the Resurrection. This means that, after the death of a loved one, we gather to worship, trusting in God’s love and grace and seeking peace through Jesus Christ, who grieves alongside us.

This guide can be used to help you make plans in advance for your own funeral. Writing down your wishes and sharing them with family or friends is a gift to those who will one day plan a service to celebrate your life. Doing this relieves their burden of guessing what you intended and frees them from making challenging decisions in a time of sorrow. We also encourage you to share your plans with the church pastor and music director, who will keep a copy on file until such time as it is needed. The pastor and music director are both available to meet and discuss your plans with you.

This guide is also designed for families who are currently planning a funeral or memorial service for a loved one. The suggestions are meant as a starting point to guide you through this time, which can feel overwhelming.

Scripture affirms “there is nothing in life or in death that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). Through a funeral or memorial service, we bring our sorrow to God as we also affirm the promise of eternal life we know in Jesus Christ.

Our support of you and your family does not end with a memorial service. The pastor is available to continue meeting with you and your family as you mourn your loss, and also has recommendations for area counselors and grief support groups. Deacons, Stephen Ministers, and other caregivers in the congregation provide additional support through prayers, meals, and visitation. Grief is an ongoing process, and we will continue this journey with you in the days, weeks, months, and years to come.

Suggested Order of Worship

Prelude

Welcome and Opening Sentences

Prayer

Hymn

Words of Remembrance

Brief words from several family members or friends arranged in advance. It is recommended that those speaking write out what they are planning to say, and speak no longer than three to five minutes.

[Solo]

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture Readings

Message

[Solo]

[Affirmation of Faith]

Prayers of Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer

Hymn

Commendation

Blessing

Postlude

This is simply a starting point for worship planning. The pastor will guide you through selecting different elements and making decisions about any omissions or additions you wish to make.

Scripture Readings

The following are offered as suggestions of passages that proclaim the hope of the resurrection and love of God through Jesus Christ. The family is also welcome to select other favorite passages. The pastor is also happy to select appropriate scripture readings for the day.

Job 19:23-27	<i>I know that my redeemer lives</i>
Isaiah 40:1-11	<i>Comfort my people</i>
Isaiah 40:28-31	<i>Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength</i>
Isaiah 65:17-25	<i>I create new heavens and a new earth</i>
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15	<i>For everything there is a season</i>
Psalms 23	<i>The Lord is my shepherd</i>
Psalms 46:1-5, 10-11	<i>The Lord is a very present help in trouble</i>
Psalms 121	<i>I lift up my eyes to the hills</i>
Psalms 130	<i>Out of the depths I cry to the Lord</i>
Psalms 139:1-12	<i>Where shall I go from your spirit?</i>
Matthew 5:1-12a	<i>The Beatitudes</i>
Matthew 18:1-5, 10	<i>The greatest in the kingdom of heaven</i>
Matthew 25:31-46	<i>As you did it to one of the least of these</i>
Mark 10:13-16	<i>Let the children come to me</i>
Luke 23:33, 39-43	<i>Today you will be with me in paradise</i>
John 3:16-21	<i>God so loved the world</i>
John 11:17-27	<i>I am the resurrection and the life</i>
John 14:1-6, 25-27	<i>Let not your hearts be troubled</i>
Romans 8:14-23, 31-39	<i>Nothing can separate us from the love of God</i>
Romans 14:7-9, 10b-12	<i>Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's</i>
Corinthians 15:20-26, 42-44, 50, 53-58	<i>Death is swallowed in victory</i>
Corinthians 4:16-5:1	<i>Visible things are temporary, invisible things eternal</i>
Philippians 3:20-21	<i>Our citizenship is in heaven</i>
Colossians 3:1-17	<i>Set your minds on things that are above</i>
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	<i>The comfort of Christ's coming</i>
Hebrews 11:1-3, 12:1-2	<i>Faith and the cloud of witnesses</i>
Revelation 21:1-2, 22:3-5	<i>A new heaven and a new earth</i>

Hymns

The following hymns from *Worship & Rejoice* hymnal (2001) are particularly appropriate for funeral or memorial services. Families are welcome to select other hymns or spiritual songs to be included.

507	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God	77	I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art
521	Abide With Me		
422	Amazing Grace!	429	If You Will Trust in God to Guide You
451	Be Still, My Soul	79	I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath
426	Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine!	295	Jesus Christ is Risen Today
502	Be Thou My Vision	59	Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
148	Come, Thou Almighty King	358	Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
317	Crown Him with Many Crowns	419	My Faith Looks Up to Thee
123	Fairest Lord Jesus	14	Now Thank We All Our God
529	For All the Saints	84	O God, Our Help in Ages Past
518	Give Thanks for Life	446	O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go
409	God of Our Life	82	Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven
72	Great Is Thy Faithfulness	500	Precious Lord, Take My Hand
501	Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah	86	The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want (Psalm 23)
499	He Leadeth Me	290	The Strife is O'er
737	Holy, Holy, Holy	415	When We Are Living
411	How Firm a Foundation	428	When Peace Like a River
51	How Great Thou Art		
515	Hymn of Promise		

Special Music

All music should bring glory and honor to God. Additional music, including solos or instrumental pieces, can be appropriate. The music director and pastor will guide you in discerning and making decisions on music.

The music director will be available to consult with the family regarding any requests for instrumental music before, during, or after the service.

Any musicians not on staff at FPCRO must consult with the music director during the planning phase.

Affirmations of Faith

The following are from faith statements of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and proclaim some of what the church has believed throughout the ages. Families are also welcome to select another statement from our confessions or similar appropriate words, including those found in Scripture. Including this element is a way for the congregation to remind ourselves of the faith of the church.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 1

What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

From A Brief Statement of Faith (PCUSA)

In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve...With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Arrangements

The pastor will work with the family for all aspects relating to the worship service. The pastor will also help coordinate conversations with the music director, funeral home director, and any additional church members and groups providing support to the family. We request that you call the church to notify the pastor of a death prior to your meeting with the funeral home.

Timing

In most cases a service takes place within a few days of death, but a memorial service at a later date is also appropriate. The pastor will advise the family of the availability of the church and its staff and will arrange a time to speak with the family to plan the service.

Visitation

Some families choose to have a short visitation for friends and family at the church prior to the start of the service. Others forego a visitation or plan that ritual at the funeral home.

Committal Service

The brief committal service takes place where the casket or ashes are laid to rest, such as a cemetery or columbarium. The main worship service may precede or follow the committal. Typically, the committal service is attended by members of the family and close friends.

Reception

The FPCRO Hospitality Committee can arrange to host a cookie and punch reception following the worship service. We are no longer able to host a luncheon/meal. The family reimburses the church for costs associated with the reception.

Flowers

Flowers for the service or reception are welcome and can be delivered to the church during normal office hours or within one hour of the service. All flowers should be removed by the funeral home or family after the service unless other arrangements have been made.

Memorial Garden and Columbarium

Our church has a columbarium intended for members and their immediate families. Niches can be reserved any time in advance. Please contact the church office for more information.

Memorial Gifts

The church appreciates any memorial gifts that family or friends wish to make. Memorial gifts are generally used for the area of greatest need, unless otherwise requested by the family. On behalf of the family, the church office acknowledges memorial gifts received and then notifies the family of those donors.

Honorariums

Providing space and services for families is a ministry of compassion on behalf of our congregation. The church facilities are made available to you, whenever possible, to host a funeral or memorial service. A list of suggested minimum honoraria for those who make the service possible will be provided to the family during the planning phase.

Planning Guide

Full Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Scripture Readings (usually at least two)

Hymns (usually two)

Special Music and/or Solo (favorite composers, organ or piano pieces, sacred solos, hymn tunes)

Affirmation of Faith (if desired)

Family Members or Friends to Speak (optional)

Other Wishes (note if military honors or other special ceremony)

Pall Bearers

Memorial Donations

Advanced Planning Information

The pastor would be happy to meet with you further to discuss your wishes. In addition to the reverse side, please also complete the information below. Then, provide copies to several close family members or friends, as well as the pastor.

Name: _____

I would like to have the following relative(s)/friend(s) oversee the arrangements for my memorial service:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

I have made the following arrangements in advance: (If marked, please include additional information of where to find details).

- ☐ Living Will or Advance Directive (file with your physician, too)
- ☐ Last Will and Testament
- ☐ Funeral Home _____
- ☐ Donation of body for medical purposes
- ☐ Organ Donation
- ☐ Burial Arrangements
 - ☐ Cremation
 - ☐ Cemetery
 - ☐ Columbarium
- ☐ Particular stories of your life and faith that you would like to have shared at this service