

Funeral Planning Guide & Worksheet



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Jesus said: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." -John 14:3

Thank you for picking up a Funeral Planning Guide and Worksheet. This material is designed to: 1) Provide a tool for planning for the future when your life on this earth ends, 2) Support and guide families making plans upon the death of a loved one.

In the first days following a loved one's death, the family makes an average of 200 decisions. During such an emotional, stressful, and demanding time, plans that have been made earlier lighten the load after death. If you've not made advance plans, this guide will be helpful to you as you make arrangements for services and burial of your loved one.

This guide will walk you through a series of questions. Your responses can be marked on the worksheet at the end. The Living Word Church's Pastors or Director of Congregational Care are available to discuss any items with you. When you are finished, please share your worksheet with a family member or friend who will act on your behalf after your death. It would also be helpful to contact the Living Word Church's Director of Congregational Care to share your worksheet so that it can be held in safekeeping for the future.

The Goal of the Christian Funeral Service

The gathering of family and friends, who form a community of hope for a funeral or memorial service, is a rich opportunity to recall the promises of God through Christ. Because of His suffering, death, and resurrection to new life, each time we gather to worship upon the death of a loved one, we do so in the context of God's promise. Every funeral includes praising God in Christ who is our hope and our salvation, even as we remember the deceased and give thanks to God for the time shared with that person.

United Methodist Christians believe in Jesus Christ whose bodily death and resurrection made possible life everlasting. Christians view death as another step in our life as children of God. Yet, Christians also experience death as a time of loss when sorrow, grief, and bereavement are both natural and appropriate. These two truths inform the Christian funeral service and guide the church in its ministry to those who have lost a loved one to death, affirming with both joy and tears the promise and hope of the Good News of Jesus.

A funeral or memorial service should be comforting to those who mourn as well as bear witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. The concern of gathered friends does minister to our grief but, above all else, a funeral is a service of worship to God. There, in God's presence together, we witness to our faith in the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. In doing so, the assurance of God's love and salvation in Christ become a ministry, especially to the bereaved. Since a funeral is a service of worship, all that takes place should be consistent with this principle.

Planning Faithfully, Choosing Wisely

What is the difference between a funeral and memorial service?

Simply put, at a funeral service the body of the deceased is present, whereas at a memorial service either the deceased's ashes or no remains are present and the service is generally held at a later time. Both services provide an opportunity to proclaim God's death-defeating acts in Christ as we remember all that God has given us in the life of our loved one.

How does the Church view cremation?

Cremation is an acceptable way for Christians to deal with one's earthly remains. The Scriptures tell us that we are formed "of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7) and, after death, we shall return "again to dust." (Job 34:15)

If I choose cremation, do I need to secure the services of a Funeral Director?

We highly recommend working with a Funeral Director. This professional will ease the strain upon family members by coordinating all the details and thus contributing to your wishes being carried out with dignity and honor. Even if cremation is your desire, a Funeral Director handles many details that are not taken care of by the church, the Pastor, or family members. Attempting to save money by not using a Funeral Director is likely to cause confusion and frustration at a time when you most need guidance and support.

Should I make pre-arrangements with a Funeral Director?

Making the decision to pre-arrange some aspects of your funeral and/or burial is helpful. An appointment with a Funeral Director in advance of death is a wise step to help you decide what you and your family need from the many services available. If you are a family member caring for a dying loved one, making an initial contact now with a Funeral Director can be very helpful and will lessen the decisions and demands you'll face upon death. The Director of Congregational Care of Living Word Church is available to talk with you about the selection of a Funeral Director or to refer you to Funeral Directors they know well and hold in high regard.

How soon after death does a funeral or memorial service take place?

Funeral services are generally held within three to five days following death, thereby allowing appropriate time for family members and friends to gather for the service. Memorial services can be held at any time. However, waiting for weeks or even months after a death will have a bearing on finding a sense of closure, and this will impact the grief work that follows the death of a loved one. Therefore, it is recommended that a memorial service be held within a few weeks after death.

If a funeral or memorial service is to be followed by a burial that same day, the schedule of the cemetery workers dictates that burials be held during normal business hours. Surcharges apply for weekend burials, and burials are not available on holidays. It is also possible to have the burial before the service which allows for a late afternoon or evening service.

Funeral or memorial services on Sunday are highly discouraged, as Sundays are reserved for the worship services of the congregation.

What fees are associated with a funeral or memorial service at Living Word Church?

There is no building rental fee for the funerals of Living Word Church members. Fees for musicians, pastors, media/sound, custodians, and other staff members can be coordinated through the Director of Congregational Care of Living Word Church based on a fee schedule.

Who makes arrangements for the musician(s)?

The Director of Congregational Care, along with the Directors of Traditional and Contemporary Worship, will make musical arrangements for all funerals held at Living Word Church. If the service is conducted at the funeral home, then musicians will be arranged by the Funeral Director.

May we have a visitation at the church the evening before the service, or must that take place at a funeral home?

The visitation may take place at either the funeral home or Living Word Church in the afternoon or evening before the service if there are no other events already scheduled. In addition, a visitation time is typically offered at the church prior to the service.

Who is responsible for producing the order of worship and bulletin?

After the service has been planned with the Pastor and Director of Congregational Care, the church office will produce the bulletin at no cost to your family.

Who is responsible for submitting the death notice and obituary to the newspaper?

The Funeral Director will take care of this for you. A full obituary normally appears 2-3 days before the visitation and funeral. There is a cost for this, and the Funeral Director will assist you. Notices to additional newspapers can also be handled by the Funeral Director at your request.

Who plans the reception following the funeral or memorial service?

If using the Fellowship Hall at Living Word Church, the Director of Congregational Care will schedule the room and make these arrangements with your family. The Director of Congregational Care and the Memorial Team Ministry will work with you to plan the meal for the appropriate number of people you anticipate attending. We assure you that there will be sufficient food and seating for all who choose to attend the reception. Any leftover food is yours to take home. There is no fee for the reception for Living Word Church members.

What if I desire to have memorials directed to Living Word Church or other organizations?

This is an honorable thing to do. Living Word Church and any other organizations you choose are blessed when memorials are directed to support their ministries and missions. The Funeral Director will be happy to include any memorial designation(s) in the notices about the funeral service. All memorial gifts received directly by Living Word Church will be put in our General Operating Fund and will generate an acknowledgment to you and to the donor.