



A Pastoral Guide to Funerals and Memorials at Northminster Presbyterian Church

“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.” from A Brief Statement of Faith Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Introduction

On behalf of the entire Northminster Presbyterian Church family, please accept our sincerest condolences on the death of your loved one. We have prepared this guide in hopes that it may answer many of your questions and serve as a starting point for many conversations yet to come. Know that our church staff and elders are here to assist and support you as you begin this journey.

Theological Convictions

The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and shapes Christians’ attitudes and responses to the event of death. Death brings loss, sorrow, and grief to all. In the face of death Christians affirm with tears and joy the hope of the gospel. Christians do not bear bereavement in isolation but are sustained by the power of the Spirit and the community of faith. The church offers a ministry of love and hope to all who grieve.¹

Arrangements for the Body of the Deceased

As they are a part of God’s good creation, we believe that the human body should be treated with respect and dignity both in life and in death. Burial, cremation, or donation of the body to medical research are all theologically faithful means of making arrangements for the final disposition of the human body, so long as the remains are handled with respect, care, and dignity.

Funerals or Memorials

When the body or the cremains of the deceased are present for a worship service, the service is appropriately referred to as a funeral. When the body or the cremains are not present, the service is appropriately referred to as a memorial. In either case, the elements of the worship service are nearly identical. For simplicity’s sake, within this document, henceforth the term funeral will be used to refer to both.

¹ Directory for Worship, *The Book of Order, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, W4.10001.

Scheduling a Funeral at Northminster Presbyterian Church (NPC)

When death is imminent or has just occurred, we encourage you to notify the pastor and the church office as soon as possible. Pastoral care at this time can help the bereaved to receive the consolation of the gospel, and, if funeral arrangements have not been made, to make sound decisions regarding them.

Please discuss arrangements for the funeral with the Pastor prior to meeting with a representative from a funeral home. The Pastor will be available visit with the family in your home or meet with you at the funeral home before you meet with the funeral home representative. The Pastor can explain the nature of the funeral service; the options open to the family, and the importance of exercising sound stewardship by avoiding overspending.

In any case, please consult with the Pastor prior to scheduling a funeral service with a funeral home.

Roles and Responsibilities

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the session (local governing council) bears responsibility for the worship life of the congregation. As such, if Northminster Presbyterian Church (NPC) is chosen to officiate the service, whether the funeral takes place at the church, at the funeral home, at the graveside, or some other place, the funeral service takes place under the authority and guidance of the session. As the representative of the session, the Pastor will work closely with the family and the funeral home to prepare a worship service that is both theologically faithful to the gospel and personal in nature. Because the Pastor is informed of the requirements of the church and sensitive to the needs of the bereaved, the Pastor will serve as the facilitator to provide a worship service that is both honoring to our Maker and responsive to the needs of those that have suffered the loss. For funerals held on-site at NPC, a funeral coordinator will be appointed.

Officiating Pastor

Ordinarily NPC's Pastor will officiate all funeral services. If the family desires that other clergy participate in the service, professional courtesy and protocol dictate that the invitation to participate or co-officiate is extended by NPC's pastor. In most cases, our Pastor is happy to extend such invitations; however, please observe etiquette and do not confer with another member of the clergy about participating in the funeral service before making those desires known to NPC's Pastor.

Location of the Service

Just as we are baptized by God in church and have been nourished by God through the church, so it is wholly appropriate that thanksgiving to God for our lives should be offered in the church. The NPC Sanctuary seats approximately 125 people. It is equipped with an organ and piano. Either is available for a funeral service.²

Caskets

When a casket is present in the Sanctuary, it may be covered with a pall (a simple white cloth reminiscent of baptismal garments), or with flowers, as deemed appropriate by the clergy and the family. When requested by the family, an American flag may be used as a pall for veterans of the Armed Forces, police, fire, or EMS services. NPC does not maintain a flag for such purposes.

Civil and Military Honor Ceremonies

As the funeral is a service designed for the worship of God, civil and military ceremonies are not appropriate within the service itself. These ceremonies may take place before or after the worship service, on the lawn of the church or at the place of interment. In the event of inclement weather, these ceremonies may take place before or after the funeral service in the fellowship hall.

Visitation/Viewing

Traditionally, a visitation may be scheduled at the funeral home on the evening before the funeral service. This is an excellent time to receive friends who may not be able to attend the funeral service, and it's also an excellent time for sharing eulogies and stories about the deceased. If desired and arranged in advance, our Pastor would be happy to lead a brief prayer service at the visitation.

On occasion, families request that a visitation be held at the church immediately prior to the funeral service, and we are happy to accommodate this request. If an open casket visitation takes place in the Sanctuary or Chapel, the casket will be closed 20 minutes before the funeral. Once closed, the casket will not be reopened.

² Please note that if the funeral takes place during a season of the Christian year in which the Sanctuary and the has have been specially decorated (i.e. Advent/Christmas or Lent/Easter), the decorations will remain in place for the service.

Scripture

Because the funeral is a service of worship, and because God is revealed to God's people in Scripture, at least one reading from Scripture is required at a funeral service. The Pastor can assist the family in selecting one or more readings appropriate to the occasion. A suggested reading list is appended to the end of this document. If there are family members or friends who would like to participate in the leadership of the service, the Pastor will be glad assist them in preparing for their individual roles.

Music

It is appropriate for worshipers to sing hymns, psalms, spirituals, or spiritual songs which affirm God's power over death, a belief in the resurrection to life everlasting, and the assurance of the communion of the saints.³ A list of suggested hymns is appended to the end of this document. Ordinarily, the NPC Music Director and NPC Organist will provide music for all funerals. If guest musicians, including soloists and guest instrumentalists, are desired by the family, protocol dictates that they are to be invited by the Director of Music.

By definition, secular music is not sacred music, and as such, it is not appropriate for a worship service. Secular music *is* appropriate for visitations and receptions, and if desired, NPC's Director of Music will work with the family to plan for music in these venues.

Flowers

In keeping with faithful stewardship that shuns ostentation and seeks the proper use of the gifts of God's creation, flower arrangements displayed in the Sanctuary should be kept to a minimum.⁴ Additional flower arrangements may be displayed in the narthex and/or in the fellowship hall if a reception is to follow the service.

Flowers will be received during NPC's normal office hours or upon prior arrangement. All flower arrangements must be removed from the building following the conclusion of the service and/or reception unless other arrangements have been made. NPC's Pastor will work closely with the family in the implementation of this policy.

³ Directory for Worship, *The Book of Order, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, W4.10004.

⁴ The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, *The Book of Order, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, F2.05.

Receptions

If desired and requested in advance, NPC will coordinate and host a reception following the service in the fellowship hall. These arrangements should be made through NPC's Pastor.

In order to accommodate the many groups who use our building, and in order to be good stewards of the time of church staff, if possible, funeral receptions will be scheduled to last no more than 90 minutes.

Pictures and Photography

Pictures and mementos from the life of the deceased may be displayed outside the Sanctuary, in the narthex or at the reception. In cases where the body of the deceased will not be present for the funeral service, families are encouraged to bring one or two photographs of the deceased to display in the Sanctuary as well.

As it distracts from the worship of God, flash photography is prohibited in all worship services at NPC. Non-flash photos and video may be shot from a stationary position upon prior consultation with NPC's Pastor.

Eulogies

Sharing stories and memories of the deceased is a vital and integral part of marking death in every community, and these stories and memories are best shared in informal settings such as visitations and receptions. Within the context of the funeral service, it is appropriate to have one or two eulogies offered by friends or family of the deceased. As this is a worship service, these should be chosen with care and focused primarily on giving thanks to God for the life and witness of the deceased.

Because funeral services are naturally emotional events, even seasoned public speakers are often caught off-guard; therefore, speaking "off the cuff" is strongly discouraged. Experience proves that at least written bullet points are a tremendous aid to the speaker in presentation.

In every case, eulogies must be arranged with the Pastor in advance. *"Open-mic" time for anyone who would like to say a few words is appropriate for a visitation or a reception, but not for the funeral service itself.*

Multimedia Presentations

Families may wish to honor their loved ones with a multimedia presentation of favorite photos and music. NPC's Sanctuary is not equipped with projection equipment, but NPC has a rolling TV/DVD cart. Presentations are appropriate prior to the service or at the reception. However, as the funeral service is to be focused on God, these presentations are not appropriate for the funeral service itself.

If you choose to produce such a presentation, it must be playable in a standard DVD player, and if at all possible, be delivered to the church 24 hours before service time in order that we may test it to ensure its compatibility with our system.

Recordings

It is possible to produce an audio recording of the service. For more information, speak with NPC's Pastor.

Bulletins

NPC's Pastor will work with the family to produce a bulletin (printed order of service). If possible, please advise the church office at least 48 hours in advance of the service regarding any special requests.

Guest Book

Most funeral homes provide a guest book as a keepsake for the family. If a funeral home will not be on campus in connection with the funeral, please plan to bring your own guest book.

Memorial Gifts

Financial gifts to the church in memory of friends and loved ones are always welcomed. The most useful gift to the church is an undesignated gift to the Memorial Fund. The Memorial Fund is a fund established for the purpose of accepting and holding for a short term undesignated memorial gifts to the church.

If the donor wishes to specify a purpose other than one covered by an existing fund of the church, it is suggested that the donor consider that unless the gift is in a sufficient amount to accomplish the purpose for which it was intended, the donation could languish in the newly created fund until enough money can be raised to accomplish the purpose. Persons who wish to establish a new fund must confer with the Pastor before making a gift.

Committal Service

The Pastor is available to lead a committal service at the site where the casket/cremains are to be interred. This may be scheduled either before or after the funeral service. Northminster Presbyterian Church has a memorial garden. Please speak with the Pastor for more information about our Memorial Garden policies.

Alcohol and Tobacco

Northminster Presbyterian Church maintains a drug, alcohol, and tobacco free church. Please refrain from smoking anywhere on our campus, including on the grounds.

Honoraria

The ministers of Northminster Presbyterian Church believe that funerals are a part of their pastoral call to ministry. They count it both a great responsibility and a great privilege to be with families in their moment of need, offering through their words, work, and witness the life and love of Jesus Christ.

They also acknowledge that some families wish to honor pastors with an honorarium.⁵ As many families are uncertain about an appropriate amount and often contact the church office to ask what is customary, the following ranges are suggested as general guidelines for those wishing to provide an honorarium.

The ranges should not be interpreted as a fee for service arrangement:

Officiating Pastor: \$100–150, depending on the extent to which the officiating pastor is involved in the planning, preparation and leading of the service.

Additional Pastor(s): \$75–100, depending on the extent to which the additional pastor(s) is/are involved in the planning, preparation and leading of the service.

If a family chooses to provide an honorarium to the participating pastor(s), please check with the funeral home about their disbursement policy. Some funeral homes will handle the honorarium as part of their service, while others will leave it to the discretion of the family. On those rare occasions when a funeral home is not involved in the proceedings, honoraria may be given directly to staff members on the day of the funeral.

⁵ It is at the family's discretion as to whether or not they choose to provide an honorarium to the participating pastor(s). It is also at the family's discretion, should they choose to provide an honorarium, to follow the guideline suggested above or to determine other amounts they deem appropriate.

Fees

The following fees apply to funerals held onsite at Northminster Presbyterian Church. These fees may be:

Organist \$100

Soloist \$75

There is no charge for use of the building, bulletins, reception costs, custodial or security services. If the family would like to make a memorial gift to the church to offset these expenses, it will be most welcomed.

The musician's fees should be made payable to the funeral home. The home will then disburse the amount(s) accordingly. Normally, one check is written to the funeral home to cover all fees and honoraria, but check with your funeral director for their specific policy. On those rare occasions when a funeral home is not involved in the proceedings, fees may be given directly to the church office (ordinarily on the day of the funeral).

Service Outline

Below is the outline of a typical funeral service. While there is some flexibility within the service, this basic structure has proven effective and faithful over time.

A Service of Witness to the Resurrection Honoring the Life of *Name*

Prelude

The Entrance of the Family

Processional Hymn

Welcome

Prayer

Readings from Scripture

Giving Thanks to God for the Life of *N* (Eulogy)

Sermon

Affirmation of Faith

Hymn or Solo

Prayers of Thanksgiving and The Lord's Prayer Commendation

Blessing

Recessional Hymn

Suggested Scripture Readings for Funerals

This list is neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Family members are encouraged to select at least one (but preferably no more than four) reading(s) to be used in the funeral service.

Old Testament

Job 19:23-27 I know that my redeemer lives

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

Isaiah 26:14, 19 God will keep them in peace

Isaiah 40:1-11, 28-31 Comfort my people

Isaiah 40:28-31 Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength

Isaiah 43:1-3a, 18-19, 25 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you

Isaiah 44:6-8 I am the first and the last

Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-13 Ho, everyone who thirsts

Isaiah 61:1-4, 10-11 The spirit of the Lord is upon me

Isaiah 65:17-25 I create new heavens and a new earth

Lam. 3:19-26, 31-32 The Lord's steadfast love

Dan. 12:1-3 Many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake

Joel 2:1-2, 12-13, 23-24, 26-29 Return to the Lord with all your heart

Zech. 8:1-8 Children playing in the streets of the city

Isaiah 65:17-25 I create new heavens and a new earth

Lam. 3:19, 23 The Lord's steadfast love

The following psalms are appropriate for singing or reading in the service.

Psalm 16:1-11 The Lord is my chosen portion

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd

Psalm 27:1, 4-9a, 13-14 The Lord is my light and my salvation

Psalm 39:1-4, 12 Lord, let me know my end

Psalm 42:1-6a As a deer longs for flowing streams

Psalm 43 Give judgment for me, O God

Psalm 46:1-7, 10-11 A very present help in trouble

Psalm 90:1-10, 12 Teach us to number our days

Psalm 91 The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

Psalm 103 Bless the Lord, O my soul

Psalm 106:1-5 O give thanks to the Lord

Psalm 116:1-9, 15 The Lord has heard my voice

Psalm 118 Open the gates of righteousness

Psalm 121 I lift up my eyes to the hills

Psalm 130 Out of the depths I cry to the Lord

Psalm 139:1-12 Where shall I go from your spirit?

Psalm 145 I will extol you, O God my King

Psalm 146 Hallelujah! praise the Lord, O my soul

Epistles

Rom. 5:1-11 Hope does not disappoint

Rom. 6:3-9 Baptized into Christ's death, raised to live with him

Rom. 8:14-23, 31-39 Nothing can separate us from the love of God

Rom. 14:79, 10b12 Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's
1 Cor. 15:38, 1220a Christ raised from the dead
1 Cor. 15:2024a In Christ shall all be made alive
1 Cor. 15:2026, 3538, Death is swallowed in victory
1 Cor. 15:3544 The natural body and the spiritual body
1 Cor. 15:5057 We shall all be changed
2 Cor. 4:165:1 Visible things are temporary, invisible things eternal
2 Cor. 5:110 From God we have a house not made with hands
Eph. 1:112:1, 410 Saved by grace through faith
Phil. 3:711 Knowing him and the power of his resurrection
Phil. 3:2021 Our citizenship is in heaven
Col. 3:117 Set your minds on the things that are above
1 Thess. 4:1318 The comfort of Christ's coming
2 Tim. 2:813 If we died with him, we shall also live with him
Heb. 2:1418 Christ was tested in every way
Heb. 11:13, 1316; 12:12 Faith, the pilgrimage, the cloud of witnesses
1 Peter 1:39 Without seeing Christ, you love him
1 Peter 3:1822; 4:6 Christ's ministry to the spirits in prison
1 John 3:13 We are children of God
Rev. 7:23, 917 These are they who have come out of the great tribulation
Rev. 14:13, 67, 1213 Rest for the saints
Rev. 21:14, 2225; 22:35 A new heaven and a new earth
Rev. 22:15 The Lord God will be their light

Gospels

Matt. 5:112a The Beatitudes
Matt. 11:2530 Hidden from the wise, revealed to infants
Matt. 25:113 Wise and foolish bridesmaids
Matt. 25:3146 The Last Judgment
Luke 7:1117 Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain
Luke 18:1517 We enter the kingdom only as children
Luke 23:33, 3943 Today you will be with me in Paradise
John 3:1621 God so loved the world
John 5:2429 Whoever hears and believes has eternal life
John 6:3740 Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away
John 6:4758 Whoever believes in me has eternal life
John 11:1727 I am the resurrection and the life
John 11:3844 Lazarus raised from the dead
John 14:16, 2527 Let not your hearts be troubled

Suggested Hymns for Funerals

This list is neither exclusive nor exhaustive. The Sanctuary has ample copies of *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks
Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound
A Mighty Fortress Is our God
Be Still My Soul
Be Thou My Vision
Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine!
Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation
Doxology
For All the Saints
God of Our Life
Great Is Thy Faithfulness
Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
How Firm a Foundation
How Great Thou Art
I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art
It is Well with My Soul
Jesus Christ Is Risen Today
My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less
Praise the Lord
The Church's One Foundation
The Day of Resurrection!
The Strife is O'er
We Gather Together