

# Funeral Handbook



## First Presbyterian Church

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## Introduction

Christians recognize death as an inevitable part of life on earth, but in the presence of death, “We grieve,” says the apostle Paul, “but we do not grieve without hope.”<sup>1</sup> Death is a solemn and mysterious human experience, bringing painful separation between loved ones. In the midst of our grieving, we profess that, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has overcome the power death. Christians commend to God’s care those who die, trusting that, by God’s grace, nothing – not even death – can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.<sup>2</sup>

The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and informs Christians’ attitudes and responses to the event of death. Death brings loss, sorrow and grief to all. Yet, 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.<sup>3</sup>

Providing guidelines for funerals held in our family of faith is one of the responsibilities of the Session of First Presbyterian Church. This document seeks to assist anyone planning a funeral in our sanctuary, or at another location, using the services of our pastor as well as members of the congregation. If you have any questions regarding how First Presbyterian Church may assist you in a time of grief, please call the church office at 814-226-8145 to speak with our pastor.

The funeral is the beginning – and only a part of a much longer process – of grief. Because it is difficult for survivors to make decisions when dealing with emotional stress and grief after the loss of family members, the Session encourages all of its members to plan their funeral arrangements in advance. These decisions include location and options for burial, selections of scripture and music and preparing one’s estate. The Session encourages everyone to prepare a legal will as well as an advanced directive for medical care known as a “living will.” These documents are to be shared with family members.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:38-39

<sup>3</sup> Book of Order W-4.10001

## When Someone Dies

In the event of a death in your family, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church is to be notified immediately in addition to the licensed funeral home of your choice. The pastor will visit with the family to offer condolences on behalf of the congregation and to begin to plan a service of witness to the resurrection, taking into consideration the desires of the deceased and surviving family members.

### Funeral or Memorial Service?

The service of worship witnessing to the resurrection is, first and foremost, a service of worship to God. It shall be conducted with dignity and simplicity and will emphasize the love and grace of God as well as hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The service may be performed before or after the committal of the body.<sup>4</sup> The *funeral* service is one in which the remains of the deceased are present in a casket. The casket may be open before the service for a viewing in the Chapel, but shall be closed when moved into the sanctuary for worship so as not to distract from the purpose of giving witness to the resurrection.

A *memorial* service may or may not include the remains of the deceased. If not previously interred, the cremated remains, or ashes, shall be displayed tastefully somewhere in the sanctuary other than on the communion table.

Services of witness to the resurrection may be held on any day of the week except Sunday morning, but must be coordinated with the pastor's availability. Services are usually held at either 11:00 am or 2:00 pm, but other times of day may be chosen.

Ordinarily, the pastor serving First Presbyterian Church will participate in funerals. The church's organist will serve when requested unless he/she is unavailable or unless the pastor/church organist approves a request for someone else to play.

The family may request a guest pastor to participate in the service with the consent of the presiding pastor. Ordinarily, the visiting pastor shall assume a supportive role to the presiding pastor.

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<sup>4</sup> Book of Worship W-4.10005

## **Cremation**

Cremation is a matter of personal preference. It is not inconsistent with the Christian faith. One may also choose to donate his or her remains to be used in the study of medicine or science at medical schools and hospitals.

## **Casket Adornments**

When in the sanctuary, it is appropriate for the casket to be covered by fresh flowers or our congregation's pall, which represents a baptismal garment symbolizing the faith professed by the deceased. Just as we are all equal in the sight of God, we are all equal in death in faith and baptismal vows. The casket, while in the sanctuary, may not be covered by other symbols – civic, national or fraternal – that emphasize an allegiance held in higher esteem than one's Christian faith.<sup>5</sup>

## **Music**

The final authority determining the suitability of any music for worship rests with the presiding minister. Instrumentalists or vocalists may also participate with the approval of the minister.

## **Floral Arrangements**

The use of flowers for the funeral or memorial service shall be kept within the guidelines of what is appropriate and customary for a service of worship. A casket spray may also be used in lieu of the pall.

## **Other Participants in Worship**

If a brief reflection by a relative or close friend is desired by the deceased or a member of the surviving family, it should be offered by one or no more than two individuals. Each remembrance should last no more than three minutes.

A more appropriate venue for public acknowledgement of the deceased and what he/she meant to survivors is during a visitation or reception following the service of worship.

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<sup>5</sup> Book of Worship W-4.10005

## **Receptions and Visitations**

In the event of a death in our family of faith, we are called to provide Christian love and care. First Presbyterian Church is pleased to serve as the host site for gatherings before or after a funeral service. We offer a choice to the family of hosting a reception in the Social Hall or providing a meal to the family in the Social Hall following the service.

Presbyterian Women accept this responsibility and have authority to oversee all arrangements while working alongside the presiding pastor to care for the grieving family.

## **Fraternal, Civil, and Military Rites**

Fraternal, civil and military groups should pay tribute to the deceased outside of the worship service. If a flag is used to cover the casket en route to the place of burial, it shall be placed on the casket as it is taken out of the sanctuary at the conclusion of the worship service. The flag folding rite shall take place at the conclusion of the presiding pastor's words of committal before the casket is lowered into the vault.<sup>6</sup>

## **Gift Designations and Memorials**

Undesignated gifts given in memory of loved ones to First Presbyterian Church shall be set aside for the church's New Covenant Fund or Permanent Memorial Endowment Fund. The family will be notified of all donors by mail following the funeral.

## **Honorariums**

Honorariums for pastors and musicians involved with a funeral service are handled by the funeral home in charge. When a funeral home is not used, such as with a memorial service involving no remains, honorariums are appropriate and should be provided by the family.

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<sup>6</sup> Book of Order W-4.10005

The Session, pastor, and members of First Presbyterian Church open our hearts to all who are grieved by death and loss. We take seriously our vows to pray for all who are so afflicted. It is our prayer and hope that First Presbyterian Church may be a source of strength, comfort and hope through the promises of the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. The pastor, elders, deacons and Presbyterian Women stand ready to assist you in your time of grief following the worship service. May God's peace be with you.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This Funeral Handbook was approved by the Session of First Presbyterian Church on 2/21/2017.