

THE SERVICE OF WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION

Information, guidelines, and policies to assist in planning a memorial service.

The name of the service on the occasion of death is ‘The Service of Witness to the Resurrection,’ which reflects our fundamental beliefs that, in Christ, death has been conquered and the promise of eternal life is affirmed.

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET

The purpose of this booklet is to assist members and friends in making arrangements and planning a service of remembrance at the time of the death of a loved one. Christian theology shapes not only beliefs about death, but also how the life of the one who has died is celebrated. This booklet is offered with the conviction that, “neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation, has the power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8)

SERVICES ON THE OCCASION OF DEATH

The name of the service on the occasion of death is ‘The Service of Witness to the Resurrection,’ reflecting Presbyterian understandings that, in Christ, death has been conquered, and the promise of eternal life is affirmed. The presence or absence of a casket or urn does not change the purpose of the service. Although sometimes people use the name Funeral in referring to a worship observance with a body present, and a Memorial Service as a service when the body is not present, the Service of the Resurrection is the main focus. The Christian hope of eternal life is based upon the graciousness of God.

As we affirm the hope of the Gospel grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is also important that we honestly acknowledge our grief. Faith plays a major role in the grieving process. Persons of faith do grieve. Expressing sorrow does not show a lack of faith. We need to grieve in order to be open to the healing help God offers. Christians grieve as those who have a unique hope in the risen Christ. Reflecting this outlook, Christians should make the occasion of death a time in which the hope of the Gospel is reaffirmed with joy and peace. It is a time to celebrate the wonderful gift of God that was given to us in our relationship with the

deceased. A properly planned service can be a benediction and a comfort to us, as well as a witness to our faith.

GUIDELINES

As a Presbyterian congregation, guidelines are followed for services on the occasion of death that are outlined in the ‘Directory for Worship’ found in Book of Order: 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 in the community of faith. The church offers a ministry of love and hope to all who grieve. Plans should provide for arrangements that are simple, which bear witness to resurrection hope, and in which the Christian community is central.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Ordinarily, the Pastor of First Presbyterian Church will officiate at all Services of Witness to the Resurrection performed in the church facility. The participation of other Presbyterian ministers and clergy of other denominations and faiths are welcome in our services, at the invitation of the Pastor. If you desire that another member of the clergy assist in a service, please discuss your request with the officiating pastor. Several factors are considered before the officiating pastor will invite another clergy person to assist in a service, including the “mutual recognition of ministry.” In all instances the officiating pastor of this church makes the final decision and issues the invitation if it is appropriate. In the case of inter-religious services, it must be understood that Christian services are conducted at First Presbyterian Church. Various practices and traditional activities of other faiths may be included as long as they are consistent with the Christian understanding of the Service of Witness to the Resurrection. The occasion of death at once suggests dignity, reverence, and simplicity. All unnecessary expense and display are to be avoided as inconsistent with the Christian faith. The expenses for whatever arrangements are made should place no undue financial burden upon the family. The pastor can assist in suggesting various types of arrangements and service providers.

Time of the Service

The pastor must be consulted before a final decision is made about the time and place of the service. The church building is not available during religious holidays.

There may be other times and occasions when the sanctuary or chapel would not be available because of previously scheduled events.

Place of the Service

The sanctuary of the church building is an appropriate place for the service because it is there where many celebrate and mark all of life's passages: births, baptisms, weddings, confirmations, and other significant events. The life of the deceased should also be celebrated in these familiar surroundings. If particular circumstances dictate, or if the family firmly directs, services may be held in other places. The officiating pastor makes the decision on the appropriateness of the setting.

Interment Services

The final disposition of the remains is another matter requiring coordination and conversation with the officiating pastor. Depending on the choice made (ground burial or cremation), or the season involved (winter vs. summer), time may be a critical factor. If ground burial or placement of an urn in a columbarium is the choice, additional arrangements must be made. The family may elect to arrange a separate time of interment for family and close friends, either before or after the Service of Witness to the Resurrection.

Burial, Cremation, or Donation

Burial is a dignified custom that many people may wish to observe. The practice of cremation is also consistent with the Christian faith and is much less expensive than traditional burial. It is not new; it has been practiced by Christians throughout the centuries. The remains are usually placed in an urn and may also be placed in a columbarium. Another option is the scattering of the ashes by family and friends at a location that holds special significance. A third choice is to donate one's body to a medical institution for study or parts of the body, (eyes, kidneys, tissue, etc.) for medical use and/or research. Such donations are an act of love appropriate for all Christians. Advance arrangements are usually necessary for this option.

Flowers

Flowers are a traditional way of expressing sympathy. Those arrangements provided by the immediate family and their special guests will be used in the sanctuary. These arrangements, along with others, can also be displayed at the reception. The family should arrange ahead of time for the removal of all floral arrangements upon the conclusion of the service and reception. If the family wishes to donate flowers to the church, one or two arrangements are sufficient.

Memorial Contributions

Memorial contributions may be given to First Presbyterian Church or to other recognized charitable organizations. In this way, the memorial becomes a “living gift” and the deceased, in very tangible ways, continues to contribute to and support the work and ministry of the Church or other benevolent causes in which s/he had an interest. Contributions to First Presbyterian Church will be used for special projects or unanticipated expenses affecting the ministry of the church, and is administrated by the Memorial Committee in coordination with the Session. Contributions to other organizations are also encouraged. It is more efficient for those gifts to be sent directly to that organization, rather than through the church, which may delay their receiving this legacy gift.

The Service

The Service of Witness to the Resurrection is one which worships God, gives thanks for the life of the deceased, and affirms the promises of eternal life we have in Jesus Christ. Thus, the service is one of affirmation and positive spirit. The officiating pastor will meet with the family to plan the service and will give final approval to the order and contents of the worship service. The typical order of service is as follows:

THE SERVICE OF WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION

PRELUDE MUSIC
OPENING WORDS
PRAYER
SOLO/HYMN/MUSIC
OBITUARY
MEMORY SHARING TIME
OT READING
SOLO/HYMN/MUSIC
NT READING
MESSAGE
SOLO/HYMN/MUSIC
PRAYER
BENEDICTION
POSTLUDE MUSIC

We recommend that the congregation participate in the service through responsive prayers, affirmations, and by singing hymns. This enables all to respond in a

positive, active way in giving thanks to God for the life of the deceased. The celebration of the Lord's Supper (communion) as a part of the service requires prior approval of the Session. If the family wishes, individuals (including family members) may be invited to speak briefly during the Memory Sharing Time. In some instances, the congregation at large may be invited to share as well. Other family or friends may be invited to read scripture or another appropriate reading as part of the service. The casket or urn may or may not be present during the service. If the casket is present, it is closed before the service so that attention is directed toward God. In the event that rites of a fraternal order are desired, this ceremony should be planned separately from the Service of Witness to the Resurrection. The church service is complete in itself and should be kept separate from other rituals.

Hymns and Music

Music that is respectful and worshipful in content can be a powerful ministry of healing in times of grief. Hymns or songs of significance to the deceased or the family can be included in the service if they are appropriate for the setting. Other meaningful music (instrumentals or solos) may be included in the prelude, postlude, or elsewhere within the order of service. The Pastor is available to discuss music selections with the family, and the church pianist should be utilized if available. The family is responsible to secure vocalists or additional instrumentalists, if desired. First Presbyterian Church is unable to accommodate recorded music in either the sanctuary or chapel.

Scripture Readings

The reading of scripture should be included in the service. Scripture passages of significance for the deceased or their family can be included. Ordinarily scripture readings will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible. A list of appropriate scripture readings for a Service of Witness to the Resurrection is included at the end of this booklet.

Worship Bulletins

First Presbyterian Church will provide simple bulletins containing the order of the service and the names of participants, announcements about the reception, and memorial contributions.

Prior to the Service

Ordinarily, the family and participants in the service will meet at the church 30 minutes before the service in a room set aside for this purpose. The officiating

pastor will meet them there and go over the final details of the service. The family then proceeds to the sanctuary where they will be seated in the first several pews reserved for them. They will arrive in time to join the other worshippers in listening to the end of the prelude.

Following the Service

After the benediction, the pastor will lead the family out of the sanctuary. If a reception is being held at the church, the family is escorted to the room where it is taking place to greet worshippers.

Guest Book

Families may choose to use a guest book for friends to sign as they enter the service, providing a helpful record of those present. The family or the funeral director should provide the book. When the service is in the sanctuary, the family may wish to provide two guest books for each main doorway into the sanctuary.

Reception

Upon request, First Presbyterian Church's Deacons ministry will host a reception following the service, usually in Fellowship Hall. During the reception, the family may want to display photographs and other items. First Presbyterian Church will make every effort to accommodate reception requests, but, in some cases, previously scheduled events may make an on-site reception impossible.

Saturday receptions at the church must end by 4:30 p.m. First Presbyterian Church is a smoke-free building and alcoholic beverages are prohibited. The Deacons are available to provide and serve desserts, punch and coffee. If the family desires additional food, such as a lunch, the family coordinates the food preparation. The Deacons are available to serve the food if it is provided. Sometimes other groups (sorority, clubs) like to help as well, and can be contacted by the family about bringing food.

ADVANCE PLANNING

Families are encouraged to engage in advance planning for arrangements at the time of death. In addition to planning the Service of Witness to the Resurrection, there are several other actions and decisions which can be made in advance, including providing a written personal history, completing advance medical directives, executing a will, and listing the location of important documents. First Presbyterian Church's pastor can provide you with resources to assist in this planning process. If you choose to complete a document indicating your wishes for the Service of Witness to the Resurrection, share a copy (as appropriate) with family members, your attorney, your physician, and with the church. All documents delivered to the church will be considered strictly confidential. The church does not accept any legal liability for their custody nor may the church require others to follow their directions and requests. They will be made available only to appropriate individuals to whom they may offer guidance in carrying out your wishes. Of course, you may change any of the documents or have them returned to you at any time.

A FINAL WORD

This material is intended to be helpful. Please know that our pastor stands ready to assist you at every stage of your life's journey, including making preparations for death. Please feel free to contact the church office for information, assistance, or to clarify your desires.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

The following scripture passages are appropriate for a Service of Witness to the Resurrection.

Old Testament

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

Proverbs 31:10-31 Ode to a capable woman.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 9-15) For everything there is a season.

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

Isaiah 26:1-4, 19 God will keep them in peace. The dead will rise.

Isaiah 40:1-11 Comfort my people.

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

Isaiah 43:1-4a, 18-19 25 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-13 Seek the Lord while God may be found.

Isaiah 61:1-4, 10-11 The spirit of the Lord is upon me; comfort to all who mourn.

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

Jeremiah 31:31-34 A new covenant written on the heart.

Lamentations 3:21-26 The Lord's steadfast love never ceases.

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

Psalms

8 What are human beings that God is mindful of them?

16:5-11 The Lord is my chosen portion.

23 The Lord is my shepherd.

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

34:4-10 Taste and see that the Lord is good.

39: 4-5, 12 Lord, let me know my end.

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

43 Give judgment for me, O God.

46:1-5, 10-11 A very present help in trouble.

84 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord.

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

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

103 Bless the Lord, O my soul.

106:1-5 O give thanks to the Lord for God is good.

116:1-9, 15 The Lord has heard my voice and my supplications.

118 Open to me the gates of righteousness.

121 I lift up my eyes to the hills.

130 Out of the depths I cry to the Lord.

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

145 I will extol you, O God my King.

146 Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, O my soul.

Epistles

Romans 5:1-9 Justified by faith; hope does not disappoint.

Romans 6:1-11 Baptized into Christ's death, raised to live with him.

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

Romans 14:7-9, 10b-12 Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

1 Corinthians 13 Faith, hope and love; the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Christ was raised from the dead on the third day.

1 Corinthians 15:12-28 The resurrection of the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:35-58 The resurrection of the body.

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1 Visible things are temporary, invisible things eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 From God we have a house not made with hands.

Ephesians 1:20-23 Living is Christ and dying is gain.

Ephesians 3:14-21 The love of Christ.

Philippians 3:20-21 Our citizenship is in heaven.

Philippians 4:1, 4-9 Rejoice in the Lord always, again, rejoice!

Colossians 3:1-17 Set your minds on the things that are above.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Do not grieve as others grieve who have no hope.

2 Timothy 2:11-12 If we died with him, we shall also live with him.

Hebrews 11:1-3 4, 8, 23 By faith they obeyed; the cloud of witnesses.

Hebrews 32-12:21

Peter 1:3-9 New birth into living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 3:18-22; 4:6 Christ's is dead in the flesh but alive in the Spirit.

1 John 1:1-7 God is light and those who know God walk in the light.

1 John 3:1-3 We are children of God and will be like him.

Revelation 7:9-17 The multitude who have come out of the great tribulation.

Revelation 14:1-3, 6-7, 12-13 Rest for the saints, those who die in the Lord.

Revelation 21:1-7 The new heaven and the new earth.

Revelation 22:1-5 The River of Life, the Lamb of God, and the Tree of Life.

Gospels

Matthew 5:1-12a The Beatitudes.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come all that are weary and I will give you rest.

Matthew 25:1-13 Wise and foolish bridesmaids; you know neither the day nor hour.

Matthew 25:28-30 Come to me all you that are weary.

Matthew 25:31-46 The Last Judgment; As you did it to one of the least of these.

Mark 10:13-16 Let the children come to me.

Luke 7:11-17 Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain.

Luke 18:15-17 Let the little children come to me.

Luke 23:33, 39-43 Today you will be with me in Paradise.
John 3:16-21 God so loved the world.
John 5:24-29 Whoever hears and believes has eternal life.
John 6:35-40 Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.
John 6:47-51 Whoever believes in me has eternal life.
John 10:11-16 Jesus is the Good Shepherd.
John 11:17-27 I am the resurrection and the life.
John 11:38-44 Lazarus raised from the dead.
John 14:1-6, 25-27 Let not your hearts be troubled.
John 15:1-17 Jesus is the True Vine.

OTHER RESOURCES

Compassionate Friends

A resource following the death of a child.

www.compassionatefriends.org

www.griefnet.org

www.aarp.org/griefandloss/

May the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the
knowledge and love of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
remain with you always.
(Philippians 4:7, adapted)