

## Burial Rites in the Episcopal Church

The Prayer Book offers several liturgies that deal with death. Perhaps least known is the **Litany at the Time of Death** (page 462). When the family or friends are able to join in saying this litany, it draws those present into a common action of prayer and intercession for the dying. It ends with a Commendation said by a priest that places the departed soul under the protection and in the safe-keeping of God. Obviously, if at all possible, you would want a priest present at the time of death and your priest would want to be with you at the time of death. There is work to be done – supporting the dying in intercession, offering comfort and encouragement to those who grieve – that is at the heart of what a Christian community does. Do not hesitate to call the parish office or the rectory at any hour of the day or night so that a priest may respond.

After the death, it is common and helpful for friends and family to gather to remember the deceased and comfort one another. Often this is done in the presence of the body, either at a funeral home or in the church. While not widely used, the Prayer Book offers a form of prayer to be used at such gatherings. The **Prayers for a Vigil** are found on page 465. These prayers, or a form of Evening Prayer, provide a fitting way to close a time of gathering on the evening before the funeral. When the body is brought to the church, the parish priest meets it at the doors to say the prayers on page 466 and to cover the coffin with a pall, a large cloth that covers the coffin while it is in the church.

The **Funeral Service** itself is based on the shape of the Sunday Eucharist, with opening sentences followed by a collect. A series of readings follows, and after the last reading there may be a sermon. The Apostles' Creed, the creed used in the Baptismal Liturgy, is used. The Prayer Book provides a form of the Prayers of the People specific to a burial. If the Eucharist, is not to follow, the service continues with **The Commendation** – the prayers said by the priest and people commending the departed to God. These prayers are said at any service where the body or the ashes are present, but they are not used at a memorial service.

**The Eucharist** is a normative part of the Funeral Service. From the earliest days of the Church, the Eucharist was celebrated at such moments. In the bread and wine we see both the redemption that Christ accomplishes on Calvary, which provides forgiveness for all the sins of this life, and we see a glimpse of the heavenly banquet – the joy of eternal life in God's presence. If the family would prefer, the Eucharist could be offered at a time apart from the funeral service itself. Whatever form of service the funeral might take, a departed member of the parish will be remembered during the prayers on the following Sunday and at the altar by the priest in the days immediately after the death.

**The Committal** is the brief service, read as the body is committed to the grave or as the ashes are placed in their final resting place.

A word on cremation: the Episcopal Church accepts cremation as an appropriate practice. Indeed, St. John's has a Memorial Garden. The ashes should be in the church at the time of the service and are treated as the body would be. This respect should include placing the ashes in a final resting place. After the service, or soon thereafter, the ashes should be

placed somewhere or scattered. One of the functions of the rites surrounding death, is to help the living mark the loss and begin to move on. A final disposition of the remains is part of this.

It is worth remembering that only a few generations ago, until the revisions of the Prayer Book in the 1970's, the Episcopal Church's liturgy for burial did not include any mention of the deceased's name. The burial rites were a celebration of God as the giver of life and attempted to place this death within a much larger context. Obviously, the current Prayer Book's liturgy meets a very real need and expresses a respect and reverence for the individual, but the sense of restraint and reverence remains. Music, eulogies, all that attends the service, point to the mystery of the God who created us, who gave his Son for our redemption, whose Spirit binds us across the line of death and time into one Church.

# Burial Service Planning Worksheet

FULL NAME OF DECEASED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE BORN: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE DIED: \_\_\_\_\_

FUNERAL DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

VISITING HOURS: (where & when) \_\_\_\_\_

RECEPTION: (when & where) \_\_\_\_\_

## Family Contact Information

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Rite I  
(traditional language)

\_\_\_\_\_ Rite II  
(contemporary language)

## The Burial of the Dead

(page numbers from the Book of Common Prayer)

Rite I  
(469)  
(470)

The Opening Sentences  
The Collect

Rite II  
(491 or 492)  
(493)

## Readings:

Usually two or more readings are used; one each from either the Old Testament or the Epistles (or one from each) and one from the Gospels. If the Eucharist is celebrated, a reading from the Gospels must be included. A passage from the Psalms is used after the first reading, and, if there are three, can be used between the second and third.

Readers \_\_\_\_\_

## Suggested readings:

(470-478)

(494-495)

**Homily/Remembrances:**

After the readings, a homily (sermon) may be preached; one or two family members or friends may make brief statements of remembrance.

Remembrance(s) be given by

\_\_\_\_\_

(480)

**Intercessions**

(497 or 480)

Intercessor \_\_\_\_\_

**Communion:**

\_\_\_\_\_ With Communion

\_\_\_\_\_ Without Communion

Prayer I (333)    **The Great Thanksgiving**  
Prayer II (340)

Prayer A (361)  
Prayer B (367)  
Prayer D (372)

**Music:**

Organ Music: (prelude or postlude)

Name

Composer

Hymns:

Hymn Number

Hymn Title

Soloist?

**OTHER:** Flowers, bulletins, fees, police detail

**Other Information:**

Arrangements have been made with \_\_\_\_\_ Funeral Home.

Place of internment is \_\_\_\_\_

If St. John's Memorial Garden, name to be listed \_\_\_\_\_

Memorial Donations (church or other organization): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Funeral Hymns & Music

Music, like liturgy itself, helps us express our emotions in ways that transcend words. Hymns in particular are often a source of comfort and the Anglican tradition has many beautiful and appropriate hymns for funerals. Funeral music is always chosen in consultation with the parish organist but picking hymns is often a component of healing.

Some criteria to consider include: favorite hymns, texts that express the hope and joy of the resurrection, and whether or not it is known to the congregation. What follows is a list of suggested hymns but it is by no means complete. The standard resource is the *Hymnal 1982*.

The hymnal contains a section titled "Burial" that extends from hymn 354 to 358. Also, certain Easter hymns are particularly appropriate. The "Easter" section is found between hymns 174 and 213.

If an approved hymn is neither in our hymnal nor covered by our licensing agreement, the family will need to pay the reprint costs associated with the copyright permission.

A soloist – vocal or instrumental – may be engaged. In such cases, the parish organist is available to select a soloist and help choose the musical selection. The use of a soloist adds an additional fee to be worked out with the organist.

There will be no recorded music during the liturgy.

From the *Hymnal 1982*

680 O God, our help in ages past  
688 A mighty fortress is our God  
358 Christ the victorious  
335 I am the bread of life  
287 For all the saints  
208 The strife is o'er  
671 Amazing grace  
620 Jerusalem my happy home  
618 Ye watchers and ye holy ones  
625 Ye holy angels bright  
487 Come, my way, my truth, my life  
517 How lovely is thy dwelling place  
637 How firm a foundation  
645 The King of love my shepherd is  
664 My shepherd will supply my need  
690 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah  
379 God is love

A final word about liturgical hymns: While pastoral sensitivity is paramount in planning a funeral, we do not have a policy of "anything goes" when it comes to music in the church. As the Prayer Book states regarding the use of hymns, they "are to be understood as those authorized by this Church. The words of anthems [and hymns] are to be from Holy Scripture, or from this Book, or from texts congruent with them." In other words, if there is a favorite secular song, another venue, such as a reception, is more appropriate.