
CHRISTIAN BURIAL

The Diocese Of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

Christian burial is the reverent committal of the deceased to the care of Almighty God and the bodily remains to the elements from which the body came. It provides an opportunity for family and friends to remember with thankfulness the person, and to be comforted and strengthened in their bereavement. The Christian burial service combines true acknowledge of death with Christian hope and thanksgiving to God for life.

In this guideline, the term "Incumbent" refers to the person appointed to that Office within a Pastoral Unit, and/or a duly authorized representative of the Incumbent.

PREPARATIONS

- The Bible tells us that the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). It is worthy of dignity and respect during life and in death. It is appropriate that Christians make some basic plans for personal death ahead of time. These arrangements help us meet death realistically. Such matters as a legal will, desired cremation, grave site and format of funeral should be considered. With reference to these, the priest should be consulted.
- At the time of dying, the presence of the Incumbent is often helpful both to the dying and to his/her family who may be assembled for this moment. It is the responsibility of the family to call the priest in cases of sickness and emergency.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

- When death comes the priest should be called by the family as soon as possible for pastoral support and practical help in making funeral arrangements. In this way, the bereaved are eased and comforted. In a sense the priest becomes a 'member of the family' for the time being and deals with matters from within, as well as from without. If a priest is away, he or she must make arrangements for another priest to take on funeral responsibilities.
- If possible, the priest should be contacted at the same time as the funeral agency. Family and friends of the deceased may then turn to the priest and the professional services of a funeral director for advice on removal of the body, matters of embalming or cremations, choice of casket, obituary notices and other matters such as legal and financial responsibilities.
- The donation of the body to medical science is a valid Christian witness of concern for one's neighbor. When the body is left to science this sometimes presents difficulties for the bereaved. Every care should be taken to minister to their needs in these cases. The bereaved should be at the bedside or in another convenient location provided by the hospital or institution with the minister in attendance to conduct final prayers before the body is given to a scientific institution, university, and the like. Then, at a later time a Memorial Service should be held in a Church.

- Anglican custom makes it clear that normally funeral services should be held in the church. Here the community of faith expresses its life and worship through word, prayer and sacrament, in the midst of symbols that speak of hope and eternal life. A church service provides opportunity for those present to express grief, compassion and reconciliation. The funeral provides opportunity to reflect on the meaning of life and death, and to express the joy of the Resurrection, even in the face of sadness or tragedy.
- Simplicity in arrangements: Caskets, urns, and funeral arrangements in general should be unpretentious. In the making of funeral arrangements, we should know pastorally that extravagant gestures at the time of death are not necessarily an indication of our love for the deceased. In many cases ostentation places an unnecessary burden or debt on the bereaved.
- Holy Communion: The family of the deceased are encouraged to take part in a Service of Holy Communion in the church at the time of bereavement, or as part of the Burial Service, or at some other appropriate time. It is, of course, normal practice for an entire congregation present at a funeral Holy Communion Service to be invited to partake of the sacrament.
- Hymns: Favorite hymns of the deceased may be used where appropriate, along with evening hymns, or those that give witness to Christian joy and hope in the Resurrection.
- Flowers: Flowers are symbols of the Resurrection. If members of the immediate family wish to have them, those brought into the church should be limited to those on or near the altar, and two or three floral pieces. Flowers should not be placed on the pall. In lieu of flowers, donations in memory of the deceased to a memorial fund of the parish or to some other charitable purpose are to be encouraged.
- Liturgical Colours: White is now the preferred colour, but some churches may choose to use the more traditional colours of purple or black.
- Sunday Funerals: Sunday funerals are to be avoided if possible. There are too many practical difficulties of fitting funerals into busy Sunday schedules.
- Additional Ceremonies: For an actual funeral service or committal, only the Church's Burial Office should be used in the Church. If members of the family desire the rites of any fraternal society or veterans' group, it is recommended that such rites take place prior to the church's service. The night before is often used for these purposes.
- If a priest is asked to officiate at a funeral service for a person who is a member of another parish, the priest is to inform the incumbent of that parish.
- All arrangements for funeral services shall be made at the discretion of the Incumbent,

FUNERAL SERVICE

- The Office for the "Burial of the Dead" is an ancient service of the church. The appropriate sources for the funeral and committal services are found in the BCP (1962) and in the three forms of 'Funeral Liturgy' in the BAS (1985). The same funeral service pertains to everyone. The service is an expression of our oneness in Christ and our corporate life in him.
- Participation in the Service: The funeral service is the congregational form of worship. The whole congregation, including the relatives of the deceased and the pall-bearers, should be urged to participate in the hymns and prayers, (and as noted above, in the Holy Communion) as at any other time of worship in Church.
- The Funeral Pall: In keeping with belief in the equality of all God's children, it is an ancient custom of the church to cover the casket with a funeral pall for the service in the church. The pall is the outward evidence of universal equality before God. Another ancient but appropriate custom maintains that the pall should remain on the casket up to and including the committal, with the 'pall bearers' holding it over the open grave.

- The Casket: The casket should not be opened in church except when the body is lying in state under a proper watch and should be closed prior to the service and not re-opened.
- Eulogies: Elaborate eulogies are not part of the Anglican tradition. See BAS page 576: 'The celebrant...may...express thanksgiving for the gifts of the deceased person, especially the marks of a Christian life. Such remarks, without denying the legitimate grief of the mourners, should relate the life and death of the Christian to the victory of Christ.' While being ready to offer an appreciation of the deceased, the funeral homily should focus on the love and mercy of God and on the ultimate joy of the Resurrection, which alone can bear the weight of the occasion.

AT THE COMMITTAL:

- Committals in church cemeteries will be taken by the Incumbent (or the Priest in Charge) or the Incumbent's authorized representative.
- When there is any reasonable doubt as to the consecration of the cemetery, a prayer for the blessing of a grave shall be used.
- Where holding vaults are used for winter burials, committals may take place in the vault. When the actual burial takes place, it is appropriate and desirable that the priest be present at the grave to say the Committal Office
- The two-fold significance of the committal needs to be emphasized: the commending of a person into the hands of God, and the committing of the body or ashes to the elements of nature.
- Burial of still-born: if the burial of a still-born is desired, the service should be brief and simple, and may take place in the church or at the grave side.

CREMATION

Cremation is increasingly common and is appropriate for a Christian. There are one or two alternative procedures:

- The funeral office, with or without the Holy Communion, takes place in the church in the usual way, with prayers at the crematorium and the office of committal when the ashes are buried in the cemetery.
- If cremation takes place immediately after death the ashes may be in the church for the funeral service. The urn should be placed on a table or stand in the area where the casket is normally situated. The office of committal follows when the ashes are committed to their final resting place.
- Another order which may be used if cremation takes place immediately after death is as follows: the Incumbent may commit the ashes to their final resting place, preferably in the presence of members of the family. It is appropriate that a memorial service, ideally the Holy Communion in the parish church, should follow. The Incumbent should be willing to perform a committal service later if for some reason there is a postponement of the interment of ashes or remains (e.g. if the body has been donated to medical science.)

PLEASE NOTE: For pastoral reasons the Incumbent should encourage families to have the final committal of ashes take place as soon as possible after the cremation. In the case where ashes are to be scattered on land or sea all due government regulations should be followed.

TOMBSTONES

It is suggested that if tombstones are used, they should be moderate in size, simple in design, and of a character that symbolizes Christian hope and eternal life.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Every effort should be made to develop a co-operative relationship with funeral directors. This profession renders a significant community service to those in bereavement by taking responsibility for a multitude of details and by offering the sympathetic assistance of those who have been specially trained to minister to others in time of sorrow,