

WHEN DEATH OCCURS



*"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.
Those who believe in me, even though they die,
will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'."*

(John 11:25-26 New Revised Standard Version)

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DEATH AND THE SERVICE OF WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION

Christians recognize with all persons, the inevitability of death. Christians also believe in the doctrine of the resurrection which through faith affirms the central hope of the gospel in Jesus Christ. The doctrine is given significance through the scriptures; *“For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on the immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory”...But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 15:53, 54, 57)*

We find our strength and comfort through our faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, death and eternal life are both realities in our faith perspective.

This booklet will enable members of **Saint James Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, North Carolina** to become aware of guidelines related to the service of witness to the resurrection.

The Session of Saint James Presbyterian Church approved this booklet on April 14, 2015.

The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and shapes Christian attitudes and responses to the event of death. Death brings loss, sorrow and grief to all. In the face of death 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.

(Book of Order, Directory for Worship, W-4.1001)

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

The time, place, date and type of funeral shall be established by the Pastor, after consultation with the bereaved family.

The **funeral service** is conducted with the body present, and the **memorial service** is held at some time following the committal of the body. A **graveside service** is an alternative for those who would prefer an intimate service in which family members and close friends of the family will attend.

The Church Sanctuary is the appropriate place for a funeral service. The church represents the faith community and is the place where we are baptized into Jesus Christ for our spiritual journey. Therefore, it is appropriate that if we have been baptized into Christ and lived by His faith we would also recognize Jesus in our death through the service of worship.

The sanctuary is available without cost. The casket or urn shall be placed in the sanctuary prior to the time of service. The casket shall remain closed during the worship service and committal of the body.

The Church furnishes a beautiful pall which provides a complete covering of the casket. The use of the Pall eliminates the necessity of a floral spray. However, a floral spray may be used in lieu of the Pall. The family may also provide a floral arrangement to be on display during the worship service. There may be other floral arrangements sent to the family during the time of bereavement which accompany the body to the church. Those floral arrangements will be placed in the Narthex during the funeral service.

The service on the occasion of death ordinarily should be held in the usual place of worship in order to join the service to the community's continuing life and witness to the resurrection. The service shall be under the direction of the Pastor. Others may be invited to participate as leaders in the service at the discretion of the Pastor. This service may be observed on any day. A request to observe such a service as a part of the Lord's Day service or celebrate the Lord's Supper as a part of the service on the occasion of death requires the approval of the Session.

(Book of Order, Directory for Worship, W-4.10003)

The Saint James Presbyterian Church provides a repast meal following the funeral or memorial service. This meal is for members of the deceased family and out of town guests only. The Compassion Committee of Saint James Presbyterian Church prepares, serves, and cleans up following the meal. This service is provided free to all families of deceased members.

MEMORIALS AND FINAL GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

The traditional practice of sending flowers has declined in recent years in favor of sending memorials. When such memorials are received at Saint James Presbyterian Church, an acknowledgement is sent to both the donor and the family. Members are encouraged to prayerfully consider including the church in their financial legacy. Gifts to Saint James Presbyterian Church will be appropriately acknowledged and gifts from the estate of deceased members will be included in the official record of Session.

ELEMENTS OF THE SERVICE

The service may begin with scriptural sentences. It is appropriate for worshippers to sing hymns, psalms, anthems, 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. Scripture shall be read; a sermon or other exposition of the Word may be proclaimed; an affirmation of faith may be made by the people. Aspects of the life of the one who has died may be recalled. Prayers shall be offered, giving thanks to God:

1. For life in Jesus Christ and the promise of the gospel,
 2. For the gift of the life of the one who has died,
 3. For the community of faith;
 4. making intercessions
 5. For family members and loved ones who grieve,
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6. For those who minister to and support the bereaved,
 7. For all who suffer loss;

lifting supplications

8. For faith and grace for all who are present;

The service ends by commending the one who has died to the care of the eternal God and sending people forth with benediction.

(Book of Order, Directory of Worship, W-4.10004)

MUSIC AND SCRIPTURE FOR FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICES

It is recommended that music for a funeral or memorial service at Saint James Presbyterian Church, serve as an aid to worship and, therefore be appropriate to that end. We do not wish to limit any family to a few suggestions which we hereby offer but which can be used for congregational singing and participation if desired. The following list of musical selections and scriptural passages may be helpful:

Suggested Hymns

Amazing Grace
Great is Thy Faithfulness
It is Well
I'll Fly Away
I'm Going Up Yonder
A Mighty Fortress
Near to the Heart of God
How Great Thou Art
Here I Am Lord
Blessed Assurance
Soon and Very Soon
Nearer My God to Thee
Just As I Am, Without One Plea
Precious Lord

Suggested Scriptures

Old Testament:
Job 19:23-27
Isaiah 40:28-31
Psalms 23; 39; 46; 121; 130

New Testament:
Matthew 18:1-5, 10
Mark 10:13-16
Luke 23:33, 39-43
John 14:1-6, 25-27
1 Corinthians 15
Romans 8:14-23, 31-39

Normally, if available the Saint James Presbyterian Church organist or pianist will play for funerals or memorial services. If staff cannot be present to play, arrangements will be made by the Pastor and Session for a substitute. The family will be responsible for negotiating and paying any fees for such service.

WORSHIP BULLETINS

Although the funeral bulletins and printing are generally provided by the Funeral Home/Mortuary, Saint James assists families with the preparation of the bulletins only, not printing.

ALTERNATIVES & OPTIONS

The service may be observed before or after the committal of the body. In order that attention in the service be directed to God, when a casket is present it ordinarily is closed. It may be covered with a funeral pall. The service may include other actions common to the community of faith and its cultures when those actions do not detract from or diminish the Christian understanding of death and resurrection. The service shall be complete in itself, and any fraternal, civic, or military rites should be conducted separately. When there are important reasons not to hold the service in the usual place of worship, it may be held in another suitable place such as a home, a funeral home, a crematorium, or at a graveside.

(Book of Order, Alternatives and Options, W-4.10005)

THE SERVICE OF COMMITTAL

Members and friends of the family of the one who has died should gather at the graveside or crematorium for a service of farewell, which is to be conducted with simplicity, dignity, and brevity. The service includes readings from Scripture, prayers, words of committal, and a blessing, reflecting the reality of death, entrusting the one who has died to the care of God, and bearing witness to faith in the resurrection from the dead.

(Book of Order, Service of Committal, W-4.10006)

THE FAMILY HOUR/WAKE

This service may be conducted at the Funeral Home or the church sanctuary. Arrangements should be made with the Pastor during the initial consultation. Normally the family hour is held the hour before the funeral or memorial service takes place.

NON-MEMBER SERVICES

The Service of Witness to the Resurrection is representative of a believer's faith journey in Jesus Christ. Therefore, all believers should be led to a deeper level of understanding of the resurrection through the funeral service. Saint James Presbyterian Church affirms the Holy Catholic **(Universal)** Church understanding of our faith and therefore conducts funerals for non-members with Session approval. However, the Session reserves the right to refuse the use of the church facility in the case of a non-member request.

However, this does not prohibit the pastoral care and support the church is obligated to provide to any bereaved family. Request will be accepted on an individual case basis. A fee will be charged for the service of non-members. *This list of fees may be obtained from the church office.*

If the deceased is an acknowledged non-believer in the Christian Faith or unchurched, the funeral service may more appropriately be held in another place (*i.e. Funeral Home, a Crematorium or at Graveside*). The purpose of the church is to provide a Christian witness and to that end decisions will be made through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

DEATH AS A FACT OF LIFE – ACCEPTING THE REALITY

Confronting and accepting the reality of one's own death is a necessary step toward becoming a mature individual.

Advanced preplanning depends largely upon individual circumstances and therefore cannot be generalized as to advantage and disadvantage. Nevertheless, preplanning for death should be an essential part of every life. Among those for whom preplanning is especially important are: (a) those who are alone and want the assurance that final services are in keeping with personal beliefs and desires; (b) those who have definite preferences about certain aspects of final committal and wish to make their options known; and (c) elderly or retired persons who have moved to a distant location and want to ensure that certain recommendations regarding final committal in a hometown are heeded. However, preplanning should take place with the understanding that it is a tentative arrangement, subject to the final circumstances at the time of death. Strive to communicate one's wishes in a spirit of helpfulness and sensitivity. It is the bereaved who must live through and with this experience. *These plans should be discussed with the Pastor so that a mutually agreeable understanding may be reached.*

It is hoped that the information in this booklet will assist you in making plans to meet death when it comes to you or your family. The Pastor invites you to discuss your wishes with him/her.

Revised by Saint James Presbyterian Church Stephen Ministry

