



M I C H I G A N
M I N I S T R Y
N E T W O R K

**FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICES
PLAYBOOK**

PART 1: THE PURPOSE OF A MEMORIAL/FUNERAL SERVICE

"Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give but cannot. All of that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest."
Jamie Anderson

Being asked to perform a funeral or memorial service is an incredible honor. Accepting the invitation into such a challenging time in a family's life is one of the most pastoral acts a minister does. Because of its importance, it is essential for the person performing the service to be prepared and execute their duties with excellence.

If a minister can be a steady and comforting presence, it will go a long way toward helping the family properly navigate their grief. It can also help the family find comfort through Jesus, who confronts all who mourn.

To accomplish this, we must take this responsibility seriously. What you say and how you lead will significantly impact the family for a long time. Families often feel more connected to their pastor following a funeral or memorial service because they sense the comfort and goodness of God's love through you.

As you lead a family through this loss, remember that God has gifted you and called you for such times as these. God will give you the right words to deliver with wisdom.

TERMS TO KNOW

Obituary—A news article announcing a person's death, giving a brief overview of their life. It usually contains biographical information about the deceased, surviving relatives, funeral arrangements, and other information the family requests.

Eulogy - A speech delivered at a funeral service honoring the deceased. The person giving the eulogy is usually a close friend, member of the clergy, family member, or other person of significance to the deceased.

Committal - The act of placing a body in a grave or tomb.

Pallbearer - A person who carries or escorts the coffin at a funeral, typically a close friend or family member. There are usually 6-8 people carrying the casket.

Mausoleum - A building that houses the casketed remains of a person above ground instead of burial in a grave.

PART 2: OBTAINING INFORMATION

"A minister's primary job is to honor the requests of the family in an accurate and honoring way."

Aaron Hlavin MMN Superintendent

After being asked to perform the funeral/memorial service, the first step is to gather relevant information about the decedent, understand the family's wishes for the service, and be present to bring comfort. Your presence shows sympathy and empathy and is a means of encouragement. This is a crucial moment in which you can lovingly serve the family.

NOTE: Every situation is unique. Many factors determine the family's emotional response to death. As you seek to gain insight and information, be sensitive to the situation and ask questions with respect and care.

You will need to receive three primary pieces of information to properly prepare a message that genuinely and accurately represents the family's wishes and honors the decedent.

1. **Historical/Factual Information.** This information is often found in the obituary that the funeral home prepares with the family. Even though this is often created for you, it is wise to gather information for yourself.

Questions to ask the family (if you haven't received a copy of the obituary)

Here are some suggested questions you can ask the family:

- a) What is the full name of the deceased?
- b) What is the birthdate and place of birth of the deceased?
- c) What is the date and cause of death of the deceased? It is wise to ask the family if the cause of death is to remain private.
- d) What family members preceded him/her in death (parents, siblings, spouse, children, grandchildren)?
- e) What family members are still living (parents, siblings, children, spouse, grandchildren)?
- f) What is the marital status at the time of death? If the spouse is still living, how long have they been married? What is the date of their marriage? What is the name of the spouse?
- g) What are any children's first and last names and spouses (if married)?
- h) How many grandchildren/great-grandchildren are there?
- i) What places did he/she work (if any)?
- j) What schooling was completed? What (if any) degrees were earned?
- k) Were there any special awards/recognitions/honors they received?
- l) Did he/she serve in the military? If so, which branch? What rank did he/she achieve?

2. **Personal/Family Information.** This information is more personal and can include the decedent's stories, personality, and personhood.

Questions to Ask the Family

Here are some suggested questions you can ask the family:

- a) What are some characteristics that would best describe him/her? (Timid, Gentle, Impatient, Modest, Impulsive, Nervous, Loving, Tactful, Socially Awkward, Intelligent, Mature, Sarcastic, Patient, Angry, Insecure, Deliberate, Congenial, Stubborn, Studious, Verbal, Kind, Selfish, Secure, Considerate, Relaxed, Abrasive, Trustworthy, Motivated, Organized, Compassionate)
- b) What did you love the most about him/her?
- c) What were some of his/her hobbies?
- d) What are some of your favorite memories of him/her?
- e) What are some memorable stories you have about him/her?
- f) How should I refer to them in the service? Full name, nickname...
- g) What are the 1 or 2 most important things you want everybody to know about him/her when they leave the service?

3. **Funeral/Memorial Information.** This information is about the service itself.

Questions to Ask the Family

Here are some suggested questions you can ask the family:

- a) When will the funeral be held (date)?
- b) Will there be a casket, or will the deceased be cremated?
- c) Where will the funeral be held (church, funeral home)?
- d) What is the time of the service?
- e) What is the address of the place of the funeral/memorial?
- f) Are there any family members/friends that you would like to share?
- g) Are there any specific scriptures that were meaningful or that you would like to read?
- h) Will there be a processional/internment (graveside service)?
- i) Are there any special requests by the deceased (if known) for the funeral service (Particular song, a favorite section of Scripture, etc.)?
- j) Are there any special requests by the family for the funeral service?
- k) Who is my primary point of contact (family & funeral home)?
- l) Is there any additional information I should be aware of?

PART 3: VISITATION/VIEWING

"Grief is the price we pay for love."
Queen Elizabeth II

Usually, a funeral/memorial service includes a visitation time. This usually occurs the day before the funeral or hours before the service on the same day. This allows family and friends to gather to offer condolences and support. It can be both emotionally difficult and a great time of comfort.

A viewing usually lasts a few hours. As a minister, you only need to stay part of the time. Usually, the minister arrives with the family for a private moment just before the public visitation/viewing time.

PART 4: FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICE

"Grief is like the ocean. It comes on waves, ebbing and flowing. Sometimes, the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim."
Vicki Harrison

Funerals/memorials help friends and family members acknowledge the life of their loved one, offer support to each other, hope for tomorrow, and support and comfort for those who are grieving.

While funerals honor the deceased, they are really for the living. While the service is about them, it is performed to comfort those who now must walk through life without their loved one, the deceased. Funerals are a time of reflection and gathering people around the family to support. It is impossible to understate the value of a well-done funeral or memorial service.

Funerals help loved ones begin the process of grief together. They allow a safe environment to share thoughts, emotions, and stories. Reflecting and honoring our loved ones helps us remember who they were to us not just that they are gone.

Having support is essential to begin to adjust to the "new normal" of life without someone who meant so much.

NOTE: Some sample funeral/memorial services are in the appendix at the end of this playbook.

THE MESSAGE: The whole service should be about 30-60 minutes long, and the message portion/sermon should be around 10-20 minutes long. While each service will be different, the best rule of thumb is to keep the message part shorter rather than longer.

SUGGESTED BIBLE VERSES:

- Psalm 23, John 11:25-26, John 14, 2 Corinthians 5:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

NOTE: It is wise to ensure that anyone sharing does so before your message. This will allow you to correct any unbiblical or unwise statements made by those sharing.

PART 5: COMMITTAL SERVICE

"I still miss those I loved who are no longer with me but I find I am grateful for having loved them. The gratitude has finally conquered the loss."

Rita May brown

The committal service follows the funeral/memorial service and occurs at the cemetery. This can occur graveside or in a mausoleum.

This service should be between 15-20 minutes and should not be a recap of the previous funeral/memorial service, but a focus of comfort and the final goodbye. The family should also have one last opportunity to gather around the casket to say goodbye.

Here is a sample outline to consider:

- Open in Prayer
- Opening Statement: "We gather here today to commit the body of [enter name]"
- Read Scripture
- Share words of comfort and hope in Jesus
- Scripture
- Encouragement for the family to support each other and for everyone to pray for the grieving family.
- Concluding thoughts
- Prayer
- Turn over to the Funeral Director
- Give family members a few moments to say their final goodbye.

APPENDIX

SAMPLE FUNERAL SERVICE #1

Funeral Service Doris

Welcome and thank you for coming today

John 14:1-6

1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

4 And where I go you know, and the way you know."

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Scriptures tell us that for the Christian, when we take that last breath, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

And that when we stand before God, we receive our eternal crown of glory.

June 22nd was coronation day for Doris.

Prayer -

Read Obituary Information

Psalms 37:23-24

23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,
And He delights in his way.

24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;
For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

What makes a "good" man or woman?

Joshua 24:14-15

(14) "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

(15) And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The simple fact is this, we in ourselves cannot be good. It is Christ in us that is good.

And Doris knew this above all else.

She knew Christ, loved the Lord and raised her family the best she could to honor and serve God.

She was generous and kind

Loved the church, Sunday morning, night, Wednesday, going out to eat after

Loved serving at the church on the kitchen team

Spent time to help others

Stay at home mom, 7 kids, answering the business phones for dad's business

Shopping at Kmart was like a trip to Disney

She trusted the principle of Proverbs 22:6 that says

Train up a child in the way he should go;

even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Always busy at the house, cleaning, laundry creasers in dad's jeans

Didn't want attention on her, but on others

loved to laugh, had a sense of humor, loved the memories -

Doris was quiet but influential

OPEN FOR SHARING

KRISTINA SHARE

DENNIS SHARE

She wanted a short and sweet service. She was always considerate of everybody else. Even today she doesn't want you to be inconvenienced by sitting here for a long time.

Message

John 11:25, 26

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Doris is heaven today for one reason and one reason only. Jesus Christ.

She believed that Jesus is the Son of God.

She believed that He died on a cross to pay for her sins.

She believed that He was raised from the grave on the 3rd day and is forever alive.

Doris is not in heaven today because of anything she did.

Not because she was loving and kind.

Not because she went to church.

Not because she was thoughtful and generous.

Not because she worked hard.

She is in heaven today because of her relationship with Jesus Christ!

If there were any way possible for her to give me one request for her funeral today, I think that after seeing the glory of God and the face of Jesus she would say,

"Pastor, tell my friends and family about Jesus. I don't want them to miss this."

The Bible tells us-

1 John 1:8, 9

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 10:9

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

There is hope for each one of us to see Doris again in heaven. That hope, only hope, is Jesus Christ our Lord and savior.

Invitation for salvation

Close in Prayer

SAMPLE COMMITTAL (GRAVESIDE) #1

Committal (graveside)

Others came to a grave a long time ago to remember and grieve the loss of a friend and family member. But when they arrived at that site, they found that the grave had been opened, and the one they were looking for was not there... for He had risen from the grave.

As we stand here today, I want to read this scripture to you: It says:

"Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: It goes on to say...Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

I want to take a moment to read this passage from The Message... It puts it this way...

"**51-57**But let me tell you something wonderful, a mystery I'll probably never fully understand. We're not all going to die—but we are all going to be changed. You hear a blast to end all blasts from a trumpet, and in the time that you look up and blink your eyes—it's over".

On signal from that trumpet from heaven, the dead will be up and out of their graves, beyond the reach of death, never to die again. At the same moment and in the same way, we'll all be changed. In the resurrection scheme of things, this has to happen: everything perishable taken off the shelves and replaced by the imperishable, this mortal replaced by the immortal. Then the saying will come true: Death swallowed by triumphant Life! Who got the last word, oh, Death? Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?

It was sin that made death so frightening and law that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, because of the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God!

58With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.

For at this time... it has pleased our heavenly Father in His wisdom to take unto Himself our beloved _____, we therefore commit his body to the ground, "looking for the blessed Hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who shall change the body of humiliation and fashion it anew in the likeness of His own body of glory, according to the working of His mighty power..."

Now may the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen!

Final Prayer

If possible consider a closing song: (Examples:** Amazing Grace or Because He Lives)

SAMPLE COMMITTAL (GRAVESIDE) #2

Internment Ceremony

Open in Prayer

As we are preparing to lay (name of deceased) to rest, it is good to notice that while we grieve, we do not do so alone.

We are gathered here in honor of one whom we loved and one whom we honor together.

This final goodbye is one that lasts beyond this moment as we walk the journey of living life without our family member and friend.

We also walk this journey with the presence of God as our comfort, knowing that this world is only temporary.

Continue to comfort our hearts and help us to hear the promise of His resurrection again.

Please be in prayer for the family as they adjust to a new normal of life with our (name of deceased).

Make sure you laugh, celebrate the life she lived for all these years.

Please be of support for the family and check in on them and pray for them as well.

Please continue to keep all of each other in prayers and thoughts.

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Closing Prayer

Turn over to the Funeral Director.