



The Universal Life Church Monastery's

GUIDE TO FUNERALS

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Introduction to Performing Funerals

Your role: bring comfort, bring hope



When death comes, ministers are important for bringing comfort and hope to the bereaved. Universal Life Church ministers can perform intensely meaningful and personalized funeral and burial ceremonies for friends and family members. They are not likely to preside over funerals held in churches because the local pastor would be more likely to be involved and thus hold the service, so the services described below are thus for chapel and graveside ceremonies.

The Minister

ULC ministers are occasionally called upon to perform funeral ceremony in a chapel or graveside service. If you plan on officiating at a funeral ceremony, you should conduct yourself professionally and proudly and strive to incorporate the beliefs of the departed and their family into the ceremony. Not all funerals are religious in nature and the minister should be prepared to offer a civil ceremony without references to God or any particular belief system if the family requests that they do so. The decision of the family must be honored; this is a one-time event and will deeply affect the memory that remains of the deceased. Stated simply: your role as funeral officiant is to do as you are asked, and try your best to do it well!

The Need for Follow-Up

A few days after the ceremony, the minister should call the family and friends of the deceased to inquire about how they are feeling. This is another opportunity for family members and friends to share emotions and it is the minister's duty to listen, comfort and console them.

Sensitive follow-up will underscore the sincerity of the minister and will create the climate for the development of even stronger relationships with the family and friends. The minister offers more than his or her services at the funeral; they share their person with the family and connect at the personal level. This is very important in times of grief and sorrow.

Components of Funerals

Prayers and Scripture Readings

For religious funerals, prayers and passages from the Bible are often read aloud or recited by those gather to mourn the deceased. Samples of these can be found in the “Prayers and Readings” section below.

The Eulogy

A family member or close friend of the deceased is often asked to give a eulogy, which is a short talk of remembrance centered on the individual’s life, achievements, and character. Anything that is requested by the family in regards to a eulogy should be accommodated by the minister. A eulogy does not have to be solemn; it can contain gentle humor that assists in the remembrance of the individual.



The popularity of eulogies has diminished somewhat over time. It is more common in modern times for the minister to include some biographical content in the sermon or a message which remind those attending the funeral about the life of the departed. If a eulogy is not going to be a part of a funeral you are planning on performing, make sure to gather this biographical content in the planning session with the deceased’s family and friends. The minister should take and keep written notes about during this session.

The Graveside Service

The graveside service, also known as the committal or interment ceremony, follows the funeral service and should always be brief unless the graveside service is the whole ceremony.

Brief remarks, scripture, prayer and a closing committal statement (the “ashes to ashes” phrase is appropriate here) are adequate for the setting. Ten minutes is usually ample time for the graveside service if it is preceded by a chapel service. However, there will be occasions when the entire service will be conducted at the graveside. This type of service requires planning since there are a number of factors involved in graveside services that are considerably different than a service held indoors; the weather, temperature, natural setting (i.e. forested memorial grounds or sunbaked cemetery field), and other



arrangements are all things you will need to consider during the planning process. Some example benedictions are listed below but these are only suggestions and can easily be changed to what the family wants for the service. All remarks you deliver should be made from the head end of the casket.

After the benediction, the minister usually offers quiet words of consolation to individual family members.

Non-Religious Funeral Ceremonies

Some families may wish to have a secular funeral ceremony where religion is not dwelt upon. In these types of ceremonies, the comfort, love, and well-being of the surviving family members and friends are to be taken note of. It is appropriate for secular ceremonies to focus upon the lifetime achievements and community involvement of the deceased. Simply removing the word God, Jesus Christ, Holy Word, Scriptures and Amen from pre-prepared funeral services may be sufficient for the family if they do not want the service to have a religious tone. In addition, the customs and traditions of the deceased may influence how their family wants the ceremony to be held.

Planning a Funeral

First Steps

The minister should listen to the deceased's family members for as long as is necessary to gain important information about their wishes for the funeral and also to allow family members to vent pent up emotions. Allowing time for the individual to express emotions is vital at this stage of funeral planning. The minister must be willing to accommodate grief and the outpouring of emotions. Tears and crying may interrupt the ceremony, but so be it.



Remember that the funeral service is for the living as much as the deceased individual. All outpourings of emotion are accepted right into the ceremony and holding up the ceremony for a few moments will add to the emotional drama and the beginning of the healing process. The healing process may take years, but the beginning of this process is the funeral service because of the closure to the deceased's life that the ceremony brings.

Planning Checklist

Make sure to do the following when you are planning for a funeral service:

1. Ask who is in charge of the funeral planning.
2. Ask to meet with the family or the individual taking charge of the arrangements.
3. Have a paper and pen available to take notes when meeting the family or individual in charge of the arrangements.
4. Ask about the location of the ceremony, the name and address of the chapel or meeting hall where the ceremony is to be held, and name and telephone number of the funeral director and have that information written down for future reference.
5. Ask for the time of the service and whether or not there will be a viewing ceremony before the ceremony itself, and whether the family wishes the minister to be present. Usually, the minister will only be asked to be present if the minister is familiar with the family or has a special religious affiliation with the departed.
6. Ask if there are going to be any special honors given by the U.S. military, VFW, or related organizations during the funeral; these organizations provide the U.S. flag and sometimes a rifle salute. Ask who is to receive the flag if one is presented.
7. Ask if special music is to be played at the ceremony and, if it is, whether or not it will be provided by the chapel.

8. Draft a schedule for the funeral based on the information you gathered above and give it to the family for their approval. A funeral planning sheet can be found in the Free Downloads section of ULC.org.

The minister should lead the service and be near the head of the casket when delivering their service. The minister should seek to conduct themselves and the service in such a way as to promote an atmosphere of peace, tranquility and – most importantly – one that is conducive for remembering the departed.



Practices common amongst fundamentalist denominations like shouting, pacing back and forth, waving of arms above the head, speaking in tongues, or any mannerisms that may call attention to the behaviors of the minister rather than the message of their service should be avoided; do nothing to take away from the remembrance and celebration of the life of the deceased.

Other Aspects of Planning the Funeral

These tasks are usually handled by the family or funeral director, but the minister may be called upon to help if they are close to the family.

- Newspaper announcements about the departed's passing
- Organizing floral arrangements for the cemetery and/or funeral
- Planning musical arrangements, live or recorded
- Planning security arrangements for homes while the guests are away
- Learning about and preparing for medical needs of the funeral guests
- Notification of Social Security
- Collecting cards from floral arrangements
- Collecting church donations and prayer cards
- Orchestrating the donation of personal belongings of deceased to charity
- Locating the will of the deceased
- Notification of utility accounts
- Security arrangements for the deceased's home/belongings
- Making hearse reservations and other travel arrangements for the purposes of getting guests from the funeral to the cemetery

Suggested Order of Funeral Services

The list below shows some of the most common orders of service. Use this list as a reference as you draft funeral ceremonies for friends and family members.

1. Piano or Organ Music (live or recorded)
 2. The Opening Prayer
 3. Invocation (opening statements by minister/statement of purpose)
 4. Minister's Message of Hope and Peace
 5. Eulogy
 6. Closing Prayer
 7. Benediction
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1. Piano or organ music or congregational hymn
 2. Scripture reading
 3. Invocation (opening statements by minister/statement of purpose)
 4. Eulogy
 5. Prayer
 6. Message (of comfort, eternal life, love outlasting life)
 7. Benediction (closing prayer which consoles and gives peace)
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1. Piano or organ music (live or recorded, usually chapel provided)
 2. Opening Scriptural sentences
 3. Hymn
 4. Eulogy delivered by friend or relative
 5. Pastoral prayer
 6. Message (of comfort, eternal life, love outlasting life)
 7. Benediction
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1. Piano or organ music (live or recorded, usually chapel provided)
2. Invocation (opening welcome by the minister/statement of purpose)
3. Recitation of the Lord's Prayer
4. Old and New Testament readings
5. Eulogy (sometimes referred to as the obituary)
6. Message (of comfort, eternal life, love outlasting life)
7. Benediction

Sample Funeral Service #1

To Begin

The minister introduces themselves to the attending family and friends and addresses the purpose of their gathering. The minister states the departed one's name and his or her relationship to the family; mother, father, uncle, aunt, or friend.

The Opening Prayer

The minister presents his or her message about death and dying and includes scripture verses which are intended to comfort the family and friends. The minister speaks about the departed one and references their relationships with their family, friends, and community. This is where the minister places biographical information about the individual into their service; the departed one may have been a community leader, church attendee, parent of a number of a number of children, etc.

The Eulogy

The individual appointed to give a eulogy speaks. The minister must never cut anyone off from speaking for any reason. Speaking is a form of grieving and grieving is the function of the funeral. The minister should keep in mind that in many ways funerals are more for the living than for the departed one. Making the funeral service memorable in words and actions is the most important duty of the minister.

The eulogy, when tastefully done, is a very appropriate way of celebrating the deceased person's life. After the eulogy the minister accepts back control of the ceremony by reading a few scriptures again to comfort the family and friends. See the Prayers and Reading section below for suggestions of scriptures that you can use during the service. Some ministers use poems of peace and comfort in addition to or as a substitution for scriptures at this point of the ceremony, especially if the family wants the funeral to remain as secular as possible. Inserting the personal characteristics of the departed into the message of the eulogy is very important. In addition to listing the deceased's accomplishments, it is advisable to appeal to the emotional side of their life such as being a loving husband, father, grandmother or grandfather to members of the audience.

Stories about the deceased are particularly important at this point of the ceremony. Bringing back as many memories and including as many people as possible in the eulogy is advisable. Family members are the most helpful in supplying the minister with emotional aspects of their loved one's life.

The Closing Prayer

The minister should end the ceremony with a prayer. This should be a memorable moment. Oftentimes the minister will call for the family and friends to bow their heads during the prayer, an act that creates unity within the group. There are many appropriate prayers, and some can be found in the Prayers and Readings section. Prayers giving hope and comfort are best suited to this portion of the ceremony.

The Benediction

At the conclusion of the service, the minister should lead the recessional from within the church or chapel to the hearse. Once the casket has been placed in the hearse, the minister takes his place in the automobile procession to the graveside.

At the graveside, it is customary for the minister to lead the pallbearers as they carry the casket.

Sample Funeral Service #2

Opening Scripture: (Isaiah 43:1-3)

Invocation

O Lord, God of life and death, our ever-present help when we mourn, the eternal one who never does impose pain and death upon us willingly, give us the ability in this time of sorrow to bow before you in worship as our divine protector and source of love. Comfort those who are burdened with sorrow. Heal those who are filled with regrets. Speak to each of us through your holy Word that we may know Jesus Christ as the door to eternal life, In whose name we pray. *Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer, Psalms 23:1-4

(May be read by the minister or recited by those attending the ceremony)

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?

Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

(John 14:1-6)

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, the comforter of those who mourn, the strength of those who are weak, lift us up upon the wings of your eternal promise in Christ as we reflect upon the words we have heard and as we contemplate our own relationship with you Spirit. Where there is doubt, put faith. Where there is misunderstanding provide wisdom. Where there is guilt, pour out your forgiveness. Where there is fear, instill you peace.

We thank you for the good memories of the life we honor.

Benediction

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. *Amen.*

Prayers and Readings

Suggested Prayers

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen
(1 Thess. 5:23)

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in you, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen
(Eph. 3:20-21)

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance Upon you
And give you peace.
(Num. 6:24-26)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
That you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Rom. 15:13)

O God, from whom all blessings flow, we come in great need of Your blessing. You and You alone know our broken hearts; You know the grief we experience. Out of our emptiness we come to You. Our reservoir of strength has been depleted; our souls are bare; our feelings are numb. Lord, we need You.

Father God, we come today as people whose lives have been abruptly changed by the death of one whom we deeply love. This change has brought confusion, anger, loneliness, fear, and doubt. In the midst of these varied emotions, we long for peace and for endurance. We want to feel Your presence. Lord may the memories of precious moments shared sustain us in this time of grief. May those times of laughter and crying, joy and sorrow, energy and fatigue, conflict and peace which mark our history with this beloved individual be the foundation of hope which sends us into tomorrow.

Our Heavenly Father, at a time when we are acutely aware of the death of a loved one, we thank You for Your living presence with us. Your unfailing companionship with us gives us comfort for today and courage for tomorrow.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise,
Be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
(1 Tim. 1:17)

For Graveside Services

We gather here to claim memories which are forever sacred as they are a gift of God. We are supported by a faith stronger than death, sustained by the hope of a life that extends eternally beyond this place. Within that confidence, we gather here to commit all that is mortal of our friend to this resting place not made with hands by God Eternal.

It is not by choice that we gather in this city of the dead, hallowed by sacred memory of its inhabitants. The monuments are only symbols of the affection of surviving friends. The absence of the souls of these inhabitants is but a monument to a loving and life-giving God. As we offer the body of our deceased we are reminded that there is life immortal that shall indeed survive the grave. We now commit this one to the arms of a God who gives life that never ends.

Forasmuch as it has pleased Almighty God to take unto himself the soul of _____, we offer the body to this place prepared for it, that ashes may return to ashes, dust to dust and the imperishable spirit may forever be with the Lord

We gather here to claim memories which are forever sacred as they are a gift of God. We are supported by a faith stronger than death, sustained by the hope of a life that extends eternally beyond this place. Within that confidence, we gather here to commit all that is mortal of my mother to her resting place knowing that she is in a resting place not made by God, but by God Eternal the heaven which is now her home.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."
(Josh. 1:9)

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.
(Ps. 145:14-16, 18)

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.
(Matt. 11:28-30)

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord is my Shepherd:
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

(Ps 23)