

When A Loved One Dies...  
Planning a Memorial or Funeral Service



First Parish of Westwood, United Church  
340 Clapboardtree Street  
Westwood, Massachusetts 02090

## Forward

When a loved one dies, a family is suddenly confronted with a multitude of decisions which must be made quickly and with care. Many of these decisions relate to the planning of a Christian service of worship to mark the passing of the deceased. To help families with some of these decisions, we offer this booklet.

Some may wish to discuss the contents of this booklet with their families well in advance. Others may refer to this booklet after the death of a loved one, and prior to meeting with one of the pastors at First Parish to discuss service arrangements.

In their time of grief, some families will prefer to have the pastor select the hymns and scriptures for their loved ones' service. Others will prefer to make a few, or all, of their own selections. For the latter, we have included in this booklet, lists of some suitable hymns and scripture passages.

In all such planning, it should be recognized that there is no single "right" way to conduct a meaningful Funeral or Memorial service. Circumstances, customs, and personal preferences can vary widely. Such services should be planned to reflect the special needs and interests of individuals and their families.

## **Types of Services**

- *Funeral Service* – takes place with the embalmed or cremated remains of the deceased present. Such services are usually held in the Meeting House, at the grave, or at the funeral home. When the service is conducted at First Parish, it is requested that the casket remain closed.
- *Memorial Service* – takes place without the remains of the deceased present. Such services are almost always held at First Parish. Except for providing a guest registry, funeral home involvement is not usually required.
- *Committal Service* – takes place in conjunction with the interment of the embalmed or cremated remains of the deceased. This brief service may be combined with either of the above services, or held at a time totally separate from them.

## **Location & Timing of Service**

- *Local Funeral Service* – The service is conducted locally, immediately after which the remains are taken to a local cemetery where either a public or private Committal Service is conducted.
- *Local Memorial Service* – The service is generally conducted in the Meeting House. A Committal Service is held at a different time – generally privately and on a day before the Memorial Service. Some Memorial Services at First Parish are preceded by complete funeral services for the deceased held elsewhere, particularly out-of-state.
- *Non-Local Services* – When a non-local interment is required in conjunction with a local service, the funeral home will arrange for an on-site clergy person to conduct an appropriate Committal Service. In such cases, the words of Committal can also be included in the local service – to provide a sense of “completeness” for those not attending the interment.

## **After Service Gathering**

Depending upon its availability, the Parish Hall at First Parish may be used to host a reception following any Funeral or Memorial Service held at First Parish. There is no cost for the use of the hall.

Families may call the church office for the names of local caterers – and will be asked to defray the cost of the reception. Caterers contracted by the family are welcome to call the church office to discuss use of church linens, etc.

Set-up and clean up of the hall for such a reception are included in the Sexton's honorarium.

## **Honoraria**

- *Sanctuary:* As part of its ministry to grieving families, First Parish provides the use of the Meeting House without charge.
- *Clergy:* It is the usual practice in our community to provide an honorarium of \$250 to clergy for special services rendered in conducting funeral, memorial or committal services.
- *Organist:* The honorarium for the professional services of First Parish's organist is set at \$130.
- *Sexton:* When a funeral or memorial service is held in the Meeting House – or if a funeral collation is to be held in the Parish Hall – an honorarium of \$100 is required for the church sexton.

More information on these items is available from local funeral homes and/or from our church office.

## **Scheduling**

Following a death, the funeral home will contact First Parish on behalf of the grieving family to set a date, time, and location of the service. Usually this is done as soon as possible, to meet newspaper and other deadlines. For services held in the Meeting House at First Parish, we will, upon request by the family, secure the services of the church organist.

Following the initial contact, the pastor will consult with the family to minister to their needs at this difficult time, including planning the service.

If the primary funeral service occurs out of the area, it is usually the family which contacts the pastor directly to arrange for a later Memorial Service in the Meeting House.

## **The Meeting House**

Please know that our parishioners and their families are certainly welcome to have their services conducted at First Parish.

Services of all sizes are held in the sanctuary. Grieving families tend to underestimate the number of people who will attend a public service to demonstrate support and “pay respects.”

## **Alternate and Guest Clergy**

At times when a pastor is not available, such as during summer vacations, First Parish will provide names of alternate clergy, authorized to conduct Funeral and Memorial services on behalf of, and in, our Meeting House. For services not held at First Parish, the funeral home can provide the names of additional clergy.

If requested by the family, other clergy are welcome to assist a First Parish pastor in conducting the service. When other clergy have known the deceased well, we are quite willing to have them present the more person, “Remembrance” portion of the service.

## **Purposes of a Christian Service**

The Christian faith triumphantly proclaims the victorious passage from bitter death to eternal life in God's keeping. It also bears witness to the redemptive love of God which stands with us, and cries with us, when we who are left behind must face the painful partings and tragedies of this earthly life.

Through appropriate Bible passages, prayers, and hymns, a Christian Funeral or Memorial Service should help grieving families and friends get in touch with these vital truths of our faith – and derive hope and comfort from them.

A Christian service should express thanks to God for the earthly life of the deceased and thanksgiving for all that person has meant over the years to beloved family and friends. Christianity teaches that individual persons are both unique and precious to God. As such, in death as in life, it is important that we honor them and bear witness to our thankfulness for them.

Finally, a service should help a family commend their loved one into God's keeping. It should help them find a sense of peace, as they shift their focus from the earthly to the eternal spiritual identity of their loved one.

## **Service Content**

Like all worship services, a Funeral or Memorial service should convey a sense of inter-connectedness and progression in achieving its purposes. Here is the basic order often used at First Parish for both kinds of services. Certainly this order is open to modification to suit personal preferences.

With hymns, and without additional speakers, this service lasts 20-25 minutes. The Committal service lasts under 5 minutes.

Services at First Parish often include hymns. (Hymns are not usually used at the funeral home or a gravesite.)

## **Suggested Format for a Memorial or Funeral Service**

(In the Meeting House)

GATHERING

GREETING

CALL TO WORSHIP (responsive)

\*HYMN

PRAYER

READING FROM THE SCRIPTURES

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE:

READING OF SCRIPTURE

MEDITATION

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

LORD'S PRAYER

COMMENDATION

PSALM 23 (UNISON)

\* HYMN

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING

SENDING FORTH

## Suggested Hymns

### Pilgrim Hymnal

O God Our Help in Ages Past (#1)  
Joyful, Joyful (#8)  
Now the Day is Over (#51)  
God Be With You (#61)  
For the Beauty of the Earth (#66)  
Abide With Me (#209)  
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (#228)  
Blest Be the Tie That Binds (272)  
For All the Saints (#306)  
Dear Lord & Father of Mankind (#341)  
Nearer My God To Thee (#351)  
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God (#363)  
O Love That Will Not Let Me Go (#399)  
O Master Let Me Walk With Thee (#418)  
Eternal Father Strong To Save (429)  
I Would Be True (#489)

### New Century Hymnal

On A Hill Far Away (#195)  
The Strife is O'er (#242)  
I Was There To Hear (#351)  
In the Bulb (#433)  
God Is My Shepherd (#479)  
Amazing Grace (#547)  
Shall We Gather (#597)  
Be Still My Soul (#488)

## Suggested Scripture

### Old Testament

Psalms 23  
Psalm 25: 1-2, 4-10  
Psalm 27: 1,4-9,13,14  
Psalm 46:1-5, 10  
Psalm 84  
Psalm 90  
Psalm 95:1-7  
Psalm 100  
Psalm 121  
Psalm 139  
Isaiah 25:1,4,8-9,26-27a  
Deuteronomy 32:1-3,7,9-12;33:26-27a  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

### New Testament

Philippians 4:4-9  
John 14  
Romans 8:9-11, 31-39  
1 Corinthians 13:4-7,13