

# **FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH'S FUNERAL POLICY**

*(amended 10/13/10)*

The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and shapes Christians' attitudes and responses to the event of death. In the face of death, Christians affirm with tears and joy the hope of the gospel. 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*] Just as the church embraces us in our baptism and throughout our Christian life, so it should embrace us in our death and in our hope of resurrection to eternal life.

Because it is difficult under emotional stress to plan wisely, the Session should encourage members to discuss and plan in advance the arrangements which will be necessary at the time of death, including those decisions about the Christian options of burial, cremation or donation for medical purposes. These plans should provide for arrangements which are simple, which bear witness to the resurrection hope, and in which the Christian community is central. [*Book of Order, Directory for Worship*]. By prior consideration and planning, the family of the deceased can be relieved of some difficult decisions, and the intentions of the deceased for an appropriate service of worship can be maintained.

## **Pastoral Staff**

Upon the death of one of our members, a pastor of the church should be notified as soon as possible. This is best accomplished by contacting the church office. Our pastors also earnestly desire to know of those who need comfort and counsel as they face death. By being involved early in situations of death or impending death, the pastor can help immensely with the necessary decisions regarding funeral homes, disposition of the body, and service arrangements, as well as caring for the spiritual needs of those involved.

The Senior Pastor shall be invited to lead all funerals at First Presbyterian Church, and may decide whether to take the lead or ask an Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church to take the lead.

## **Types of Services**

All services conducted by pastors of the church are services of worship for the community of faith. While the form of services may differ, each is a Service of Witness to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Memorial Service – The Memorial Service is a service where the body is not present. Interment of the remains in a Service of Committal has either preceded the Memorial Service or will take place at a later time.

Funeral Service – The Funeral Service is a service where the body is present in either a casket or an urn. The Funeral Service is concluded with a Service of Committal at the burial site.

Graveside Service – The Graveside Service is a service that takes place at the burial site. The Service of Committal is a part of the Graveside Service.

### **Location of Service**

The service on the occasion of death ordinarily should be held in the usual place of worship in order to join this service to the community's continuing life and witness to the resurrection. The service shall be under the direction of the pastor. [*Book of Order, Directory for Worship*]

The church sanctuary or chapel are appropriate places for a Memorial or Funeral Service. Here on the church property is where we worship every Sunday. Here is where we baptize our children, celebrate marriage, gather at the Lord's Table, and remember the love and grace of God. Here we are surrounded by the symbols of our Christian faith. In this place we have tangible reminders of the "great cloud of witnesses" that surround us and the community of faith that supports us with compassion and love.

### **Visitation**

The Cheek House and Courtenay Hall, located on the church property, provides a warm and familiar place for visitation with family and friends. Members are encouraged to use this facility for visitation as a part of their arrangements.

### **The Service**

Memorial, Funeral and Graveside Services are acts of worship among the Christian community. The purposes of such services of worship are to glorify God, to affirm our belief in the resurrection to life everlasting, and to comfort the bereaved. Although gratitude and honor are to be expressed to God for the life and witness of the deceased, the focus of worship is upon God; therefore, prolonged and undue attention upon the deceased is discouraged.

### **The Order of Worship**

The service begins with scriptural sentences. It is appropriate for worshipers to sing hymns, psalms, 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 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. The service ends by commending the one who has died to the care of the eternal God and sending the people forth with a benediction. [*Book of Order, Directory for Worship*]

### **Scriptures**

The Scriptures are a rich source to which Christians and Jews alike have turned for comfort and assurance in times of grief. The pastor will guide the selection of appropriate scripture passages, and would welcome suggestions of those with particular meaning for the family or the deceased.

### **Music**

Hymns should be chosen which affirm the goodness and grace of God, and which give comfort and support to those who grieve. The pastor and the organist will guide the selection of appropriate hymns.

The church's organist will provide suitable sacred music and is available for consultation with the family concerning these musical selections. The appropriateness of musical selections will be determined by the church's music department. Additional instrumentalists or vocalists may also be employed, but must be approved by the church's music department. The family is expected to contact and to cover the cost of additional musicians.

### **The Pall**

The church provides a white pall for every Funeral Service. A pall is a large cloth which covers the casket during the service. It represents the covering of the Christian by the righteousness of Christ, and alludes to the baptismal waters of death and new life in Jesus. Since righteousness is an unmerited gift from God and all people stand equal in the eyes of God, the outer appearance of the casket in its cost or beauty is of no consequence to the Christian community. By use of the pall, the focus of the service may remain on the goodness and grace of God.

If a casket is present at the service, it is covered with the pall furnished by the church. Where appropriate, the American flag may be used in lieu of the pall. If the family chooses to use a flower pall, it will be removed when the casket enters the church. The church pall (or flag) will then cover the casket during the service. Following the benediction, as the casket is taken from the church, the flower pall may again be placed upon the casket.

### **Cremation Urn**

In the case of cremation, the urn containing the ashes is usually only present at the time of committal, following or preceding the Funeral Service.

### **Flowers**

In keeping with the simplicity and understanding of the Christian faith to avoid ostentation, flowers are limited to one arrangement on the Communion Table. This will encourage worshipers to focus their attention on the promises of Scripture and the grace of God. Typically, the family of the deceased will furnish the arrangement of flowers for the service.

### **Other Fraternal, Civic or Military Rites**

The service shall be complete in itself, and any fraternal, civic, or military rites should be conducted separately. [*Book of Order, Directory for Worship*] The service of worship is an act of the Christian community in which the wider community is welcome. If other rites take place, these rites shall be conducted apart from the service and place of worship.

### **Costs and Fees**

There are no charges or fees for use of the church's facilities or for the services of the pastor(s). Costs to the family will be for flowers the family provides at the service and for musicians and vocalists the family may request. It will be the responsibility of the family to order flowers from the florist of their choice. Any honorarium the family may wish to give musicians or vocalists who are employees of the church should be made by check to the First Presbyterian Church with the intended recipient's name in the lower left-hand corner of the check. Such checks should be sent to the church finance office.