

Geneva Presbyterian Church



GUIDELINES FOR
FUNERALS AND
MEMORIAL
SERVICES



The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and shapes Christians' attitudes and responses to the event of death. Death brings loss, sorrow, and grief to all, yet 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. It is in that spirit that Geneva Presbyterian Church offers a ministry of love and hope to all who grieve.

These guidelines are offered to assist members and friends in planning for a worship service upon the death of a loved one. They are based on the traditions and customs of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. and our local congregation.



Decisions Concerning the Body

In our tradition, Christians may consider several options for the physical body of the deceased, including:

- burial in a casket and a cemetery plot;
- cremation, with the ashes placed in an urn for scattering or interment. Geneva Presbyterian Church has a Memorial Garden where the ashes of a loved one can be inhumed, or mixed into the soil.
- donation to an institution for medical use or research. Those desiring this option usually arrange this prior to death.

The Setting of the Service

Funerals and memorial services are usually held in the Sanctuary of our church, which grounds the service in the context of the worshipping community to which the deceased has belonged. It recognizes the role that the community has had in supporting and nurturing the deceased in the life of faith. Funerals and memorial services held at Geneva will be under the leadership of the pastor of Geneva Presbyterian Church, although others may participate in the service at the request of the family and the discretion of the pastor.

The deceased's body is usually present and visible at a funeral service. Funerals often happen at a mortuary or funeral home and may be followed by a shorter graveside service. Because of the presence of the embalmed body, funerals generally occur within a few days of the death.



A memorial service does not include a body, so the schedule is at the family's convenience, and it's more practical to hold it at a church. Since many families live far from each other, memorial services are common. All you need are photos and perhaps some memorabilia. Memorial services can happen at a church and often include a reception or fellowship time afterward.

Arrangements can also be made to hold the service at a home, funeral home, cemetery chapel, or other appropriate location. When the funeral or memorial service is held off-site, the pastor of Geneva may collaborate with other religious leaders in carrying out the service. The service may be observed on any day, and may, with the approval of the Session, occur as part of the Service for the Lord's Day.

A committal service is a short service at the graveside or in the Memorial Garden consisting of brief Scripture readings and prayers. Committals may be scheduled before or after a memorial service, or after the conclusion of a funeral.

Private viewing can sometimes be an important factor in longer-term healing. During the service, however, the casket will be closed in the sanctuary, as is our tradition. If the service is held at a funeral home, we also suggest that it be closed. If viewing is to be done at the church, it shall be done prior to the service in the church's Gathering Space.

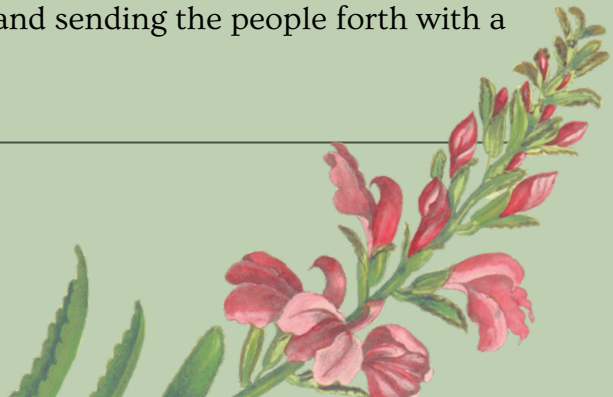


Planning the Service

The pastor will be pleased to work with you to plan an appropriate and meaningful worship service that is a “witness to the resurrection” and a celebration of the life of the deceased. The content of the funeral or memorial service is the responsibility of the officiating pastor and is guided by the Directory of Worship in the Presbyterian Book of Order and the Book of Common Worship.

A basic outline for this service is as follows:

- The service begins with a scriptural welcome.
- It is appropriate for worshippers to sign hymns and read psalms that 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; and an affirmation of the faith may be made by the people.
- Aspects of the life of the deceased may be recalled.
- Prayers shall be offered, giving thanks to God for the life of Jesus Christ and the promise of the gospel, for the gift of the life of the deceased, and for the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- The service ends by commending the deceased to the care of the eternal God and sending the people forth with a benediction.



Alternatives and Options

The funeral or memorial services 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 is ordinarily closed. The service may include other actions common to the community of faith and the many cultures within it. Any fraternal, civic, or military rites should be conducted separately, either prior to or following the Christian service.

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, funeral home, or crematorium; at the grave side; or in Geneva's memorial garden. For those who choose cremation, Geneva provides a beautiful garden for the inhumation of ashes. Ashes are placed directly into the soil without container so that they become part of a living garden.

Donation to medical science is also equally acceptable in our tradition as Presbyterians.



Involvement of Children

We consider it healthy to include children in the family's sorrow, including a viewing. The family may wish to encourage, but not require, children's participation at a viewing, funeral, or memorial service. Reactions to death will vary with the age of the child. There will be questions that should be answered honestly and factually. To some questions, "I don't know" is the best we can offer. Answers stating what we believe will give children confidence in the future and in a God who can be trusted.

A Ministry of Hospitality

As part of its ministry, the deacons of Geneva Presbyterian are pleased to provide beverages, finger foods, and dessert at the church following the memorial service and/or committal. A small honorarium is requested to defray food expenses. If you would like to serve a full meal instead of light refreshments, please use the services of a caterer.



Financial Considerations

Geneva Presbyterian Church is privileged to service families during their time of grief. In that spirit, all honoraria and donations are simply used to reimburse the church for the expenses it incurs. If finances are a concern, please discuss the issue with the pastor.

For the professional counsel and services of our pastor, an honorarium of \$200 or more is appropriate.

The honorarium for the use of the worship area is \$200.

The honorarium for the professional services of the church pianist is \$100. If a rehearsal with a soloist is required, the honorarium is \$150.

Planning Ahead

Because it is difficult under emotional stress to plan wisely, the leadership encourages members to discuss and plan in advance the arrangements which will be necessary at the time of death, including 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 resurrection hope, and in which the Christian community is central.

