

How to Conduct a Funeral Service

Question 1: What are the main parts of a funeral service?

- **Prayer of Thanksgiving** – we give thanks for the life of the person who died.
- **Prayer for Comfort** – we share the sadness of family and friends and ask the Holy Spirit to comfort them.
- **Prayer for Forgiveness and Peace** - we ask God to have mercy and forgive the person who died for any sins he may have committed. We also ask family and friends to forgive the person who died and to ask for forgiveness if they have done anything to offend the person who died.
- **Prayer asking God to look after the person who died** - we use the prayer that Jesus prayed on the cross: “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 24:46)

Question 2: What are some things you do when someone in your church dies?

- Before I visit the family, I ask the Holy Spirit to lead me: “Holy Spirit help me to bring your comfort to the family – give me the right words to say.”
- I write down the names of as many of the family members as I know and pray for each one of them.
- Whenever possible, I arrange for at least one other person to go with me. You will need to train up a group of church leaders who are all able to conduct a funeral service. We say a short prayer together before entering the home or hospital.
- After greeting the family, I ask permission to pay our respects to the one who has died – we stand in silence for one minute – after which I conclude with a short prayer: “Heavenly Father, we thank You very much for the life of _____(name of the person who has died). Please receive him/her into Your loving arms – In Jesus name we pray – Amen.”
- I check whether any funeral arrangements have been made (sometimes the family may be in a state of shock and may need help with these practical arrangements):
 - When will it be?
 - Does the body need to be embalmed?
 - Where will the body be kept?
 - Will it be burial or cremation?
 - How many memorial services will they like to have?
 - Who would they like to inform?
 - Are they planning to provide any refreshments for those who come to pay their respects?
- I ask them to tell me what happened just before his/her death. Getting the family to talking about the person who has just died is an important way of helping them to express their sadness.
- I also ask them to take time to say good bye to their loved one. If possible, I ask them to write out a short good-bye letter.
- I ask the family if there is anything they would like to include in the funeral service:
 - I encourage them to choose a few songs to sing.
 - I ask them to tell me some of the good things they remember about their loved one who has died.

- I ask permission to mention some of those thoughts during the service. If they agree, I ask them if one of them would like to say a few words during the services.

Question 3: What do you do during a funeral service?

- I try to bring one or two other church leaders with me, and (if they have been trained) involve them in the service.
- We pray together asking the Lord to send His Holy Spirit to comfort those who are grieving.
- We arrive early, greet family members and pay our silent respects to the one who has died.
- I ask permission from family members to begin the service – sometimes they would like to wait for someone to arrive before beginning.
- “Family members and friends of Mr _____, (name of the person who died) – I realize that not all of you are Christians – but you love Mr _____ and his family. I invite you to join us in this short service.
- I ask the congregation to stand together and observe a minute of silence. “Please stand and let us remain silent for one minute as a sign of our love and respect for Mr _____. In the silence, I would like you to remember something Mr _____ did for you or something he said to you that brought you joy and encouragement - maybe even something that made you smile or laugh.”
- After a minute’s silence, I lead in a prayer of thanksgiving: “Our Father in heaven, You understand how we are feeling at this moment. Even though we are sad, we want to thank you so much for the life of Mr _____. Thank You for all his goodness and kindness. Thank You for all his love for us - in Jesus’ Name we pray - Amen.”
- I lead them in singing one song of praise.
- I invite one or two family members or friends to say a few words about how Mr _____ has helped and encouraged them.
- If there is enough time, I lead them in another song.
- I introduce the prayer for forgiveness and peace: “Please join me in praying that Mr _____’s spirit may rest in peace. There is something you can do to help that. We will spend another minute in silence. This time in the silence, I want you to try and remember a time when Mr _____ said or did something that hurt or upset you - or a time when you said or did something that hurt or upset him. No one is perfect - we all make mistakes - God is merciful and forgiving and we can learn to forgive one another as well. So let’s remain silent for another minute.
- “Our Father in Heaven, once again we thank You for Mr _____’s kindness and love for us. If he has ever done anything to offend You, please have mercy on him - forgive him for all his sins. If he has hurt any of us - please help us to forgive him. If we have hurt him, please forgive us and please tell him that we are sorry. Come Holy Spirit - help us to forgive one another - because we really want Mr _____’s spirit to rest in peace. In Jesus’ Name we pray - Amen.”
- Next, I usually have a reading from the Scriptures and a short message of encouragement and comfort.

- Then I allow time for family and friends to say “good bye”: “The time has come for us to say good bye - as you walk past the coffin, here are some things you can say in your heart or out loud:
 - “Thank you”
 - “Please forgive me - I am sorry”
 - “I forgive you - may your spirit rest in peace”
 - “I love you very much - I am going to miss you”
 - “God be with you till we meet again”.
- Just before the burial or cremation, I ask God to receive Mr _____’s spirit: “Our Father in Heaven, thank you so much for Mr_____. While he was alive, his family and friends took care of him. But now he has left us to enter Your heavenly home. Please take good care of him. Our bodies are made from the same material this earth is made from. When we die our bodies return to the earth. So now, we return Mr _____’s body to the earth but his spirit, his life - that part of him that will never die, we commit to You. Father, into Your loving hands, we commit his spirit - may he forever rest in Your peace. Amen.
- After the burial or cremation, I conclude by asking God to comfort Mr _____’s family and friends and bless them with His peace.
- “Our Father in Heaven, thank You for helping us to say “good bye” to Mr_____. You understand the sadness we feel at this moment. Come Holy Spirit and comfort his family and friends who will miss him. Fill our hearts with the hope of Your resurrection. We believe Jesus died but then rose again from the dead. He promised to give all those who trust in Him eternal life. And so, we look forward to the day when we will meet him Mr_____again. And so now, may the blessing of the Almighty God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with Mr _____ in heaven and also with his family and friends here on earth. Amen.”

Question 4: What Scripture passages would you use at a funeral service?

- Psalm 23
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
- John 14:1-3
- Revelation 21: 2-5
- John 3:16

Question 5: What are other suggestions for conducting a funeral service?

- Help the family to express their sadness.
 - Some Christians trying to be helpful say: “There is no need to weep - your loved one has gone to a better place - so stop crying - just praise God and rejoice!” This is NOT good advice.
 - Jesus said: “Blessed are those who mourn - for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).
 - Paul said: “We do not want you to grieve like others who have no hope.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13) - When someone very close to us dies, we will feel sad - but our sadness should be mixed with HOPE - the hope that one day we will meet again.

- Keep the service as short as possible. I suggest 30 to 45 minutes. There will usually be many non-Christians present. If your service is too long, they may find it boring.