



# **Acton Congregational Church**

**A Guide to**

**The Christian Funeral**

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### **A Time to Plan**

The death of a loved one, regardless of the circumstances, is a time of significant loss and grief. Because it is difficult to plan appropriately when under the emotional stress of loss, you are encouraged to consider, discuss and even plan in advance the arrangements that will be necessary at the time of your own death or the death of a loved one. This includes decisions about the Christian options of burial, cremation or donation of the body for medical purposes. This guide has been developed to help you pre-plan your own service, or to be of help to family members or friends at the time of a death.

Your pastor and church family welcome the opportunity to assist you with such planning. They will be glad to keep a record on file of your preferences, as well as any other pertinent documents such as living wills, powers of attorney and lists of those to be notified at the time of death. They can also give you the names of several professional establishments specializing in embalming, cremation and other funeral arrangements that go beyond the development of the worship service. Donations for medical purposes should be made through a hospital or medical school.

### **Because We Believe**

Christians believe in Jesus Christ whose bodily death and resurrection has made possible life everlasting. Christians view death as another step in our pilgrimage. It is the occasion when those who die in the Lord move from this world to the realm of life eternal lived with the Lord, where death, loss, mourning, crying and pain no longer exist (Rev. 21:4). Yet Christians also experience death as a time of loss when sorrow, grief and bereavement are both natural and appropriate. These two convictions guide the church in its ministry to those who have lost a loved one to death, affirming with both joy and tears the promise and hope of the Gospel.

### **Grieving in a Community of Hope**

Christians do not bear grief alone, but are sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and are to be surrounded by the support, consolation and care of the church. Your pastor and care givers have been trained to minister to you and provide support in times of loss. They welcome the privilege of ministering to you on such

occasions, and stand ready to assist you in such times of need. When death occurs, your pastor should be informed as soon as possible in order that he/she might provide appropriate consolation and support to you, your family and friends, and assist in making arrangements for a service that commemorates and gives thanks for the life of the one who has died. These plans should provide for arrangements that are simple, bear witness to resurrection hope, are centered in the witness of Christian scripture as it is read and sung, and include the larger Christian community in prayer and support.

## **Choices to Be Made**

A number of choices will need to be made beyond that of burial, cremation, and organ donation before the service can be planned.

- Will the family wish to have an opportunity to view their loved one's body? (Viewings are possible even when the deceased has made arrangements for organ donations.) Viewings can be very helpful to the grieving process that will follow, especially if the death was unexpected. A pastor can talk with you about this and assist you in your decision.
- Will the viewing be private (for family members only) or also include the larger community of friends?
- Will the body be buried, cremated or donated?
- Does the deceased have a burial plot or columbarium niche? If not, a funeral director can assist you with the purchase of a grave or a niche.
- Will the service be a funeral or memorial service? Funeral services have the casket or urn present in the service; memorial services take place after burial or cremation.
- Will the burial, scattering or inurnment be a continuation of the worship service or take place before or at an extended time after the service?
- Will there be a reception following the worship or committal service, and where will it be held—ACC's Fellowship Hall, a restaurant, banquet hall or private home?

The funeral or memorial service is ordinarily held in the church, cemetery chapel, or the funeral home. Your pastor encourages you to consider the church. This space is familiar, designed for worship and is rich with the symbols of our faith. It may be held on any day of the week, and should be planned for a time that will meet not only the needs of the family, but also enable the participation of other members of the church family.

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

**Is cremation consistent with Christian teaching?** Yes. Cremation only hastens what embalming delays: “We are dust and to dust we shall return.” (Gen. 3:19).

**What is the difference between a funeral and memorial service?** Simply put: the body of the deceased is at a funeral service whereas the deceased’s remains or no remains are at a memorial service. In either case, the church views each as an opportunity to proclaim God’s death defeating acts in Christ as we remember all that God has given us in the life of our loved one.

**Can a Christian donate their organs to others or their bodies to science?** Yes, there is nothing in our Church’s doctrine prohibiting this gift. On the contrary, the Lord enthusiastically approves the laying down of one’s life for his friends (John 15:13). He would surely welcome the sharing of organs no longer needed with those whose lives could be prolonged and saved and/or the gift of our bodies to further medical science. Check with the Department of Motor Vehicles for the process to make your decision known to others.

**Must one be a member of the Acton Congregational Church to have a funeral or memorial service at the church?** No. This ministry of the church and its pastor is open to all who profess faith in Jesus Christ, whether a member of the congregation or not.

**How soon and at what time should the service be?** Funeral services are generally held within three to seven days following death, thereby allowing appropriate time for family members and friends to gather for the service. Memorial services can be held at any time. If a funeral is to be followed by a burial that same day, the schedule of the cemetery workers dictates that the service be held in the morning or very early afternoon as cemeteries in the area do not allow a burial to begin after 3 pm. (It is possible to have a late afternoon or evening service, followed by a burial the next morning.) Otherwise, the service should be scheduled for a time that will allow for the greatest number of people to attend. Frequently, weekday services occur before or after the luncheon hour, allowing people to be away from their offices for an extended time around noon. Saturday services are often held mid to late morning, with Sunday services being held in the early afternoon.

**What fees are associated with the service?** There are fees for the use of the church building, its preparation and cleaning following the service, as well as the services of the pastors and musician/s. Your funeral home can obtain this information for you, or you may contact the church office. There are no building usage or pastoral fees for active members of the congregation as this is part of the church's ministry to its members. Honoraria are discretionary.

**Is it possible to use guest musicians?** The musical portion of the service is under the supervision of both the officiating pastor and the church's organist. We do not recommend the use of family or friends as soloists, as the emotional nature of the occasion makes singing or playing extremely difficult. This should be discussed with the pastor during service planning and a final determination made at that time. A guest organist or other instrumentalists may be used, subject to the approval of ACC's church organist.

**What about flowers?** One or two floral displays are most appropriate and may be ordered through your own florist or one of several the church can suggest to you. Because of the beauty of the sanctuary itself, as well as concerns about good stewardship, we recommend that floral displays remain modest in their size and number. Often, friends and business or professional associates will send floral arrangements. These will be displayed in appropriate places throughout the sanctuary and narthex.

**May we have a viewing at the church a day before the service or must that take place at a funeral home?** Viewing can take place in the church, either on an afternoon and/or evening before the funeral, or one or two hours before the service on the day of the funeral itself.

**Does the church provide pallbearers?** No. If a casket is to be present, pallbearers will need to be provided by the family or friends, or arranged for by the family through the funeral director.

**Who is responsible for producing the order of worship or program?** After the service has been planned with the pastor, the church can produce a worship bulletin.

tin if so desired. The draft of the order of worship is given to the family for proofing and correction. Once a final draft is approved by the family, the church will be responsible for its printing.

**Who is responsible for funeral notices or an obituary?** The family should designate someone to write an appropriate funeral notice which can be filed with the Beacon and/or the Boston Globe on a fee basis by telephone or fax. The notice should announce the death, as well as date and time of the person's funeral or memorial service. These are published daily. Larger obituaries of prominent persons are published by the newspaper at its discretion and on its own schedule, with material submitted by the family subject to the paper's editorial decisions. Notices through other papers in or beyond Greater Boston should be filed by contacting the particular paper's obituary department. Often, a funeral director will be able to assist with these contacts.

**Who provides the guest book?** The family is responsible for providing a guest book, which can be purchased through a funeral director or one of the area's fine stationery stores. This will be placed in the room during a viewing, in the narthex during the service and in the Fellowship Hall during the reception.

**May a reception follow the service?** Yes. This is an important time for worshipers to greet the family and extend their condolences. It is also a good time for people to engage in further remembrance. We suggest that if the family has favorite photographs, artwork or other important mementoes, these be displayed at the reception. The family is responsible for providing these.

**Can ACC's Fellowship Hall be used for receptions?** Yes. Please make arrangements with the Church Administrator.

**May the family designate its desire for memorial gifts?** The family may choose various organizations as the recipients of memorial donations. This should be included in the notice published in the newspaper. It may also be included in the worship program. Gifts given to ACC's Memorial Funds will be acknowledged to the donor for tax purposes and a list of those giving such remembrance gifts will be provided to the family for appropriate acknowledgment.

## **Scripture Readings for Funeral and Memorial Services**

*(This list merely offers suggestions and is not intended to be exhaustive.)*

### **Old Testament**

Job 19:23-27  
Isaiah 40:1-11, 28-31  
Isaiah 40:28-31  
Isaiah 65:17  
Psalm 23  
Psalm 46:1-5, 10-11  
Psalm 90:1-10, 12  
Psalm 121  
Psalm 130  
Psalm 139:1-12

### **Epistle Lessons**

Romans 8:14-23, 31-39  
Romans 14:7-9, 10b-12  
1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 35-38, 42-44, 50, 53-58  
2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  
Revelation 21:1-4, 22-25, 22:3-5  
Revelation 22:1-5

### **Gospels**

Matthew 5:1-12a  
Luke 23:33, 39-43  
John 11:17-27  
John 14:1-6, 25-27

### **Hymns**

How Firm a Foundation  
Our God, Our Help in Ages Past  
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy  
A Mighty Fortress is Our God  
Amazing Grace  
How Great Thou Art  
Nearer, my God, to Thee  
I Heard the voice of Jesus Say  
Just as I Am  
Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me  
Now Thank Thee All Our God  
The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want  
The King of Love My Shepherd Is  
For All the Saints Who From Their Labors Rest

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