

# **DEATH AND THE SERVICE OF WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION**

## **First Presbyterian Church, Marianna, Florida**

The session (the governing body) of the First Presbyterian Church of Marianna, Florida has prepared this statement (primarily based on the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)) with the hope and prayer that it will be of guidance, comfort and support to members, friends and visitors as they face the reality of their own deaths and the deaths of those they love.

### **DEATH IS SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION**

The *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states:

**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. 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.**

### **CHRISTIAN BELIEF CONCERNING DEATH**

In light of the above statement and our Biblical and Reformed faith, we can acknowledge certain beliefs concerning death.

#### **1. DEATH IS REAL**

We live in a culture which encourages us to deny the reality of death. As Christians, denial is impossible. In Scripture we find a frank and healthy acceptance of this aspect of our humanity. We are not expected to like or to celebrate or even to welcome death. Yet to deny its reality is to cut ourselves off from the even greater reality of God's power over death.

#### **2. DEATH IS INEVITABLE**

Death is for each one of us the inescapable conclusion of life as we know it. Once again, the Scriptures acknowledge this inevitability, yet still call us to embrace and to affirm life.

#### **3. DEATH CAUSES GRIEF**

The loss of a loved one leads to a harrowing experience of tangible pain, sharp anxiety, helplessness, guilt and anger. Grief is a normal and natural human reaction to any form of loss

and is more intense the deeper the relationship with the one who is lost. As a normal human experience, grief is something of which we need not be ashamed or feel guilty. Even with our hope as Christians we still affirm that tears are not out of place when confronted by the death of one we love. Instead of denying the reality of grief, we need to support and encourage one another in dealing with the experience. Since we are the Body of Christ, we belong to one another in the Lord. It is, therefore, in and through the church that we can have the most tangible experience of God's comfort and compassion ministering to our grief.

We would recommend to those who are grieving the books, "Good Grief" by Dr. Granger E. Westberg and "Experiencing Grief" by H. Norman Wright, as well as the statement, "Understanding and Experiencing Grief and Loss following the Death of Loved One," produced by the National Health Ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) All of these are available from the pastor.

#### **4. DEATH IS NOT THE END**

- A. With all Christians we believe that death has been conquered by God in Jesus Christ. Every New Testament book declares or assumes that Christ rose from the dead. "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" is the message not only for Easter day but for every day of the year, and is the foundation of our hope as Christian men and women.
- B. We believe that as the followers of Christ we shall share in his victory over the grave. "And God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." (I Corinthians 6:14). The fact of his resurrection is the rock upon which we build a faith that we shall be raised to a new and an everlasting life.
- C. What will the resurrected body be like? No one knows. The Apostle Paul tells us that it will not be a resurrection of the flesh but that God will give us "spiritual bodies". This seems to mean that we will be individual persons with means of expression and identification.
- D. We affirm that at death the believer goes to the presence of God, who is our eternal home. The Christian no longer inhabits a physical body. The real person is taken to the presence of God. With the Apostle Paul we affirm that not even death can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ.
- E. The hope of eternal life is based not upon our own worth, which could only bring God's displeasure and condemnation, but upon the grace and the mercy of God. As Christians, we commit into God's gracious care and keeping those who die, trusting in the good news of life beyond life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TIME OF DEATH**

The *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states:

**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 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. The session is responsible for establishing general policies concerning the observance of services on the occasion of death.**

In light of the above statement, the session shares the following comments:

### **1. FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS**

The session encourages families to make a calm appraisal of intents and desires concerning appropriate funeral arrangements before death is imminent. The form on the attached pink sheet is intended to be of assistance to you in this matter. A copy should be retained by the family in a place known to survivors. A completed copy also may be placed in a sealed envelope with your name on the outside and given to a pastor to place in a confidential file at the church until needed.

### **2. DISPOSITION OF THE BODY**

Christian methods of disposition of the body are burial, cremation or donation for medical purposes. Even where the whole body is not donated for medical purposes consideration of the use of organs is an appropriate act of Christian stewardship. In the case of cremation the ashes may be buried or scattered. Whatever method of disposition is chosen, ostentation and undue expense should be avoided.

### **3. MEMORIALS**

In lieu of flowers, it is increasingly becoming a custom to suggest that memorial contributions be made to the church or to a specific charity. This, along with remembering one's church and favorite charities in one's will, is a way of continuing the Christian stewardship that one has practiced in life.

### **4. FUNERAL OR MEMORIAL SERVICE?**

Traditionally, the burial or cremation has taken place following the service at the church. Such practice, though, was not that of the early Christians, nor that of the early American Protestants. The bringing of the body to the church was introduced by the Roman Catholic Church. The ancient practice has much to commend it. If the burial or cremation occur prior to the church service people are freer to turn their attention away from the physical remains to God, who is our refuge and strength. A "Service of Witness to the Resurrection" concluding at the

church rather than the graveside or crematorium can create a feeling far less stark and dreadfully final. Such a service, unless the family so desired, would not require the services of a funeral director. Whether the service is a funeral service, with the body or cremated remains present at the church, or a memorial service at which the body or the cremated remains are not present, the basic order of service for the “Service of Witness to the Resurrection,” held at the First Presbyterian Church remains the same.

## **A SERVICE ON THE OCCASION OF DEATH**

The *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states:

**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. Others may be invited to participate as leaders in the service at the discretion of the pastor. This service may be observed on any day. A request to observe such a service as a part of the Lord's Day service or to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a part of a service on the occasion of death requires the approval of the session.**

**This service 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 shall be closed. It may be covered with a funeral pall. The service shall be complete in itself, and any fraternal, civic, or military rites should be conducted separately. 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, a funeral home, a crematorium, or a graveside.**

In light of the above statements, the session would share the following comments:

### **1. A SERVICE OF WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION**

This title from *The Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reminds us that for Christians a service on the occasion of death is primarily one which focuses attention on the Christian hope of resurrection through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

### **2. A SERVICE OF WORSHIP TO GOD**

Central to any service on the occasion of death must be the recognition that it is God, the Creator and Sustainer of life, who is being worshipped and not the person who has died. In this service God's people witness to their faith in the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Thanksgiving is offered to God, the Creator of all, for the gift of life given to the deceased. God's promises of help and comfort to those who mourn are remembered and claimed.

### **3. AS A SERVICE OF WORSHIP IT SHOULD BE HELD IN THE CHURCH**

There are sometimes, of course, extenuating circumstances, but normally the church is the most suitable place for such a service. This is the place where faith is given birth and is nurtured, where marriage vows are made, where children are baptized and confirmed, where the Lord's Supper is celebrated and where week by week the congregation gathers to worship. It is the setting and the association of the church that helps to give an awareness of the presence of God which brings assurance, comfort and hope. It is anticipated even if the service is not held at the church that the pastor would conduct the service.

## **ELEMENTS IN A CHRISTIAN SERVICE ON THE OCCASION OF DEATH**

### **1. THE READING OF SCRIPTURE**

God's Word to our need is the strength of the Christian service on the occasion of death. God speaks to our grief his healing word of love and assurance.

Old Testament readings particularly appropriate for such a service include: Psalms 23; 27; 46; 90; 91; 103; 121; 130; 139; Job 19:23-27; Isaiah 25:6-9; 26:1-4,19; 40:1-11, 27-31; 43:1-3a, 18-19, 25; 55:1-3;6-13; 65:17-25.

New Testament readings particularly appropriate for such a service include: Luke 23:33, 39-43; John 11:17-27; 14:1-6 25-27; Romans 6:3-9; 8:28-39; I Corinthians 13 and 15; II Corinthians 4:16-5: 1; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Peter 1:3-9; Revelation 7:9-17; 21:1-4; 22:3-5.

### **2. PRAYERS**

Prayers shall be offered:

giving thanks to God

- for life in Jesus Christ and the promise of the gospel, for the life of the one who has died,
- for the comfort of the Holy Spirit,
- for the community of faith;

making intercessions

- for family members and loved ones who grieve,
- for those who minister to and support the bereaved,
- for all who suffer loss;

lifting supplications

- for faith and grace for all who are present;

concluding with everyone praying together the Lord's Prayer.

### 3. AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

It is appropriate at such a service that the congregation affirm again its faith using the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds, or other more recent confessions of faith. On such occasions the familiar words of the creeds, "the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" take on a new meaning.

### 4. THE SINGING OF HYMNS

There is nothing which gives such a service its intended note of faith and victory as the united voices of Christians singing some of the great hymns which affirm God's power over death, a belief in the resurrection to life everlasting, and the assurance of the communion of saints. Below is a list of appropriate hymns for a service at the time of death from *The Presbyterian Hymnal*. This list is intended to be helpful to those planning such services and not be complete. The pastor and church organist will be happy to discuss other favorite hymns that a family would like included in the service.

A Mighty Fortress is our God  
For All the Saints  
How Firm a Foundation  
Christ the Lord is Risen Today  
Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah  
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty  
Crown Him With Many Crowns  
The Lord's My Shepherd  
The Church's One Foundation  
Eternal Father, Strong to Save  
When We Are Living  
Great is Thy Faithfulness  
I Danced in the Morning  
Baptized in Water  
Christ is Alive  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Give Thanks  
Thine is the Glory  
O Jesus, I have Promised  
God of Our Life  
I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art  
For the Beauty of the Earth  
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above  
Here, O My Lord, I See Thee

Our God, Our Help in Ages Past  
Now Thank We All our God  
Near to the Heart of God  
The Church's One Foundation  
Abide With Me  
Give Thanks for Life  
Amazing Grace  
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee  
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling  
Christ is Alive  
How Great Thou Art  
Lift High the Cross  
We Know that Christ is Raised  
To God be the Glory  
Christ is Risen! Shout Hosanna  
Jesus Christ is Risen Today  
Morning Has Broken  
O for a Closer Walk with God  
Lead on, O King Eternal  
Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven  
If Thou but Suffer God to Guide Thee  
God of Grace and God of Glory  
Lord, Speak to Me

## **5. ORGAN MUSIC, SOLOS AND ANTHEMS**

All music used during such a service including solos, anthems and organ music should be selected in consultation with the church organist and should reflect the triumphant good news of God's victory over death in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## **6. THE ORDER OF SERVICE**

The following order of worship is generally used for services on the occasion of death which are held at the church. This same basic order is used whether these are funeral services with the body or cremated remains present, or memorial services when the body or cremated remains are not present.

- Organ Prelude
- Call to Worship
- Prayer of Adoration
- Hymn
- Affirmation of Faith
- Gloria Patri
- Old Testament Lessons
- Prayer of Thanksgiving
- Hymn/Organ Interlude/ Solo/ Anthem
- New Testament Lessons
- Prayer of Intercession
- The Lord's Prayer
- Hymn
- The Charge and Benediction
- Organ Postlude

If the service at the church is followed by a Service of Committal at the graveside or at the columbarium it generally will take the following order:

- Scripture Sentences
- Prayer
- Act of Committal
- Prayer
- The Charge and Benediction

If the service at the time of death is held only at the graveside it generally will take the following order:

- Call to Worship
- Prayer of Adoration
- Scripture Readings
- Prayer of Thanksgiving
- Act of Committal
- Prayers of Intercession
- The Lord's Prayer
- The Charge and Benediction

## **CHURCH POLICIES CONCERNING SERVICES ON THE OCCASION OF DEATH**

1. The pastor, or the church office (526-2430), should be contacted at the time of a death in order to assist the family in making the arrangements for a service. No service should be scheduled before checking the availability of the church and the pastor or guest minister to conduct the service, and someone to play the organ. If the pastor is not available at the time of death these arrangements should be discussed with the church secretary.
2. It is anticipated that the pastor will conduct a service at the time of a death, whether this is held at the church, the funeral home or at the graveside.  
If the family should request another minister to participate in the service this should be made known to the pastor, so that he may extend an invitation and work out the details of the service with the other minister.  
If the family would like for family members or friends to speak as part of the service this should be made known to the pastor in the planning of the service so that such words of tribute might be included in the service at the appropriate place.
3. If the pastor is not available to take the service, the church office should be contacted to make arrangements for another minister to conduct the service.
4. It is anticipated that the church organist will play for all services at the time of death which are held at the church. The church organist requests a minimum fee of \$100.00 for playing for funeral and memorial services at the church. If this person is not available the church, through the chairperson of the Worship and Music Committee, will make arrangements for someone to play.
5. If a guest soloist is requested by the family, that person must consult with the church organist regarding the selection of music and any rehearsal schedule, when the service is to be held at the church.
6. The adult choir, as a volunteer group, ordinarily will not be available to sing at funeral or memorial services at the church.
7. The pastor does not charge any fee for his leadership in funeral or memorial services, any gifts of appreciation are left to the discretion of the family.
8. The person who is conducting the service will consult with the family regarding special requests for elements to be included in the service but shall have final authority for determining the actual content of the service.
9. The church provides a bulletin for each service held at the First Presbyterian Church. This includes brief information concerning the deceased as well as the order of service. Sample copies of such bulletins are available from the pastor.



10. Any audio or video recordings of services at the First Presbyterian Church are the responsibility of the family. The person leading the service should be notified if such recordings are to be made.
11. If the body is brought to the church, the casket shall remain closed.
12. The church's funeral pall is available for use in any service held in the church. Its use is encouraged, though the family may elect to use a floral casket spray, or the American flag instead. The church pall may also be used at the funeral home and at the graveside provided arrangements have been made with the Funeral Home for its safe return to the church.
13. The family will be responsible for any arrangements on the flower stands. If the service takes place near a Sunday, in consultation with the church secretary and/or the chairperson of the Worship and Music Committee, the regular Sunday flowers may be used, or the flowers from the funeral or memorial service may be left for the service on the following Sunday.
14. The display of floral arrangements in the church beyond the casket spray must be done in such a way as not to block aisles or access to the pulpit, organ and any other musical instruments to be used during the service.
15. If so desired one photograph of the deceased may be placed in the front of the church. Other photographs may be placed in the narthex or the fellowship hall.
18. The church, through the Elder of the Month, will provide a sufficient number of ushers for the service. The pallbearers, though, are the responsibility of the family.
17. Any fraternal, civic or military rites shall be held at a time and place other than that of the worship service at the church.
18. Use of the church's Columbarium Niches for the placing of cremated remains is subject to the Official Policy Statement Columbarium Niches of the First Presbyterian Church, Marianna, Florida. A copy of this statement is available from the pastor, or from the church office.
19. Any memorials given to the church shall be received and used according to the Gifts and Memorials Policy of the First Presbyterian Church, Marianna. A copy of this policy is available from the pastor, or from the church office.
20. The Stewardship Committee of the Session is available to consult with the family regarding the use to be made of memorials given to the church, as well as to advise those who are planning to remember the church in their wills.

21. The church parlor and fellowship hall may be used by the family as gathering places before and/or after the Service of Worship. They may also be used as places to greet friends before and/or after the service.
22. If so desired by the family, the church will make available to the family a meal on the day of the service. This may be held at the church, at the home, or at some other location dependent upon the preference of the family. Such meals are coordinated through the Hospitality Committee of the Evangelism and Fellowship Committee.
23. All participants in the life of the First Presbyterian Church are encouraged to discuss with their families their wishes and preferences regarding details and arrangements for a service on the occasion of death and the disposition of the body using the attached pink form. A copy should be retained by the family. A copy of the form may be placed in a sealed envelope with your name on the outside and given to church office staff to place in a confidential file at the church. This form should be updated as needed. Two copies of the form are attached. Additional forms may be obtained from the church office.

**PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TIME OF DEATH**  
**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**MARIANNA, FLORIDA**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Individuals are encouraged to complete this form and to discuss its contents with members of their family. This information should be updated any time your personal situation or feelings on any of these matters change. If you so desire, a copy may be placed in a sealed envelope with your name on the outside and given to the pastor to place in a confidential file at the church.

Do you prefer:

A funeral service \_\_\_\_\_(with body or cremated remains present) or a memorial service\_\_\_\_\_

Do you prefer a service held:

In the church \_\_\_\_\_ At the funeral home \_\_\_\_\_ At the graveside only \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_ please specify \_\_\_\_\_

What is your preference for the disposition of your mortal body at the time of death?

Burial \_\_\_\_\_ Cremation \_\_\_\_\_ Donation to Medical Science \_\_\_\_\_

Have you willed your body or any organs to medical science?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, where is that document located? \_\_\_\_\_

If your body is to be buried, would you prefer:

A committal service first, followed by a memorial service? \_\_\_\_\_

A funeral service, followed by a committal service? \_\_\_\_\_

If your body is to be cremated, would you prefer:

A service at the church with the body present prior to cremation? \_\_\_\_\_

A memorial service at the church with your cremated remains present? \_\_\_\_\_

A memorial service at the church without your cremated remains present? \_\_\_\_\_

If your body is to be cremated, what arrangements would you prefer for the disposition of your cremated remains?

Burial \_\_\_\_\_ scattering \_\_\_\_\_

(where) \_\_\_\_\_

Interment in the Church's Columbarium \_\_\_\_\_

disposal by funeral home \_\_\_\_\_

disposal by family at a later date \_\_\_\_\_

Would you desire any service in conjunction with the disposition of your cremated remains?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what type of service would you want? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you know of any circumstances which might alter these preferences? If so, what are they?

Do you have any special requests as far as your funeral or memorial service is concerned?

Scriptures you would like used \_\_\_\_\_

Hymns you would like sung \_\_\_\_\_

Special Music you would like used \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Would you want the church pall be used on your casket? \_\_\_\_\_

Preference in funeral director (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

Would you prefer friends to call:

At your home? \_\_\_\_\_ At the funeral home? \_\_\_\_\_

At the church? \_\_\_\_\_ before the service? \_\_\_\_\_ after the service? \_\_\_\_\_

Location of family burial plot (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

If your preference is for memorial gifts, to what cause should they be designated?

The First Presbyterian Church? \_\_\_\_\_

The First Presbyterian Church for use for (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

The 1835 Endowment Fund of the First Presbyterian Church? \_\_\_\_\_

A specific charity? \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify charity) \_\_\_\_\_

Donor's choice \_\_\_\_\_

Have you remembered the First Presbyterian Church in your will? \_\_\_\_\_

What assistance from the congregation would your family probably need or appreciate?

Where are the following items located?

Vital statistics about your life? \_\_\_\_\_

List of relatives and friends to be contacted? \_\_\_\_\_

The deed to any cemetery plot or cremation niche? \_\_\_\_\_

Your will and other important papers? \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER COMMENTS (please use the space below, or a separate sheet of paper)