

Bethlehem Lutheran Church's Funeral Policy Handbook



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“I am the resurrection and the life.” – John 11:25

Planning now for your funeral is important. We make plans for many things in life. Some we are never able to do. Yet death and burial are inevitable, and thus it is crucial that we also plan for it. Planning does not hasten the event.

Funeral pre-planning is necessary, first of all, as a means to let your wishes be known to all concerned. Secondly, pre-planning your funeral enables you to give expression to your faith through choosing and ordering what is to take place. Also, it eases the burden on your loved ones by eliminating the pressure of decision-making, particularly the need of trying to do things “the way you would have wished.” Finally, pre-planning will give you a certain amount of peace, knowing that your affairs are in order.

If at all possible, discuss these plans with your loved ones. Allow them to participate in the planning and express their thoughts. This brings the subject out into the open and provides loved ones with an opportunity to openly share their love and sorrow--best shared now, rather than after a death occurs.

Please bear in mind that the more complex and complete your plans become, the more tentative they must be. The events surrounding your death, or events that may occur between now and the time of your death, may necessitate changes. Therefore, from time to time, every several years, the plans in this booklet may need to be updated.

This handbook should answer many of your questions about the planning of a funeral/memorial service and what ways, we as the church, hope to serve you in this time. We are more than happy to visit with you about your questions, and help you as you make plans. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to call the church office at 319-266-3541.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Amy Eisenmann

Table of Contents

Purpose of Funeral and Memorial Services... 4

Types of Worship Services... 4

Bulletins... 5

Scripture... 5

Memories and Eulogies... 6

Homilies... 6

Music... 6

Holy Communion... 6

Visitation... 6

Prayer Service ... 7

Flowers... 7

Memorial Table... 7

Military Honors... 7

Social & Fraternal Societies... 7

Video and Photography... 7

Receiving Guests & Guestbook... 7

Family Reception Area... 8

Gift Designation & Memorials... 8

Receptions... 8

Fees & Honorariums... 8

Final Arrangements... 9

Key Documents to Have in Place ... 10

Grief Resources... 10

Funeral Planning Worksheet... 11-12

Purpose of Funeral and Memorial Services

In death, grief and loss are real and not to be minimized. We as a congregation of the people of God desire to walk with our brothers and sisters in times of sorrow and are saddened by loss. Simultaneously, we as the People of God confess and are given hope in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting with Jesus Christ.

While loved ones will be remembered in this service, they will be remembered as children of God, and most importantly we will remember and celebrate what Jesus Christ did for them and for us. Therefore, this service is worship to God who gives us life, forgiveness, and the promise of eternity.

Types of Services

Funeral Service: A funeral service is when remains are going to be present in casket or as ashes in an urn and are generally held within several weeks of the death.

Memorial Service: A memorial service is conducted when no remains are present. This type of service is preferable when remains are unavailable or the service is celebrated a significant time after the death.

Prayer Service: This service typically happens the evening before a funeral and frequently happens either at the funeral home or at the church. It is a way for people to share memories and have a brief time of prayer together for those who might not be able to make it to a funeral/memorial service during the daytime. Prayer services are sometimes held as a way to end an evening visitation.

Inurnment: This is a brief service with readings and prayers that commit ashes to a final resting place. This can be done any time after the death.

Graveside Committal: This is a brief service with readings and prayers committing a body in casket or urn to the ground. Committal generally follows right after the funeral service.

Visitation: A visitation is a not a worship service. It is a time when the body is available for viewing. Participants can pay final respects to the deceased and offer condolences to the family.

Bulletins

The Bethlehem staff will produce your bulletins. The pastor will meet with you to discuss the service before bulletins are printed.

Scripture

There are usually 2-3 readings during the service. A psalm may be read or sung in unison. Below are some suggested texts that are common to funeral/memorial services.

Old Testament:

Genesis 1:26-28
Genesis 2:15-24
Genesis 50:15-21
Isaiah 40:1-11
Isaiah 40:27-31
Isaiah 42:5-17
Ezekiel 34:11-16
Job 19:23-27
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Zechariah 8:1-8

Gospels

Matthew 11:25-30
Matthew 25:1-13
Luke 7:11-17
Luke 12:35-40
Luke 23:32-43
John 5:24-29
John 10:7-16
John 11:21-27
John 14:1-6

Psalms

Psalm 16:1,5-11
Psalm 23
Psalm 34:1-8
Psalm 42:1-7
Psalm 46:1-7
Psalm 90
Psalm 103:1-5, 10-18
Psalm 121
Psalm 130
Psalm 143

Other Epistle Readings:

Romans 5:1-11
Romans 5:17-21
Romans 8:31-35, 37-39
1 Corinthians 15:12-26
Ephesians 3:14-21
Philippians 2:5-11
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Hebrews 11:32-12:2
1 Peter 1:3-9
1 John 4:7-21
Revelation 7:9-17
Revelation 21:2-7

Provision for readings other than from the Scriptures are not included in the funeral service without prior approval of the pastoral staff. These are perhaps best shared in family gatherings, at the prayer service (if you are having one) or at the reception. Consult with the pastor if you have questions.

Memories and Eulogies

Lutheran worship liturgies for the burial of the dead are complete without eulogies or memories being shared during worship. Due to the difficulty of the day, we highly encourage families to make time to share memories and stories outside of the worship service. On the rare occasion when a eulogy is requested, the eulogist is welcome to work with the pastor regarding the nature of the message and is encouraged to keep their eulogy to 5 minutes or less.

Homilies

A brief homily will be offered at the worship service by our current pastor. If a guest preacher is desired, this must be approved and arranged with the Bethlehem staff. The homily will be a time to remember our loved one and to proclaim boldly the good news of the gospel—there is everlasting life in Jesus Christ. A copy of the homily is made available to the family after the service.

Music

The Bethlehem musical staff or an appointed substitute will play for the service. Any outside musicians or vocalists need to consult with the musical staff and pastor to discuss the music and the reverential nature of the service. This is a worship service and worship music is highly encouraged. If your loved one had a favorite secular song that you would like in the service, prior approval must be given to use the song during the worship service. Please feel free to suggest favorite hymns to the pastor for use in the service.

Holy Communion

The sacrament of Holy Communion was given by Christ for the sake of creating and sustaining faith in His church. We believe that in the sacrament Christ is present to us. He comes to us, meeting us in our grief, sorrow, sin, and suffering. Holy Communion gives us a foretaste of the feast to come in the kingdom of God. Holy Communion is not a requirement of the funeral service, but can be a meaningful part of worship for those still on their earthly journey. Please arrange with the pastor if you would like Holy Communion to be part of this funeral/memorial service. The Altar Guild will make sure that the table is set and prepared for the service.

Visitation

If the family chooses, Bethlehem can facilitate a visitation for the family prior to the funeral. We suggest that the visitation be held the day of the funeral and last no more than two hours. Often at Bethlehem, families choose to have the visitation before the service and the reception immediately following the funeral or memorial service.

Prayer Service

If the family chooses, Bethlehem's pastor can facilitate a prayer service to be held at the funeral home or at the church the evening before the funeral. This may allow for family members who are unable to attend the funeral the following day (due to work or other conflicts) a chance to grieve and spend time together.

Flowers

Flowers can be an important image and symbol of the hoped-for promise of resurrection. If flowers are sent, they will be arranged in the sanctuary and displayed in the narthex.

Memorial Table

It is absolutely appropriate to have a memorial table in the narthex for people to view during the reception. Families are welcomed and encouraged to place family photos, artwork, display of hobbies and similar items. If a tv/dvd player are needed, please notify the church staff prior to the day of the service.

Military Honors

If there is a graveside committal as part of the service, military honors are most appropriate at the graveside following the rite of committal. If a committal is not scheduled, provision may be made for military honors to be done at the conclusion of the worship service outside the church.

Social & Fraternal Societies

The worship service is meant to give glory to God and comfort to the bereaved. The worship service is not an occasion to support, augment or complement non-church organizations and rituals. Therefore, no social/fraternal society rituals will be included in the service in the sanctuary of the church or at the graveside committal. Once the worship services have concluded the family may observe social and fraternal society rites as they deem appropriate.

Video Recording/Photograph

The service may be recorded discretely from the rear of the sanctuary. Our technology staff will gladly help with this. We ask that no flash photography occur during the funeral/memorial service.

Receiving Guests & Guestbook

The funeral home will provide a guestbook for the funeral. If you are not working with a funeral home, and would prefer to have a guestbook, this will need to be provided by the family. The family may choose to receive guests formally or informally after the service. We will move the family to the narthex area so that guests may partake in the reception and greet the family. Due to the emotional nature of the day, we highly encourage families to greet guests informally during the visitation and reception.

Family Reception Area

The Bethlehem Staff recognize that funerals are often exhausting emotionally for the family. For this reason, we will set up the library as a receiving area for the family to take a break from greeting guests. The Family Reception area will have a coffee and tea maker, cups, lids, and tissues. If you need anything else, or need additional items in the family reception area, please notify church office staff.

Gift Designations & Memorials

In response to the goodness of God and in gratitude for the life of the deceased, you may choose to designate financial contributions be made in honor of the deceased. This often happens in lieu of flowers. At Bethlehem, we encourage memorials. Common choices are:

- Bethlehem's Unified Fund: This fund covers our day to day operating and ministry expenses.
- Bethlehem's Memorial Fund: A fund that allows the church to use funds for a specific, designated purpose at the family's request (examples: current capital campaigns, etc).
- Bethlehem's Endowment Fund: A fund that supports the work of organizations throughout our community (ie. Northeast Iowa Food Bank, Love INC, etc)

Receptions

We feel a time to gather with family and friends for comfort and support is important. Church volunteers provide food if desired. There are multiple options for meals available, including:

Cost of Groceries-Open-face Sandwiches, Salads, Chips, and Cake
Donation Accepted-Cake/Bars/Cookies and Coffee Only

Coffee, Lemonade and Water are served with each style of meal. Families are charged for the estimated number given to serve (amount of food prepared/purchased), not the number served. Families are invited to take the remaining food with them. If a family chooses not to take the remaining food with them, it will be used for other purposes as those serving the meal see fit. The reception will be held in the Fellowship Hall. All will be invited to participate after the worship service.

Fees & Honorarium

The staff and community of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, called by Christ to comfort those who mourn, plan and implement the funeral service/memorial service for your loved one. There is no fee for these services. You may, however, gift the pastor, organist/musician, custodian, an honorarium if desired. Suggested honorariums are \$125 per musician, \$100 for custodian, and \$175 for pastor.

Final Arrangements

In addition to your funeral service, it is helpful to make arrangements ahead of time regarding care of your body and your final resting place. Below are terms that will help you think through these decisions. Medical decisions (organ donation, autopsy, etc.) should be noted in your Living Will.

Organ Donation: All individuals can indicate their intent to donate (people under the age of 18 must have the consent of a parent or legal guardian). Medical suitability for donation is determined at the time of death. You may choose what can be donated and for what purpose. The common purposes are for transplants, education and research. The following can be donated:

- Organs: heart, kidneys, pancreas, lungs, liver, and intestine
- Tissue: cornea, skin, heart valves, bone, blood vessels, and connective tissue
- Bone marrow/stem cells, umbilical cord blood, peripheral blood stem cells

Donation of Body for Research: If you would like to donate your whole body for research, this should be arranged prior to your death. Many organizations require registration on file prior to death for the body to be received as a donation. Once the donation has been made and research conducted, ashes from the body are returned to the family. Generally this takes four to six weeks.

Autopsy: Unless legally required, you have the option to choose whether or not to have an autopsy on your body. The two most common choices are:

- No Autopsy, unless legally required
- Yes, if it will benefit medical research

You can also name a person who will make this decision after your death. This can be important if there are questions surrounding the circumstance of your death.

Embalming: Embalming is the art and science of temporarily preserving human remains to forestall decomposition and to make them suitable for display at a funeral. The three goals of embalming are thus presentation, sanitization and presentation of dead body to achieve this effect. If you are being buried in a grave plot, most states require embalming. This process must be coordinated with a funeral home. Please know that the church is happy to accompany you as you talk with the funeral home. This can often be overwhelming and many find it comforting to have pastoral presence.

Cremation: Cremation is the incinerating of a body. The remains, known as cremains, are in the form of ashes.

Key Documents to Have Discussed and Have in Place:

- **Will** - A will is simply a set of instructions on how to distribute your assets to loved ones and charities upon your death. Be aware, however, that a will is subordinate to any beneficiary designations you have made on investment and retirement accounts.
- **Durable Power of Attorney** - You name another person to act on your behalf, with limited or broad powers as you see fit. A "durable power" lets someone act on your behalf if you are disabled and terminates upon your death.
- **Health Care Power of Attorney** - This document authorizes someone to make medical decisions on your behalf if you are unable to.
- **Living Will** - This document lays out your wishes regarding the use of life sustaining measures in the event of terminal illness. It's best used in tandem with a health care power of attorney since a living will alone doesn't give anyone authority to speak for you.

If you have questions about these documents or would like further pastoral conversation, please feel free to contact the church office at 701-599-2081 and schedule a time to meet with the pastor.

Grief Resources

After a death, there is a variety of emotions ranging from anger, to shock, to deep sadness. All these emotions are normal. The grief process is not one that can be moved through in a day. We are with you as you journey through your grief during the days after, the months later and the years to come. We encourage you to take advantage of the care ministries offered in our faith family.

Visitation Ministry: It can be helpful to talk and pray with others when you are grieving. Whether you would like to receive a visit from the pastor, or from a lay visitor, we invite you to call the church office and arrange a visit.

Prayer Shawls: These handmade shawls are tied with love and serve as a tangible reminder that God is with us, even in the midst of difficult times. Email Pastor Amy at pastoramy@bethlehemcf.net if you would like to receive a Prayer Shawl. Prayer Shawls are available for children and adults.

Quiet Christmas Service: The holiday season, especially around Christmas, can be difficult days for the bereaved. While the world is celebrating, we are often aching. We gather the weekend before Christmas for a service of remembrance, reflection and honoring. A time to be quiet, and gather together at the table for communion.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, IA
FUNERAL PLANNING WORKSHEET

Guide for the Christian Funeral of _____
First, Middle (maiden) Last

Date(s) completed/ revised: _____

This worksheet may be used by a bereaved family in the midst of funeral planning; or by individuals anticipating an impending death; or to express one's personal wishes for your own funeral. This worksheet may be revised at any time.

TO PLAN THE FUNERAL OF ANOTHER

In the event of a death, call the church before making any arrangements. Call the office directly at 319-266-3541. If the office is closed, you will be referred to a number to reach the pastor.

TO EXPRESS WISHES FOR YOUR FUNERAL

You may choose to file this worksheet with the church. This information will be kept in a confidential file available to the pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Also, after you complete the worksheet consider telling someone you trust about it. You may wish to discuss what you have written to be certain that it is clear. Consider providing copies for your family and to file with your will. Or simply give them a note that says, "As we have discussed, I have recorded my desires regarding my death and burial. I keep this information in the following place: _____ (i.e.: on file at the church; with my will) At the time of my death, I ask that you use this information to the extent possible. With gratitude," Then sign, date, and send the note.

I understand that the information and instructions provided here are for the guidance of my church, my family, and my friends in making arrangements necessary at the time of my death. Although this information is being left for safekeeping, it is not legally binding or enforceable. I understand that this worksheet does not make the church obligated or responsible for the execution of these instructions.

Signature

Date

Please fill-out as much as this worksheet as possible. Check the options that you desire. If changes are made on to this sheet, please initial changes.

Care of the Body

Please make sure to complete other legal documents re: these decisions

- Donate organs
- as transplants
- for research
- for education

Specific Areas to Be Donated: _____

- Donate body for research/teaching
- with ashes returned

Autopsy

- none unless legally required
- if it will benefit medical research
- decision to be made by: _____

Embalm body

Cremate body

- after visitation or service
- before visitation or service

Bury body

Other: _____

(might include: burial at sea, ashes spread, above ground interment, etc.)

Type of Worship Service

- Funeral with Coffin/urn present
- Memorial Service without remains
- Inurnment
- Graveside Commitment
- Graveside Only

Expressions of Sympathy

- Flowers/Live plants
- Other: _____

Memorials

Memorial gifts might be used to further support these ministries and organizations:

- Bethlehem Unified Fund
- Bethlehem Memorial Fund
- Bethlehem Endowment Fund
- Other: _____

Funeral Service Location

- church
- funeral home
- cemetery chapel
- cemetery (no funeral, a graveside service only)
- other: _____

Time

- morning
- afternoon
- evening

Remains present

- Yes
- No

Holy Communion Celebrated

- Yes
- No

Favorite Biblical theme or image: _____

Biblical readings:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Congregational hymns

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Other Music (solos, prelude, postlude, etc)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Final Arrangements

_____ I have made arrangements for my burial.

Name of cemetery _____

Location of cemetery _____

Contact person, phone _____

Name of lot or crypt holder _____

Easement or deed number _____

Legal description of graves or crypts as shown on easement or deed

_____ I am a lot holder and have made arrangements with the cemetery to assign graves to specific individuals. These arrangements are:

Grave number Assigned to Relationship

I do not have arrangements for my burial. I suggest the following arrangements.

_____ I have arrangements for a memorial marker with the following company:

The arrangements are: _____

_____ I do not have arrangements for a memorial marker.

You may wish to suggest a particular symbol or text. I would prefer:

Additional Comments: