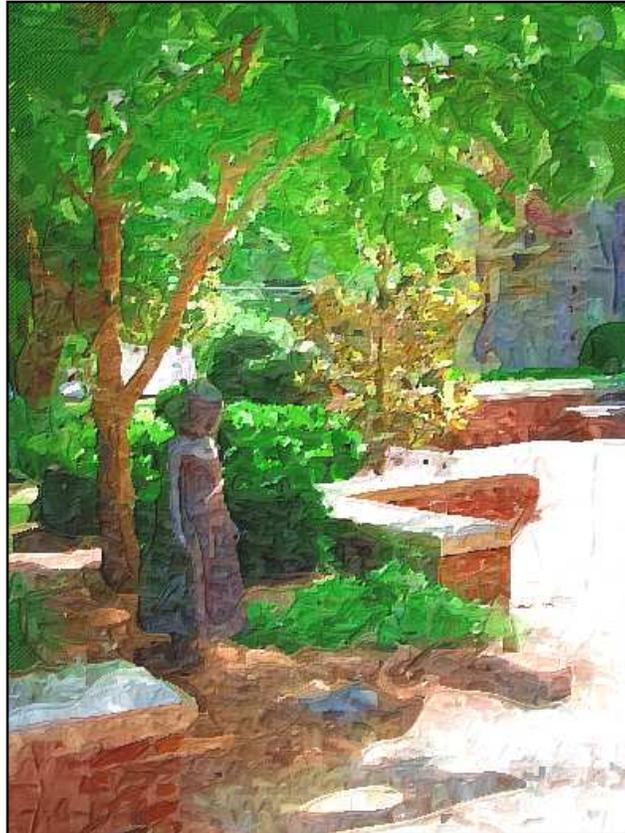


Considering Death with a Heart for Life:
A brochure to help plan for death



First Presbyterian Church
Wilson, North Carolina

Understanding Death

You are bold. You are bold just in choosing to read this pamphlet. You are bold because most folks avoid discussions about death. Why? For all the reasons you can name.

Death is almost always hard. Death is almost always sad. Occasionally, death is particularly tragic. Even simple conversations can be difficult, reminding us of past losses from which we have not quite recovered. Finally, talking about death reminds us of our own mortality. For these reasons and probably more, most people will shy away from a discussion on the topic and will avoid addressing it.

Death, though, is inevitable, and as Christians, we understand the reality of it. We know it is part of life – a hard part, but a part of life nonetheless. In scripture we recognize that people of faith are free to mourn in times of loss. We see that it is not necessary to cry, but it is appropriate to do so. We read that Jesus himself cried at the death of a close friend. We see grief throughout the Bible and particularly notice its poignancy in Psalms. There we see what we know - that grief can be immediate or delayed, brief or long-lasting.

And yet, even as faith allows us to mourn, it also gives us cause to rejoice, for death is not the final event in human existence. The God who created the heaven and the earth, the God who created each of us, continues to care for us. At the very heart of our faith is the conviction that even beyond death, God gives us life. This confidence comes by the grace of God through faith. This is why we can join in conversations about death without fear or anxiety.

When we consider what happens at death or what happens beyond death, we learn to trust that which we cannot see. When we hold a flower and remember the seed, we can know something of the miracle of new life. We know the tiny seed has given life to a delicate flower. We see the subtle shades of color and graceful shape and can comprehend the connection with the seed planted; they are the same, yet they are different. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. We believe that the human personality persists; we are the same person after death, yet we are also radically different.

Paul says, “Lo, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” He goes on. “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.” When we consider the manner of the deposition of our remains, we learn to trust in a future beyond our bodily existence. We can choose to have the body buried, cremated, or donated to science - all Christian ways of “planting the seed” so to speak. From a Christian perspective, we know that whatever is sown is perishable. We can, though, commit those remains to the earth in good faith because of the resurrection. We know, in the words of the Psalmist, that the Lord keeps our “going out and our coming in from this time on and forevermore.”

Finally, when we consider arrangements for funerals or memorial services, we remember that the focus of all Christian gatherings is God. So when we consider even our own funeral service in advance, we think not of ourselves, but of God. How might the service glorify God? One of the greatest gifts we can share at death is our witness to the steadfast love of the God we know in Christ, that one love that can sustain and support those we leave behind. We read in Paul’s letter to the Romans that nothing in life can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus – not even death. “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” This gives us cause to rejoice.

Considerations Prior to Death

Because death is not to be feared, it is appropriate and faithful to make plans concerning death in advance and review them occasionally. Such decisions can provide comfort, giving us a voice in how we want our final decisions made. These decisions are also a final gift we can give those we love and who follow us. It relieves them of difficult decisions during a painful time. Our willingness to leave written instructions is a sign of maturity, a selfless love and an abiding faith. Consider this checklist of some details associated with death.

Consult an attorney. Execute a "Durable Power of Attorney," a current will, a "living will," and a health care surrogate form. Talk about how to preserve financial assets should you become incapacitated. Learn about how to handle your assets after death, and about executing the necessary documents. Consider sharing a portion of your estate for the work of the church.

Put documents in safe place. Identify a close friend or family member who lives in the city where your important papers are kept and allow these trusted individuals access to them. Give copies of your living will to your doctor and family members.

Decide about cremation or burial. Both are accepted forms of committal for Presbyterians. Cremation offers many advantages in term of cost and ease of arrangement, but many find burial to be more emotionally satisfying. This is a personal decision which ultimately is made by the family or the person given legal authority to make final arrangements; however the desire of the deceased is almost always honored if this has been clearly expressed. (If cremation is chosen, realize that North Carolina law prohibits cremation until at least twenty-four hours after death occurs.)

Identify a funeral director, burial or cremation society representative. Making decisions and pre-arranging services are a big help, especially if family lives some distance away. Cost for cremations are about \$1,000 and up, depending upon services. Burial cost begin at about \$3,000 and can go much higher, depending upon additional services such as the cost of a casket, vault, etc. Ask a pastor, an elder or trusted friend to go with you to make these decisions. Always have someone you trust with you when you are making emotional decisions.

Meet with the pastor of your church. Fill out the form "Expression of Wishes for Procedures at the Time of Death." Share a copy with your family and make a copy available for the church to file.

Sit down with family members and the pastor to discuss your desires and your thoughts about death. If your children or friends do not know of your plans, then unnecessary expenses, delays and consultations may be required to conclude business and personal affairs.

Having carefully made plans and shared your plans, **get on with life!** Enjoy each day to the fullest and giving thanks to God for the friendships and activities which bring meaning to life.

The Role of the Church (from Book of Order, W-4.10001 and W-4.10002)

Christians and Death

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.

Planning Arrangements

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.

Support of First Presbyterian

We believe it is important for Christians to care and support each other in times of grief. At First Presbyterian, we seek to reach out to the bereaved in a variety of ways.

Presbyterian Women Support

Around the time of death, the women of the church will work with you to coordinate a meal. This may be for your immediate family or for your extended family in connection with a funeral service. In special circumstances, they can help coordinate small receptions around the funeral service.

Congregational Care Support

The deacons of the church often reach out to members and friends in moments of sickness and pain. Meals following a hospitalization, notes in moments of loss, visits in times of change are some ways you might experience the care of this group.

Pastoral Care

The pastoral staff at First Presbyterian is committed not just to assist in planning the service, but in helping the family with grief, considering difficult decisions or thinking through matters of theology and faith.

First Presbyterian Church Funeral Policy

The central doctrine of the Christian faith is resurrection. As servants of the resurrected Christ, the members and staff of First Presbyterian Church seek to provide loving care for the family members in times of death. While funerals and memorial services are traditionally opportunities for shared grief, in the Reformed Tradition these services are an expression of Christian compassion and demonstrate our common faith in resurrection. Therefore, the focus of every service is on God.

- Arrangements for services are made through the ministers. The pastor is in charge of and directs all services held at First Presbyterian. If a family wishes to invite others to assist in the service, they need to tell the pastor who, in turn, can extend the invitation to the guest. The pastor does not expect honorariums for conducting services.
- All music is under the direction of the Director of Music, in conversation with the pastor. The family may work with the pastor and director of music in the selection of hymns.
- First Presbyterian requires no charge for funeral services or for any use of church facility for a funeral. A family may make a contribution to the church, and it will be received with appreciation.
- Photographs, pictures or picture displays of the deceased are to be placed in Clark Hall or the Dudley Room or other areas of reception, rather than the sanctuary.
- If desired, the family may order flowers for the service. Floral arrangements are limited to one arrangement (or two identical arrangements) by the chancel steps. Flower arrangements which come as gifts may be sent to the family's home or cemetery.
- The casket will be closed before the service begins. The church offers silk palls for covering a casket or urn. Paraments for the service are white. An American flag may be used when appropriate. All paraments, including palls, remain in the sanctuary.
- Photographing or videotaping are prohibited during the service. If requested, families may arrange for a video tape in the balcony. Audio tapes are available if prior arrangements are made with the church office.
- The church will provide a printed order of service.
- The funeral guild will assist in funerals and memorial services.

Types of services

A. *Committal and/or burial followed by memorial service*

The family meets at the graveside for a private burial, then proceeds to the church for a memorial service. This service allows the family to remain at the church following the service to greet visitors.

B. *Service followed by graveside service*

This is the most traditional type service. The family meets in the pastor's office or parlor prior to service then walks into the sanctuary together. If there is a casket, it is present. Following the service, the pastor leads the family out the center aisle and forms a graveside processional outside by the narthex entrance to the sanctuary.

C. *Memorial service with committal and/or burial at another time*

The same service as noted above, except instead of proceeding to graveside, the family might stay to greet visitors. This is often used when burial or scattering of remains is done privately by the pastor or on another day in another city.

Tone and Order of Service

Funerals in the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition are worship services. Therefore, like all worship services, the focus is on God and the grace God provides. While grief is normal and present, the tone reflects the joy of God's gift of the deceased life and God's gift of eternal life through faith.

A general order for the service is as follows:

- Prelude music
- Call to worship
- Hymn of praise
- Prayer of invocation and Lord's Prayer
- Reading from Old Testament
- Reading from New Testament
- Pastoral Remarks
- Hymn of Affirmation
- Prayer of Thanksgiving
- Words of Committal
- Benediction
- Postlude music

Frequently Requested Hymns for Funerals

- A Mighty Fortress is our God (260)
- Abide With Me (543)
- Amazing Grace (280)
- Be Thou My Vision (339)
- Dear Lord and Father of Mankind (345)
- Fairest Lord Jesus (306)
- For All the Saints (526)
- I Sing a Song of the Saints of God (364)
- Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee (464)
- Lead On, O King Eternal (447)
- Lift High The Cross (371)
- Now Thank We All Our God (555)
- Our God, Our Help In Ages Past (21)
- Praise Ye The Lord, The Almighty (482)
- The Church's One Foundation (442)
- The Day of Resurrection (118)
- This Is My Father's World (293)
- Morning Has Broken (469)

*“For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time of war and a time of peace.” Ecclesiastes 3, selected verses*

For those who have lost someone dear, one of the greatest fears is memory. “How might we ensure the memory of our beloved?” At First Presbyterian we have the enormous blessing of a garden that can hold those memories of our dearly departed in the beauty of God’s creation and under the shadow of the cross that rises high over our sanctuary. As you enter the garden, you will notice it is tucked in a quiet corner between our sanctuary and education buildings, as if the lost are held by extended arms of our church community. In the garden you will find niches for the interment of ashes, open space for scattering and benches for sitting and reflecting. All church members and their families may make use of the facility, but the placement of ashes are always done as part of a Christian service.

If you are considering the garden, please know that there are at least three options. The first is to make use of one of the hundred niches for an interment. The niches can hold two cremains, if desired. The names of the deceased are marked on a granite plaque that covers the niche. Another option is scattering. At least two locations are available for scattering of the ashes in the garden soil. Names of these deceased are recorded on a plaque on the garden wall. Finally, many church members like to have the names of loved ones recorded in the garden, even if buried elsewhere. A plaque by the gate entrance allows you to memorialize loved ones that way. If you are interested in making arrangements for such an interment, please speak to our financial administrator. She will walk with you to the garden to help find an appropriate location and outline for you the guidelines and fees for its use.

Gardens are a very appropriate place for those who have endured loss. They remind us of the reality of life. There are seasons of brightness and warmth, and times of loss and bitter cold. Gardens also remind us of the steadfast promises of the God we know through Jesus Christ. With each rising flower or blooming shrub, we are reminded of the eternal rest and comfort we share with our Creator. For everything there is a season.

Fees

- Reserving a niche and accompanying granite marker \$1500
- Spreading of ashes and engraving of name on plaque \$1000
- Name of someone buried elsewhere engraved on plaque \$500

End of Life Giving

It is certainly appropriate and faithful to consider how you might support the work of the church even after your death. In considering a gift to the church, please consider the following options.

- **The McKinnon Fund** assists in major repairs to church facilities, equipment and grounds (a capital reserve fund).
- **The Pastor's Fund for Special Assistance** provides emergency support to both church members and individuals in the community.
- **The Choir Reserve Fund** supports the music ministries of the church.
- **The Memorial Fund** supports the ministries and missions of our congregation.
- **The General Operating Fund** helps sustain the ongoing operation and administration of the church.
- **Scholarship Funds** provide financial support for students in college and seminary.

There are any number of ways that gifts can be made to the church, including...

- **Check/Cash:** The most common method of completing a financial pledge is via monetary donation. Gifts of cash can be paid in installments over several years, with scheduled reminders sent according to the frequency specified by the donor.
- **Appreciated Securities:** Securities may be donated to the church and can provide tax advantages that gifts of cash cannot. For example, when appreciated securities (which have been held by the same donor for one year or more) are contributed, the donor may deduct the fair market value and completely avoid the capital gains taxes associated with the appreciation.
- **Gift Annuities:** The creation of an annuity can allow you to make a gift to the church and subsequently receive fixed annual payments for life. The amount of the payments is based on the age(s) of the donor(s) at the time of the gift.
- **Life Insurance:** When new or existing policies name the church as owner and beneficiary, all subsequent premium payments become tax deductible contributions, and the church will ultimately receive the life insurance proceeds.
- **Wills/Bequests:** It is very easy and rewarding to remember the church in your will by designating a portion or set amount of your estate to pass to the church.

You may contact our financial administrator for additional information on how to support the church through estate giving. Please, though, consult your legal or financial advisor in regards to any kind of gift, as First Presbyterian does not provide legal or tax advice.

Memories and Memorials

Flowers: If there are flowers that remain from your service, you may leave them for the next Sunday worship. The gift will be noted in that Sunday's bulletin.

Memorial Gifts: All memorial gifts sent to the church are gratefully acknowledged. The church will send a note to the donor, a notice of the gift to the family of the deceased, and place an announcement in the monthly newsletter. All gifts are placed in the Memorial Fund unless specifically designated by the donor or by the family.

Evensong Services: Occasionally, around the first Sunday in November, an Evensong Service is held to worship God and remember those died in the previous year. Families who have lost loved ones are given notice by a written letter.

First Service: Each year, on the first Sunday in January, the congregation concludes the 11:00 service in the memorial garden. On what is often a brisk winter morning, a wreath is placed in the garden, names of recently deceased are recited, and a benediction is shared.

Reading Resources on Death and Loss

Speak to the pastor about literature concerning grief and other resources to help in your recovery.