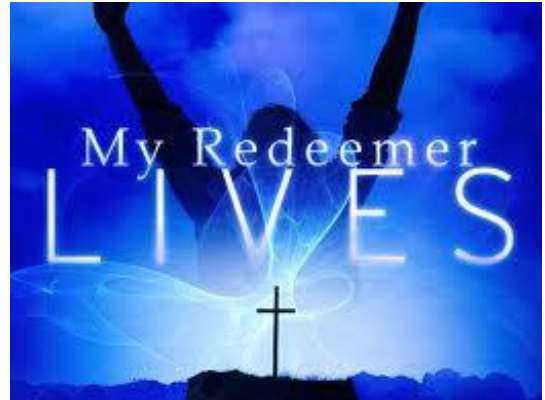


FUNERAL WORSHIP PREPLANNING

St. John's Lutheran Church, 884 Newfield Avenue, Stamford, Connecticut 06905

INTRODUCTION

No one wants to think about their own death and funeral. However, preplanning for the funeral service can be a tremendous gift to your family. At a time of great loss and grief, your family will be faced with not only their emotions, but with a host of decisions to make. Funeral preplanning informs them of your personal preferences, it provides them guidance, and it affords you the opportunity to witness to your loved ones by setting forth a Christ-centered service of worship that proclaims Easter hope.



The intent of this “Funeral Worship Preplanning” is to allow you to make *suggestions* to your family regarding the funeral service. The word “suggestions” is emphasized, because you should allow your family flexibility in the funeral arrangements they make. Further, it is recommended that you discuss funeral worship plans with family and provide them with a copy of your suggestions. A “Funeral Worship Preplanning Worksheet” is provided as part of this publication so that you can write down your preferences.

THE FUNERAL

The funeral or memorial service is first and foremost the worship of the Lord of Life and a celebration of the cross and empty tomb that gives believers in Christ the hope of everlasting life. While the funeral honors, remembers, and celebrates the life of the deceased, the heart of a funeral is always the gift of life that God grants. This good news meets death head-on, provides hope and comfort to all who worship, and proclaims Christ as Lord of both the living and the dead. It is the pastor's responsibility to ensure that the proclamation of Easter life is strongly present in music, Scripture, message, prayer, and liturgy.

WORSHIP CONSIDERATIONS

In the brief time leading up to the funeral or memorial service, the pastor will visit with your family about the worship service and attending logistics. The following information will help you make suggestions to your family.

- **Location of Worship Service** Although there may be unusual reasons for funerals or memorials to be held at the funeral home, you are strongly encouraged to hold worship in the sanctuary or chapel of the church. This is where the people of God regularly gather to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Holding the service in the sanctuary or chapel helps all who attend more clearly understand that what we do at a funeral is worship.

• **Music** Funerals are occasions to sing the great music of the church that witness to the Lord of life. Secular music is not appropriate for worship, but could be played at the funeral home visitation or other setting. The pastor will help you determine if a song is appropriate for music or not, but a guiding question to ask is, “Does this music give glory to God and witness to our hope in Jesus Christ?”

Congregational Hymns – Hymns that the congregation sings are strongly encouraged. Singing involves the congregation and allows everyone to give expression to the faith we hold. It is usually wise to select hymns that are both singable and more commonly known. Typically, three hymns are sufficient. Listed below are hymns that you might consider. All are from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the worship book at St. John’s Lutheran Church.

Abide with Me No. 629
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus No. 392
Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound No. 779
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God No. 504
Beautiful Savior No. 838
Behold the Host Arrayed in White No. 425
Beneath the Cross of Jesus No. 338
Blessed Assurance No. 638
Blest Be the Tie That Binds No. 656
Borning Cry No. 732
Children of the Heavenly Father No. 781
Christ the Lord Is Risen Today! No. 373
For All the Saints No. 422
For All Your Saints, O Lord No. 427
Give Me Jesus No. 770
Great Is Thy Faithfulness No. 733
Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer No. 618
How Firm a Foundation No. 796
How Great Thou Art No. 856
I Know That My Redeemer Lives! No. 619
I Love to Tell the Story No. 661
In the Cross of Christ I Glory No. 324
It Is Well with My Soul No. 785
Jerusalem, My Happy Home No. 628
Jesus Christ Is Risen Today No. 365
Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross No. 335

Jesus Loves Me! No. 595
Just As I Am, without One Plea No. 592
Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus No. 802
Lift High the Cross No. 660
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling No. 631
My Faith Looks Up to Thee No. 759
My God, How Wonderful Thou Art No. 863
My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less No. 597
My Life Flows on in Endless Song No. 763
Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds No. 367
Now the Green Blade Rises No. 379
O Christ, Our Hope No. 604
O Day Full of Grace No. 627
O God, Our Help in Ages Past No. 632
Oh, Happy Day When We Shall Stand No. 441
O Jesus, I Have Promised No. 810
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me No. 623
Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us No. 789
Shall We Gather At the River No. 423
Soon and Very Soon No. 39
The King of Love My Shepherd Is No. 502
The Lord’s My Shepherd No. 778
The Strive is O’er No. 366
Thine Is the Glory No. 376
Thy Holy Wings No. 613
What a Friend We Have in Jesus No. 742

Other Music – Soloists or instrumentalists are frequently part of praising God at funerals or memorial services. The church usually arranges for these skilled musicians. While it is acceptable to have a friend or relative provide such music, they should have the music abilities necessary and the emotional strength to sing or play at a time when they may be grieving. Music in addition to congregational hymns is optional and family members should not feel obligated to arrange for it.

Again, only music that reflects our trust in Christ is appropriate at a funeral. One or two anthems are usually done. Below are possible anthems to assist you in communicating preferences to your family. Many congregational hymns can also be done as anthems; if a number is listed after the title, it can be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

Behold the host Arrayed in White No. 425
Drawn to the Light No. 593

Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ No. 402
God Be with You Till We Meet Again

Give Me Jesus No. 770
He Leadeth Me: Oh, Blessed Thought
If with All Your Hearts – Mendelssohn
I Know that My Redeemer Liveth – Handel
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring – Bach
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring – Bach (Instru.)
Just a Closer Walk with Thee No. 697
Lamb of God No. 336
Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart No. 750
Nunc Dimitis Pg. 113

On Eagle's Wings No. 787
O Rest in the Lord (Elijah) - Mendelssohn
Precious Lord, Take My Hand No. 773
Sheep May Safely Graze – Bach (Instru.)
Shepherd Me, O God No. 780
Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling No. 608
The Lord Is My Shepherd – Dvorak
The Old Rugged Cross
Thine Is the Glory No. 376
You Are Mine No. 581

• **Scripture Readings** The worship service usually has three readings from the Bible; at least one should be a text from one of the four Gospels. A funeral is a gathering of believers who assemble to hear good news from God's Word. Scripture read at funerals or memorial services reflect our hope and trust in Jesus Christ. The pastor will want to know if you have favorite passages. To assist you, below you will find possible selections.

Old Testament Readings

Job 19:23-27	<i>I know that my Redeemer lives</i>
Psalms 23	<i>The Lord is my shepherd</i>
Psalms 27:1, 4-9a, 13-14	<i>The Lord is my light and salvation</i>
Psalms 42:1-7	<i>As a deer longs for flowing streams</i>
Psalms 46:1-7	<i>God is our refuge and strength</i>
Psalms 90	<i>You have been our dwelling place in all generations</i>
Psalms 103	<i>Bless the Lord, O my soul</i>
Psalms 118:5-9, 13-17, 19-20	<i>God's steadfast love endures forever</i>
Psalms 121	<i>I lift up my eyes to the hills</i>
Psalms 130	<i>Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord</i>
Psalms 139:1-12	<i>O Lord, you have searched me and known me</i>
Psalms 142:1-6	<i>With my voice I cry to the Lord</i>
Psalms 143	<i>Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications</i>
Psalms 146	<i>Praise the Lord, O my soul</i>
Ecclesiastes 3:1-12	<i>For everything there is a season</i>
Isaiah 25:6-9	<i>God will swallow up death forever</i>
Isaiah 26:1-4, 19	<i>God will keep them in perfect peace</i>
Isaiah 40:1-11, 28-31	<i>Comfort, O comfort my people</i>
Isaiah 41:10	<i>Do not be afraid, for I am with you</i>
Isaiah 43:1-3a, 5-7	<i>I have called you by name, you are mine</i>
Isaiah 44:6-8	<i>I am the first and the last</i>
Isaiah 49:13b-16a	<i>God will not forget you</i>
Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-13	<i>Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters</i>
Isaiah 61:1-3	<i>The spirit of the Lord God is upon me</i>
Isaiah 65:17-20, 23-25	<i>I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth</i>
Isaiah 66:10-14	<i>As a mother comforts her child</i>
Jeremiah 31:8-31	<i>I will turn their mourning into joy</i>
Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33	<i>The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases</i>
Joel 2:12-13, 23-24, 26-29	<i>Turn to me with all your heart</i>

New Testament Readings

Romans 5:1-11	<i>Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ</i>
Romans 6:3-9	<i>Baptized into Christ Jesus</i>
Romans 8:26-27	<i>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness</i>
Romans 8:31-35, 37-39	<i>Who will separate us from the love of Christ</i>
Romans 14:7-9	<i>Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's</i>
1 Corinthians 15:12-26	<i>Christ, the first fruits, has been raised from the dead</i>

1 Corinthians 15:51-57	<i>Where, O death, is your victory</i>
2 Corinthians 4:7-18	<i>We have this treasure in clay jars</i>
2 Corinthians 5:1-8	<i>A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens</i>
Ephesians 1:11—2:1, 4-10	<i>Saved by grace through faith</i>
Philippians 3:20-21	<i>Our citizenship is in heaven</i>
1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 18	<i>We do not want you to be uninformed about those who have died</i>
Hebrews 12:1-2	<i>We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses</i>
1 Peter 1:3-9	<i>A living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead</i>
1 John 3:1-2	<i>See what love the Father has given us</i>
Revelation 1:17-18	<i>Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last</i>
Revelation 7:9-17	<i>God will wipe away every tear</i>
Revelation 14:13	<i>Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord</i>
Revelation 21:1-7	<i>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth</i>
Revelation 22:1-5	<i>The Lord God will be their light</i>

Gospel Readings

Matthew 5:1-10	<i>Blessed are those who mourn</i>
Matthew 11:25-30	<i>Come to me, all you who are weary</i>
Mark 16:1-7	<i>The resurrection of Christ</i>
Luke 18:15-17	<i>Let the little children come to me</i>
Luke 24:1-9, 36-43	<i>The resurrection of Christ</i>
John 1:1-5, 9-14	<i>The light shines in the darkness</i>
John 3:16	<i>For God so loved the world</i>
John 6:37-40	<i>I will raise them up on the last day</i>
John 10:11-16	<i>I am the good shepherd</i>
John 10:27-29	<i>My sheep hear my voice</i>
John 11:21-27	<i>I am the resurrection and the life</i>
John 12:23-26	<i>Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth</i>
John 14:1-6, 25-27	<i>In my Father's house are many rooms</i>
John 20:30-31	<i>That through believing you may have life in his name</i>

• **Officiating Pastor** The called pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church will officiate. If you have a relationship with another pastor or if you have a clergy relative, speak to the pastor about having an assisting role in the service.

• **Tributes** Personal tributes are sometimes delivered at funerals, but are generally discouraged. Too often those offering remembrances are ill equipped to speak in public, especially during an emotionally difficult time. The pastor will certainly make many personal references during the sermon, but it is important to remember that our worship focuses upon God's good news of resurrection life, not upon the goodness or achievements of the deceased.

• **Pall** For those funerals where a casket is present, a white cloth covering called a "pall" will be placed over the casket before it is brought into the sanctuary at the beginning of the worship. The pall symbolizes the righteousness of Christ with which we are "clothed" or "covered" through our Baptism.

• **Luncheon** If your family wishes to have a meal or dessert following worship, the Women of St. John's Lutheran will serve it for a small fee. This fellowship time is very important for families and friends as they support each other and enjoy one another's company. The pastor will ask family to approximate how many people will attend the luncheon. If the funeral is scheduled mid-afternoon, your family may decide that dessert is preferable to a lunch.

If there is a graveside committal at a cemetery as part of the funeral, two options are possible. The committal can be done immediately after the funeral; then, everyone returns to the church for the luncheon. Or, the luncheon can be held immediately after worship with the committal to follow later

(this second option is often done during winter weather as a courtesy to guests or when the cemetery is of considerable distance from the church).

• **Memorial Gifts** Many choose to designate one or more memorial recipients to which gifts are given in lieu of flowers. There are many worthwhile charities and associations, but we hope you will consider including St. John's Lutheran Church as a memorial recipient.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

• **Consult Family** It is important to reiterate that the plans you make for your funeral be done in consultation with family members. It should be your intent to provide *guidance only* for the decisions they will make, not create strict directives that would be difficult or uncomfortable for family to honor. Allow your family the flexibility they need to make good decisions regarding your funeral. Be in conversation with them about your preferences and the arrangements you suggest.

• **Cremation** There are some who worry that cremation might not be a Christian practice. Cremation is a matter of personal preference and is completely acceptable from a Christian perspective. The people of God speak of "dust to dust" and "ashes to ashes;" it makes no difference whether we return to the dust of the ground slowly or quickly. Again, cremation should be talked about with family members if this is your preference.

• **Memorial Garden** St. John's Lutheran Church has a memorial garden where ashes may be interred. Contact the church office at 203-322-0066 if you are interested in a resting place on the grounds of the church.

• **Pastoral Assistance** If you wish to discuss any of your funeral or memorial arrangements with the pastor at St. John's Lutheran, he/she would welcome a conversation with you.

• **Preplanning** The next page provides a preplanning worksheet for the funeral or memorial worship wherein you can state your suggestions to family members. Once you've completed the preplanning worksheet, it is suggested that you do the following:



- Provide a copy of your preplanning to your family members.
- Provide a copy of your preplanning to the church; it will be retained in a confidential file.
- Keep a copy of your preplanning with your will and other legal documents.

Remember, your preplanning is not intended to be ironclad directives to those who will work with the pastor to plan your funeral or memorial worship. Your preplanning lets your family know what arrangements, music, and Scripture are important to you. Knowing your preferences will be a significant, helpful guide for them.

Funeral Worship Preplanning Worksheet

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH



The funeral or memorial service is first and foremost the worship of the Lord of life and a celebration of the cross and empty tomb that gives believers in Christ the hope of everlasting life. In consultation with your family, complete the following worship preplanning sheet and provide your family with copies.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Name & Address of Funeral Home to be used: _____

Congregational Hymns:

Other Music (*soloists or instrumentalists*):

Scripture Readings (*one of the three should be from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John*):

Luncheon:

- Estimated number of persons in attendance: _____ (*Your family will likely adjust this number*)
- If there is a graveside committal, is it your preference to have a luncheon/dessert *before* or *after* the committal at the cemetery? (*check one*) Before After

Designated Memorial Gift Recipient(s):

Other considerations for the funeral/memorial worship:

