

ST. THOMAS' EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
est. 1791

# Funeral Planning

## A Guide and Workbook



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# Concerning the Service

*The death of a member of the Church should be reported as soon as possible to, and arrangements for the funeral should be made in consultation with, the Minister of the Congregation.*

*Baptized Christians are properly buried from the church. The service should be held at a time when the congregation has opportunity to be present.*

*The coffin is to be closed before the service, and it remains closed thereafter. It is appropriate that it be covered with a pall or other suitable covering.*

*If necessary, or if desired, all or part of the service of Committal may be said in the church. If preferred, the Committal service may take place before the service in the church. It may also be used prior to cremation.*

*A priest normally presides at the service. It is appropriate that the bishop, when present, preside at the Eucharist and pronounce the Commendation.*

*It is desirable that the Lesson from the Old Testament, and the Epistle, be read by lay persons.*

*When the services of a priest cannot be obtained, a deacon or lay reader may preside at the service.*

*At the burial of a child, the passages from Lamentations, 1 John, and John 6, together with Psalm 23, are recommended.*

*It is customary that the celebrant meet the body and go before it into the church or towards the grave.*

*The anthems at the beginning of the service are sung or said as the body is borne into the church, or during the entrance of the ministers, or by the celebrant standing in the accustomed place.*

# **When a death occurs, call your priest.**

**The emergency pastoral care phone line for St. Thomas' Episcopal Church is: 856.881.2841. If there is no answer, leave a message stating clearly what has happened and how you may be reached.**

**Do not schedule a funeral without consulting with the priest. A consultation with the priest should take place prior to setting dates with family, friends, or a funeral home. A conversation with the priest will help you to have a more informed conversation when making arrangements with others.**



## Introduction

This guide will walk you through the what, why, and how of a funeral or memorial service at St. Thomas' Episcopal Church.

The best time to plan for a funeral or memorial service is long before it is needed. The forms necessary to do this are at the end of this booklet or are available in the church office. The Rector is available to help you with this. The Rector keeps a file of burial plans for anyone that desires it.

When we are born, we begin our journey toward death. For some, death comes after many years of full and happy living. To others it seems to come prematurely. Some may find in dying a blessed relief from months or years of agonizing suffering. Others' lives are snuffed out in an instant. Whenever it comes, or however it is accomplished, death is inevitable. It is a shock to those who survive. It is an imponderable mystery. At St. Thomas' we hope the practices and services we offer strengthen your assurance of Christ's triumph over death and provide comfort and loving support for all who mourn.

## Theological Background

As an Episcopal Church, our practices around death are based in the Book of Common Prayer. There we read:

*The liturgy for the dead is an Easter liturgy. It finds all its meaning in the resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we, too, shall be raised.*

*The liturgy, therefore, is characterized by joy, in the certainty that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

*This joy, however, does not make human grief unchristian. The very love we have for each other in Christ brings deep sorrow when we are parted by death. Jesus himself wept at the grave of his friend. So, while we rejoice that one we love has entered into the nearer presence of our Lord, we sorrow in sympathy with those who mourn. (BCP, 507)*

Our practices seek not to sanitize or minimize death, nor to aggrandize it. The rites set out in the prayer book facilitate healing by a clear process of mourning, remembering, and committing the deceased into God's care. The goal is to honor the dead, then to honor the continuation of life by those who remain.

## **What We Do**

These are the practices by which we prepare for death:

1. Ritual death in union with Christ through baptism (BCP, 299)
2. Ritual preparation for death by eating the bread of heaven (BCP, 355)
3. Ministration to the Sick (BCP, 453)
4. Ministration at the Time of Death (“Last Rites”) (BCP, 462)
5. Vigil (BCP, 465)
6. Reception of the Body (BCP, 466)
7. The Burial of the Dead (BCP, 491)
8. The Committal (BCP, 501)

Step 1 often begins when a newborn baby is given into the hands of the church to baptize as the parents commit to bring up the child to know the love of God.

Step 2 is a regular, often weekly, practice by most active Christians.

Steps 3-4 are often performed at times of illness or when someone perceives that death is near. Often it is up to you to notify the church that these services may be required.

This workbook is designed to assist you to navigate steps 5-8.

## 5. The Vigil

*It is appropriate that the family and friends come together for prayers prior to the funeral. Suitable Psalms, Lessons, and Collects (such as those in the Burial service) may be used. The Litany at the Time of Death may be said, or the following... (BCP, 465)*

We recommend a Vigil, a Funeral with the body present, and a Committal as essential elements of mourning and processing grief. These rites will enhance the capacity of the bereaved to integrate this fresh loss into their lives in a healthy, loving manner.

In some traditions, the singing of psalms and prayers accompanies the washing and dressing of the body—a custom strange to most Episcopalians, and Christians for that matter, but commendably Christian in origin. In a culture that professionalizes this work with Funeral Homes, a “Viewing” is often the appropriate time a place to practice the Vigil. The Vigil is sometimes referred to as the “Wake.”

The Vigil is a watch over the dead body held by family and friends, usually during the night before burial, which combines elements of prayer, mourning, social reunion, and quite often even frivolity. The Vigil is a time for remembering the deceased. It is a time for laughter and tears: for telling stories, remembering good times and bad, and for lamenting unfinished business. At the vigil is where things are said which need to be said concerning the deceased and his or her relationships.

The Vigil can be held in one of three places: the funeral home, the family home, or the church. We strongly recommend a Vigil. It is an integral part of the ritual and the grieving process. Please let the Rector know if it is your intent to have a Vigil.

## **6. Reception of the Body**

Just as a baby is handed over to the ministrations of the church so as to make a good start on life (which is to say, to begin the preparations for death), so at the end of life the body of the deceased is given back over to the church for final care and disposition. The Lych Gate at St. Thomas' is a traditional site for giving over custodianship of the body. From this moment, the deceased's remains have left the care of the family and are entrusted to the care of the Church. This liturgy marks the family's final surrender of the deceased so that the deceased may complete her or his journey.

The casket or urn is brought into the church for the funeral by pall bearers and positioned in the front of the nave where it will stay for the service. The casket is closed before the funeral and not opened again (BCP 490). Visitors are asked to be reverent and respectful in the church, using the time prior to the beginning of the service for meditation rather than visiting.

Instead of being covered with a blanket of flowers, the casket is covered with a pall owned by the church and used to cover every casket placed here. In death, all are children of God and equal in God's sight and love. Funeral decorations, however lovingly provided, may obscure this point and are, therefore, not used in church. Donated flowers will be sent on to the reception. The exception is two vases of flowers for the altar, which are a part of most Sunday services at St. Thomas'.

If the body has been cremated in time for the service, the container will be covered with a white embroidered pall and placed on a stand in front of the nave prior to the beginning of the service.

It is not appropriate to schedule a funeral on a Sunday or a High Feast Day (i.e. Christmas, Easter, etc.). Since the funeral liturgy is an Easter liturgy, white vestments are worn. Even during Lent, the liturgy remains an Easter liturgy and "Alleluia" is sung where it occurs in the rite.



## 7. Burial of the Dead

The Burial of the Dead, commonly known as the Burial Office, Funeral, or Memorial Service (if the body has already been buried), is the work of the Church community in order to lay to rest the body of the deceased. The Burial of the Dead is not a time for eulogies or stories: that was the work of the Vigil<sup>1</sup>. The Burial of the Dead is not a time for practices unique to a person. Military honors or other rituals associated with specific organizations should be planned for after or (preferably) before the Burial Office.

As with Holy Eucharist, the Rites of Burial can be performed according to Rite I (traditional language) and Rite II (contemporary language). At St. Thomas' we recommend Rite II be used.

A brief homily will be offered by the presiding clergy.

It is quite appropriate, but not obligatory, to celebrate the Eucharist as part of the burial service. The Eucharist should recall Easter with festal vestments and singing. The liturgy calls on all to participate as able. Lay persons, including family and friends, can take part fully and joyfully.

The offering is a critical part of the Eucharistic celebration. While not a common practice at funerals in south Jersey, you may wish to have a monetary collection taken up in honor and memory of the one who has died. In this case you are invited to select an outreach or cause dear to the deceased as the ultimate recipient of the offering. This offering comes to the altar to be blessed and is a way for those gathered to honor and celebrate the life of the one who has died. A common alternative to a monetary offering is simply to have someone bring forth the bread and the wine used for the Eucharistic celebration.

The Burial of the Dead ends with the Commendation, a solemn leave-taking and offering of the dead person to God. The presider says the commendatory prayer and then a deacon, if present, says the dismissal. The presider then leads the body out of the church to its final resting place, with the family and congregation following.

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1 If a Vigil is deemed impractical but eulogies are desired, a reception after the service is the ideal time for them. If only one or two are wanted, from specific speakers, special arrangements might be made ahead of time with the Rector. In this case, they might be offered before the Liturgy of the Word. Eulogists should bring their texts written out, totaling no more than 500 words each.

## 8. The Committal

This final stage of the liturgy of the dead takes place at the grave. *Grave*, in the sense of the Book of Common Prayer, means the resting place of the body in the ground or vault, but it can also mean the repository of ashes. The point is the finality of “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” This is the last rite and its central and memorable ceremony is the casting of earth upon the coffin, urn, or any other final receptacle. This part of the rite is simple and brief. All those present, beginning with family, should be encouraged to cast earth. This is a sign of putting away the dead, to seal the certainty, that in this life they will never return to us and to begin to piece together a future without their bodily presence.

If there are reasons to delay celebrating the burial office more than a few days after a person’s death, the committal may take place beforehand. The burial office can then be scheduled for a convenient time. Else it is important that the committal take place immediately upon the conclusion of the burial office.

## The Lessons

Lessons, Psalms and Canticles are chosen from the Book of Common Prayer, pp. 494-495, 471-475, and 87-96. This page contains an overview of those options. You may recruit readers, or the church can provide them. Hymns are optional.

### Scripture Suggestions

#### *1. Selections for the first reading (from the Hebrew Scriptures):*

Isaiah 25:6-9	(He will swallow up death for ever)
Isaiah 61:1-3	(To comfort those who mourn)
Lamentations 3:22-26,31-33	(The Lord is good to those who wait for him)
Wisdom 3:1-5,9	(The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God)
Job 19:21-27a	(I know that my Redeemer lives)

#### *2. Selections for Psalms:*

Psalms 23	(The LORD is my Shepherd)
Psalms 27	(The LORD is my light and my salvation)
Psalms 42:1-7	(As the deer longs for the water-brooks)
Psalms 46	(God is our refuge and strength)
Psalms 90:1-12	(Lord, you have been our refuge)
Psalms 121	(I lift up my eyes to the hills)
Psalms 130	(Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD)
Psalms 139:1-11	(LORD, you have searched me out and known me)

or Canticles from the BCP, pp. 85-96

#### *3. Selections for the second reading (from the Christian Scriptures)*

Romans 8:14-19, 34-35, 37-39	(The glory that shall be revealed)
1 Corinthians 15:2-26, 35-38, 42-44, 53-58	(The imperishable body)
2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9	(Things that are unseen are eternal)
1 John 3:1-2	(We shall be like him)
Revelation 7:9-17	(God will wipe away every tear)
Revelation 21:2-7	(Behold, I make all things new)

#### *4. Selections for the gospel reading (from the Christian Scriptures):*

John 5:24-27	(He who believes has everlasting life)
John 6:37-40	(All that the Father gives me will come to you)
John 10:11-16	(I am the good shepherd)
John 11:21-27	(I am the resurrection and the life)
John 14:1-6	(In my Father's house are many rooms)

## Hymn Suggestions

Many people desire that favorite hymns of the deceased be played at the funeral service. Hymns should be selected from our two Episcopal hymnals (*Hymnal 1982, Lift Every Voice and Sing*). All music must be approved by the organist. Special offerings by singers or instrumentalists in the family are welcome. Some music, including any pre-recorded music, may be more appropriate for a wake or reception.

Particularly suitable hymns for a Burial Office or Memorial Service from the *Hymnal 1982* are:

174-213      Any hymn from the Easter section

287	For All The Saints	473	Lift High The Cross
293	I Sing A Song Of The Saints Of God	477	All Praise To Thee
296	We Know That Christ Is Raised	482	Lord Of All Hopefulness
	And Dies No More	488	Be Thou My Vision
304	I Come With Joy To Meet My Lord	493	O For A Thousand Tongues
335	I Am The Bread Of Life	517	How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling-Place
336	Come With Us, O Blessed Jesus	618	Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones
339	Deck Thyself, My Soul, With Gladness	620	Jerusalem, My Happy Home
343	Shepherd Of Souls	623	O What Their Joy And Their Glory
366	Holy God We Praise Thy Name		Must Be
376	Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee	625	Ye Holy Angels Bright
379	God Is Love	635	If Thou But Trust In God To Guide Thee
383	Fairest Lord Jesus	637	How Firm A Foundation, Ye Saints
388	O Worship The King, All Glorious Above		Of The Lord
390	Praise To The Lord, The Almighty	641	Lord Jesus, Think On Me
397	Now Thank We All Our God	644	How Sweet The Name Of Jesus Sounds
410	Praise, My Soul, The King Of Heaven	645/646	The King Of Love My Shepherd Is
423	Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise	657	Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
439	What Wondrous Love Is This	658	As Longs The Deer For Cooling Streams
460	Alleluia, Sing To Jesus		

Particularly suitable hymns from *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (LEVAS II) include:

60	How Great Thou Art
141	Shall We Gather at the River
181	Amazing Grace
188	It Is Well With My Soul
103	Steal away
106	Precious Lord, take my hand
188	When peace like a river

If you desire a soloist for the service, please discuss this with the Rector or organist.

## Basic Information

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Baptized? Y / N

Confirmed? Y / N

Communicant? Y / N

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Death: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Last residence: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Cause of Death: \_\_\_\_\_

Where and when will the body be interred? \_\_\_\_\_

Funeral Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Funeral Home Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Service Location:    Church        Home        Funeral Home

Will the body be present (funeral) or already buried (memorial service)? Casket / Urn / Memorial

Do you prefer Rite I or Rite II (Rite II uses more contemporary language)?        I / II

Number Expected at Service: \_\_\_\_\_        Number of pews to reserve for family: \_\_\_\_\_

Address to which to send cards or memorials: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Memorial Donations go to: \_\_\_\_\_

*(if no designation made, memorials will go to the St. Thomas' endowment)*

Name and Address of Charity to receive the offering (required if a Eucharist is celebrated):

*A charity or ministry that was important to the deceased, at St. Thomas' or elsewhere, would be especially appropriate.*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If there are questions about the service beforehand, the church should contact:

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Suggested Order of Service for a Funeral

### The Burial of the Dead: - Rite Two

Prelude

Opening Anthems

Collects

### The Liturgy of the Word

Old Testament Lesson

Reader:

Psalm or Canticle

Reader:

New Testament Lesson

Reader:

Sequence Hymn

Gospel

Homily

The Apostles' Creed

Prayers of the People

Reader:

### The Holy Eucharist (optional)

The Peace

Offertory Hymn

Eucharistic Prayer A

Communion Hymns

Post Communion Prayer

### The Commendation

Commendation

Blessing

Dismissal

Processional Hymn

Postlude

### At the Graveside

The Committal

### Fees for a Funeral

There is no cost for the use of the church or for the services of the clergy person. However, donations to the parish (suggested: \$150 for a funeral, \$300 for funeral and reception), and to the Altar Guild (\$100 is suggested) are always appreciated. An honorarium for the clergy (\$150 is common) is not expected, but appropriate.

Donation Recipients \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The fees associated with a funeral service at St. Thomas' follow:

Crucifer	\$15	_____
Sexton	\$50 for service only	
	\$100 for service and reception	_____
Organist (opt.)	\$150 organ and/or piano only	_____
	\$200 if soloist/choir is added	
Soloist (opt.)	\$75-\$150 per soloist (see Rector/organist)	_____
Cemetery	Cemetery opening costs are paid on purchase of a site. Openings for caskets are paid directly to the excavator.	

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

Please submit a copy of this form with your check made out to *St. Thomas' Episcopal Church*. Either a single check or multiple checks may be written. All checks should be handed directly to the priest for recording and distribution.

For those who desire it, the purchase of burial space at St. Thomas' is handled separately. Please contact the church office for more information.

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FOR OFFICE USE: Checks Requested by \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Altar Guild:	Casket? Y / N	Eucharist? Y / N	# Reserved Pews _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Notified
Usher:	_____			<input type="checkbox"/> Notified
Crucifer:	_____			<input type="checkbox"/> Notified <input type="checkbox"/> Paid
Musician:	_____			<input type="checkbox"/> Notified <input type="checkbox"/> Paid
Sexton:	_____			<input type="checkbox"/> Notified <input type="checkbox"/> Paid
Soloists:	_____			<input type="checkbox"/> Notified <input type="checkbox"/> Paid
Other:	_____			<input type="checkbox"/> Notified <input type="checkbox"/> Paid

## Checklist

- ☐ Service schedule agreed upon with the priest and church calendar
- ☐ Plans for vigil communicated to priest
- ☐ Meet with priest to discuss service choices, homily
- ☐ Basic Information form filled out, submitted to church office
- ☐ If there is to be a reception at the church, arrangements made through the church office
- ☐ If the burial is to be on the St. Thomas' grounds, arrangements made through the church office
- ☐ Payment made to the church for services of musicians, sexton, etc.
- ☐ Photo of the deceased emailed to church office for bulletin cover
- ☐ Altar flower arrangements made directly with florist.

“Flowers by Thomas” (856) 243-2621 is our preferred florist and can deliver without an appointment.

- ☐ Guest book (optional)
- ☐ Optional brief poem or quotation in case of extra space in bulletin
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_