

Christian Burial

The following, adapted from the funeral liturgy contained in the *Book of Alternative Services* of the Anglican Church of Canada, is a helpful indication of our intended practice in the conduct of funerals:

Liturgical expressions of faith and hope in the face of death should leave room for the radical sense of anxiety and loss which mourners experience. They should enable, rather than deny, the grief process. On the other hand, Christian funerals should not become unrelieved expressions of anguish and despair; there is a time for thanksgiving even in the midst of mourning. This note of thanksgiving even in a time of tears explains, in part, the ancient association of Christian funerals with celebrations of the eucharist (holy communion).

It is important to note that funerals are the property of neither funeral directors nor clergy. Both funeral directors and clergy may provide valued support and resources, and clergy have a particular responsibility to make sure that the rituals observed are appropriate expressions of Christian faith and hope. The family and friends who come to bury their dead should be encouraged to take an active role in the liturgy.

Funeral rites normally consist of a number of distinct liturgical events spread over a period of time, usually several days. They may include such elements as:

- i) Prayers in the home.
- ii) Prayers in the presence of the body (whether in the home or in church or in a funeral home).
- iii) The reception of the body at the church.
- iv) A liturgy of the Word in a funeral chapel, (the service) in the church.
- v) The committal of the body to the grave, the flames or the sea.
- vi) The disposal of the ashes at a later date.

The following are guidelines regarding Christian burial for use in the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, for the information of funeral directors and cemetery officials.

A. Arrangements

1. The cleric who will be conducting the funeral should be consulted as early as possible and certainly before final arrangements are made. No publication of time or place of service should be made prior to this consultation.
2. It is preferred that the burial service be read in a church building. Church buildings will be available for funerals when desired. The final decision as to where the service is to be held will be made by the family in consultation with the cleric.



3. The burial service is the congregational form of prayer appropriate to the death of a member of the Christian community. The family and friends who come to bury their dead should be encouraged to taken an active role in the liturgy. Therefore, it is more suitable that the family should be seated as part of the congregation than in some adjacent space.
4. The memorial societies comprising the National Memorial Society Association of Canada exists to promote simple, dignified funerals at reasonable cost and to enable individuals to plan in advance of death, the type of funeral preferred. Members of this association are pledged to co-operate in every way with Anglican tradition and custom and, as such, are endorsed by the bishop of the diocese. Most funeral directors will make similar arrangements when requested.
5. Any deviation from Anglican use and custom regarding Christian burial should be referred to the area bishop.

B. The Service

6. The casket should be closed before the liturgy begins, whether in the church or funeral chapel. It may be covered by a funeral pall if such is available.
7. There should be no deviation from the above rule when the service is to take place in the church. When the service is to be conducted in a funeral chapel, if the family does not understand the proper procedure and is under great emotional strain, nothing should be allowed to take place which will be a matter of contention or resentment. Little difficulty is experienced in this matter if the proper procedure is explained to families beforehand. In whatever place a funeral service takes place, it should proceed with all possible dignity and decorum.
8. At a church service, the body of a lay person is placed in the nave of the church with the foot of the casket towards the altar. In the case of a bishop or priest, the body is normally placed in the chancel with the foot of the casket towards the congregation. A cleric is usually buried in normal ecclesiastical vestments.
9. At a service in a church, a few flowers are permissible but both the number of pieces and their location will be at the discretion of the cleric. In some churches they will be restricted to those used at the altar.
10. It is helpful for funeral directors to have copies of the Prayer Book Service and the *Book of Alternative Services* for the use of people attending funerals in their chapels. The Anglican Book Centre (80 Hayden Street, Toronto) has available in a separate form, the funeral liturgy according to both the *Book of Alternative Services* and the *Book of Common Prayer*.
11. Music should be in keeping with the religious nature of the service and should witness to the Christian belief in life everlasting. There are many suitable hymn tunes and appropriate organ music which can be used.



12. It is proper for members of a fraternal organization, who so desire, to attend the funeral service of one of their former members in a body. If the family desires the rites of any such fraternal society, they should take place apart from the burial office of the church and prior to it, preferably at some such time as the evening before.

C. Committal at Graveside

13. The Committal must be taken at the graveside as it is a committal into a final resting place. When circumstances prevent the interment of the body immediately following the funeral service in the church or a chapel, the committal may be read at the conclusion of the service.
14. Earth or sand, and not flowers, should be used at the committal and should be used by the cleric, or by the cleric and mourners, if she/he desires or by the funeral director if the cleric requests him/her to do so.

At the committal, it is Anglican preference for the casket to be completely lowered, if possible.

D. Cremation

15. If the body is to be cremated, any of the following procedures is appropriate:
 - i) The funeral liturgy, followed by committal of the body to the fire.
 - ii) The funeral liturgy, followed by private cremation, after which the final committal of the ashes takes place.
 - iii) The committal of the body to the fire, followed by the funeral liturgy.
 - iv) Cremation, followed by the funeral liturgy and the committal of the ashes to their final resting place.
 - v) The committal of the body to the fire and another committal of the ashes to their final resting place.

E. Infants

16. In the matter of the death of infants, three different states are recognized by law:
 - i) An infant who dies any time after birth, even within seconds; in such a case a death certificate is issued and the usual funeral arrangements are made.
 - ii) Still births of 20 weeks pregnancy or more - A still birth of this nature must, by law, be registered with a burial. The committal will be in the cemetery or crematorium as usual.
 - iii) In the case of still births of less than 20 weeks pregnancy, no registration is required by law, and it is not customary for a cleric to hold a burial service. In some cases, pastoral concerns for the family's grief will require some modified liturgical rite. (See Section 2.5).

