

DEATH AND BURIAL:

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

FOR

PEOPLE OF FAITH

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

110 North Third Street

River Falls WI 54022

715-425-2052



DEATH AND BURIAL: A GUIDE

First Congregational United Church of Christ, River Falls, WI



Death poses a crisis for families. No one can be adequately prepared for the experience of separation that results. Moreover, death often comes as the culmination of a lengthy process that has placed strain on the emotional, physical and spiritual health for those who survive.

Death and the process of dying are feared by most people. Almost all of us are uncomfortable in its presence. At some level this would seem to suggest that we are fearful of confronting our mortality and the mortality of persons we love and upon whom we may be dependent. The result is that people seldom speak of death while they are living vital lives, except in abstract ways. When a family member dies, however, there is no alternative but to deal with death, at least to the extent of making arrangements for burial. This in itself can be a very difficult experience and the occasion for misunderstandings with families.

The thesis of this guide is that the preparation for death and dying should be made well ahead of times of crisis. Since life is unpredictable, there is no better time for such preparation than now. The following are major areas for decision making.

LEGAL: PREPARING A WILL

It is good stewardship to prepare a “Will” that provides a clear directive for the distribution of your property at the time of death. The Will also provides the opportunity to designate a personal representative to administer your estate and the guardians for any minor children. A Will may reduce misunderstandings within your family. A valid Will must be prepared in accordance with the requirements of state law. Without a Will, the Court and state law will determine the distribution of your property and the selection of your personal representative and guardians.

SELECTION OF A POWER OF ATTORNEY

A Power of Attorney provides for the designation of a trusted person to handle your financial and legal matters at any time that you are unable to do so during your lifetime. This legal document may eliminate the need for costly guardianship or conservatorship proceedings.

MEDICAL: LIVING WILL/HEALTH CARE POWER OF ATTORNEY

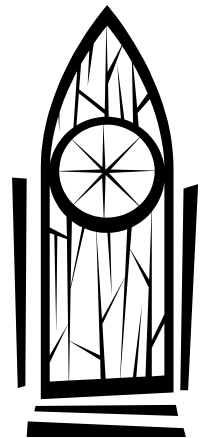
The preparation of a “Living Will” or “Health Care Power of Attorney” provides the occasion for family discussion on future medical care decisions at a time when you may not be able to designate your wishes.

The Living Will provides a statement on your wishes for medical care, for example, the use of artificial means to sustain life, and allows designation of a proxy for those decisions when you are in a terminal condition.

The Health Care Power of Attorney allows you to designate an individual that will make your medical decision at any time that your physician says you are unable to make the decision yourself.

Your proxy or health care agent should be a trusted person who understands your final wishes. Most people would not wish to be kept alive if there is no reasonable expectation of an adequate quality of life. In an age of very advanced technology, there are decisions to be made that profoundly influence or determine matters of mere existence, reasonable life, and death. Most of us are very committed to life, but there needs to be a recognition that death can also be a sign of God’s grace. Your family doctor needs to have a copy of your Living Will or Health Care Power of Attorney. For copies of these forms go to: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/forms.

You will also find forms and people to help you negotiate these forms through the church office.



THE WORSHIP SERVICE: MEMORIAL OR BURIAL

It has always been the practice of Christian people to have a worship service to mark the end of a person's life. The purpose of such a worship service is at least five-fold:

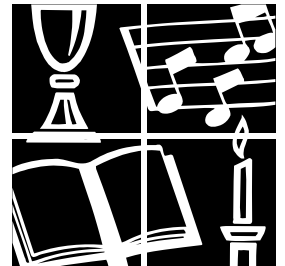
1. To remember the deceased. Memory is a gift of God and we should cherish and cultivate our recollections.
2. To be a channel of God's comfort, hope and strength.
3. To remind us that we have responsibility to care for one another.
4. To remind us of our mortality.
5. To lift up the matter of Christian hope.

An important responsibility of the pastor is to coordinate the development of the worship service. For persons who participate in the community of faith, it is always appropriate to have a worship service in the church. This is always superior to having a worship service in a funeral home. The worship service may be either a memorial service or a burial service. The following definitions may be helpful.

Memorial Service = When the body is not present
Funeral Service = When the body is present

In recent years the term 'Celebration of Life' has become popular. Such a service celebrates not just a life, but the hope of resurrected life. At any of these worship services, the sacrament of Holy Communion is appropriate.

When the service of burial is conducted in the church, a burial pall is available. A pall is a fabric covering placed over the casket. This pall makes an elaborate casket unnecessary.



One of the great advantages of having a memorial or burial service in the church is that there is the possibility for congregational singing and other good music. Hymns which reflect the promise of resurrection and our baptismal covenant would include:

- Now Thank We All Our God
- O God Our Help in Ages Past
- Lord of all Hopefulness
- Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
- Morning Has Broken
- Thine is the Glory
- Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
- Be Still, My Soul
- In the Bulb There is a Flower
- Blessed Be the Tie That Binds
- I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me
- This is My Father's World
- Shall We Gather at the River
- Morning Cry
- For All the Saints
- Swing Low Sweet Chariot
- You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore

FUNCTION OF THE PASTOR

It is important to contact the pastor at the time of death. It is best when the pastor is contacted during the process of dying. You may call the pastor at any hour of the day or night. The pastor will lead you through the process of preparing for death and dying and burial.

DISPOSAL OF THE BODY

It would be well to keep in mind the words of the Scriptures: *“For thou art dust and unto dust shall thou return”*; and also, *“Then shall the dust return unto the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”* We should remember that the person we loved no longer exists in the body that remains.



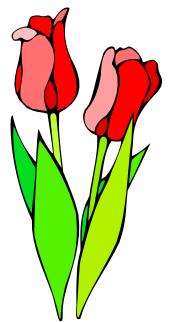
Recently our society has seen a dramatic shift in the most common method of disposing of a body. At one time nearly all burials were at cemeteries in a casket. Currently well over half of our church burials are cremations with the cremains either being interred in a cemetery with a marker, or the cremains are taken to a spot important to the deceased. Wisconsin law currently allows scattering of cremains (Wisconsin Statutes § 440.80.) Christians should have no qualms about disposing of the body through cremation. Some people choose cremation out of respect for the earth and not adding to its crowding. There are also some financial advantages to cremation. There are, of course, those who choose cremation simply out of a basic conviction. One could argue that cremation simply hastens the process of returning to the dust of the earth.

FUNERAL EXPENSES

We should resist the temptation to “honor the dead” by lavish expenditures of money on funeral arrangements. Excessive expenditures on a funeral is an example of poor stewardship. One of the difficulties is that at the time of death, there is little, if any, opportunity to seek the lowest cost arrangements. There are many subtle forces that tend to increase the cost of funerals. The lowest priced caskets serve the required purpose just as well as those that are high priced. Love can only be shown to a person while that person is living.

FLOWERS

Large displays of flowers should be avoided on a least two grounds. First, anything more than a few displays looks overdone. Second, flowers cost a great deal of money and last only a couple days. It is not unusual for families to spend several hundred dollars on flowers and for friends to send flowers valued at many hundreds of dollars. An indication in the newspaper that flowers should not be given is thoroughly appropriate.



Funeral Home

The funeral home can play an important role in coordinating the service, meal, flowers, obituaries, death certificates and the many other aspects involved in death.

MEMORIAL GIFTS

In addition to remembering a person's life, the giving of memorial gifts is a good way to honor a life. Such wishes can be indicated in the newspaper announcement of death.

VISITATION

A period of visitation can be a helpful option to a family and circle of friends. It can be scheduled the day before a burial service or immediately prior to the service. Should there be a reviewal, it should be brief. The value of long parades past an open casket is questionable. Conversation with family and friends is probably best accomplished at a fellowship gathering following the worship service.

The decision to have the body cremated does not preclude a period of reviewal prior to cremation.

THE ROLE OF A POWER OF ATTORNEY

The Power of Attorney handles your financial and legal matters at any time that you are unable to do so during your lifetime.

1. Register at bank as Power of Attorney
2. Gain authorization to sign checks.
3. Gather information on finances (bank accounts, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, etc.)

THE ROLE OF A PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE

The Personal Representative handles your financial and legal matters at the time of death:

1. Obtain death certificate (will be needed for funeral, insurance, stocks and bonds, banks, dissolution of property).
2. Call and inform Social Security Office (1-800-772-1213).
3. Call Pension or retirement holder.
4. Gather insurance policies and inform insurance agents of death.
5. Notify bank and investment holders of death.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

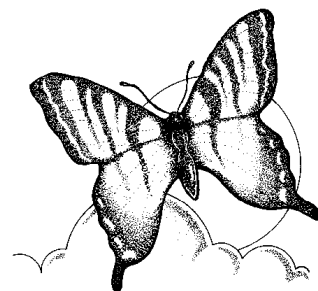
In order to provide a variety of tools to help families talk about death, the following is a partial listing of educational resources.

ADULTS:

- Lament for a Son: Nicolas Wolterstorff
- A Grief Observed: C.S. Lewis
- Mourning and Creativity: George Pollack
- On Death and Dying: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
- Widow: Lynn Caine
- The American Way of Death: Jessica Mitford
- (Video) “Shadowlands” - *story of author C.S. Lewis’ journey from sheltered bachelorhood to the vulnerability of marriage and, ultimately, to widowhood. His vulnerability and suffering causes a radical shift in his understanding of God.*

CHILDREN:

- The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst
- My Grandpa Died Today by Joan Fassler
- Lifetimes by Brian Mellonie and Robert Ingpen
- Always and Forever by Alan Durant
- When a Pet Dies by Fred Rogers
- Grandad’s Prayers of the Earth by Douglas Wood
- I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas



IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

PASTOR AND CHURCH:

Pastor Chris Myers (Church 715-425-2052 / Home 715-426-2075)
First Congregational United Church of Christ
110 North Third Street, River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

ATTORNEY:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

POWER OF ATTORNEY (EXERCISED DURING ONE'S LIFE):

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE (EXERCISED FOLLOWING ONE'S DEATH):

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

MORTICIAN:

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

CEMETERY PLOT LOCATION: _____

SOCIAL SECURITY #: _____

LOCATION OF SAFETY DEPOSIT BOX #: _____

LOCATION OF ACCOUNT(S):

Checking: _____
Savings: _____
Investments: _____

PREFERENCES FOR MEMORIAL/FUNERAL SERVICE:

Hymns: _____
Scripture: _____
Other: _____

DEATH AND BURIAL: A CHECKLIST

PREPARATION

1. **Discuss final wishes** with family members/close friends:
 Burial or Cremation
 Organ Donor
 Funeral Service or Memorial Service
 Mortuary Choice
 Burial Plot
2. **Prepare a Will with an attorney** to designate distribution of your property at the time of death.
3. **Consider a Power of Attorney** to designate someone to administer financial/legal matters during your lifetime.
4. **Discuss Living Will or Health Care Power of Attorney with family members** (for medical decisions during lifetime).
5. **Notify private physician of Living Will or Health Care Power of Attorney**, to be placed in your medical records.

WHEN DEATH OCCURS

1. **Call Pastor Chris Myers (425-2052 church/426-2075 home).**
2. If death occurs at home, **call designated mortician for removal of body.** (At hospital or nursing home, this is done by staff.)
3. **Call appropriate family members;** perhaps inquire as to scheduling issues for funeral/memorial.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR BURIAL/MEMORIAL SERVICE

1. **Meet with Pastor Myers** to plan funeral/memorial service (select hymns, solos, scriptures).
2. **Decide upon place and time for service:** First Congregational United Church of Christ or mortuary.
3. **Visitation** - yes or no.
4. **Supply mortuary with list of surviving relatives** for memorial folder and for newspaper obituary. (Mortuary places obituary in newspaper.)
5. **Decide upon designation for memorial gifts.** It is well to include this information in Newspaper and in service bulletin.

DISPOSAL OF THE BODY

1. Supply mortuary with clothing for the deceased.
2. Advise mortuary as to pre-purchased plot, grave maker, urn.