
Funeral Planning Guide and Worksheet



St. John's Lutheran Church

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Funeral Planning Guide and Worksheet

Jesus said: “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

John 14:3

Thank you for picking up St. John’s Funeral Planning Guide and Worksheet. This material is designed to:

- provide a tool for planning for the future when your life on this earth ends, and
- support and guide families making plans upon the death of a loved one.

In the first days following a loved one’s death, the family makes an average of 200 decisions. During such an emotional, stressful and demanding time, plans that have been made earlier lighten the load after death.

If you’ve not made advance plans, this guide will be helpful to you as you make arrangements for services and burial of your loved one.

This guide will walk you through a series of questions. Your responses can be marked on the worksheet at the end. The St. John’s Pastors are available to discuss any items with you. When you are finished, please share your worksheet with a family member or friend who will act on your behalf after your death. It would also be helpful to contact a St. John’s Pastor to share your worksheet so that it can be held in safekeeping for the future.

The Goal of the Christian Funeral Service

The gathering of family and friends, who form a community of hope for a funeral or memorial service, is a rich opportunity to recall the promises of God through Christ. Because of His suffering, death, and resurrection to new life, each time we gather to worship upon the death of a loved one, we do so in the context of God’s promise. Every funeral includes praising God in Christ who is our hope and our salvation, even as we remember the deceased and give thanks to God for the time shared with that person.

Lutheran Christians believe in Jesus Christ whose bodily death and resurrection made possible life everlasting. Christians view death as another step in our life as children of God. Yet, Christians also experience death as a time of loss when sorrow, grief, and bereavement are both natural and appropriate. These two truths inform the Christian funeral service and guide the church in its ministry to those who have lost a loved one to death, affirming with both joy and tears the promise and hope of the Good News of Jesus.

A funeral or memorial service should be comforting to those who mourn as well as bear witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. The concern of gathered friends does minister to our grief but, above all else, a funeral is a service of worship to God. There, in God’s presence together, we witness to our faith in the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life ever-lasting. In doing so, the assurance of God’s love and salvation in Christ become a ministry, especially to the bereaved. Since a funeral is a service of worship, all that takes place should be consistent with this principle.

Planning Faithfully, Choosing Wisely

What is the difference between a funeral and memorial service?

Simply put, at a funeral service the body of the deceased is present, whereas at a memorial service either the deceased's ashes or no remains are present. Both services provide an opportunity to proclaim God's death defeating acts in Christ as we remember all that God has given us in the life of our loved one.

How does the Church view cremation?

Cremation is an acceptable way for Christians to deal with one's earthly remains. The Scriptures tell us that we are formed "of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7) and, after death, we shall return "again to dust." (Job 34:15)

If I choose cremation, do I need to secure the services of a Funeral Director?

We highly recommend working with a Funeral Director. This professional will ease the strain upon family members by coordinating all the details and thus contributing to your wishes being carried out with dignity and honor. Even if cremation is your desire, a Funeral Director handles many details that are not taken care of by the church, the Pastor, or family members. Attempting to save money by not using a Funeral Director is likely to cause confusion and frustration at a time when you most need guidance and support.

Should I make pre-arrangements with a Funeral Director?

Making the decision to pre-arrange some aspects of your funeral and/or burial is helpful. An appointment with a Funeral Director in advance of death is a wise step to help you decide what you and your family need from the many services available. If you are a family member caring for a dying loved one, making an initial contact now with a Funeral Director can be very helpful and will lessen the decisions and demands you'll face upon death.

How soon after death does a funeral or memorial service take place?

Funeral services are generally held within three to five days following death, thereby allowing appropriate time for family members and friends to gather for the service. Memorial services can be held at any time. However, waiting for weeks or even months after a death will have a bearing on finding a sense of closure, and this will impact the grief work that follows the death of a loved one. Therefore, it is recommended that a memorial service be held within a few weeks after death.

If a funeral or memorial service is to be followed by a burial that same day, the schedule of the cemetery workers dictates that burials be held during normal business hours for city cemeteries. Surcharges apply for weekend burials, and burials are not available on holidays.

Funeral or memorial services on Sunday are highly discouraged, as Sundays are reserved for the worship services of the congregation.

What fees are associated with a funeral or memorial service at St. John's?

There are fees for the people involved in providing the worship service as well as those who prepare and clean up following the service and reception. A fee schedule is available from the church office and area Funeral Directors. Payment of these fees are coordinated through the Funeral Director.

Who makes arrangements for the musician(s)?

St. John's Director of Music will arrange for the pianist or organist for all funerals, when available. A vocalist may be selected by you or your family, or the vocalist can be arranged by St. John's or the Funeral Director.

May we have a visitation at the church the evening before the service, or must that take place at a funeral home?

The visitation may take place at St. John's the afternoon or evening before the service if there are no other events already scheduled in our Worship Space and Gathering Area. In addition, a visitation time is typically offered at the church prior to the service.

Who is responsible for producing the order of worship and bulletin?

After the service has been planned with the Pastor, the church office will produce the bulletin at no cost to your family.

Who is responsible for submitting the death notice and obituary to the newspaper?

The Funeral Director will take care of this for you. A simple death notice is printed in the Leader Telegram shortly after death at no cost to you. A full obituary normally appears 2-3 days before the visitation and funeral. Notices to other newspapers can also be handled by the Funeral Director at your request.

Who plans the reception following the funeral or memorial service?

When plans are being made for the funeral following death, the Funeral Director will work with the St. John's Women Funeral Coordinators to order food appropriate to the number of people you anticipate attending. We know it is difficult to estimate a number. But we have years of experience at planning these events and, with a few questions, we can assist in that estimate. We assure you that there will be sufficient food and seating for all who choose to attend the reception. Any leftover food is yours to take home, or deliver to agencies in the community that welcome donations (such as Hope Gospel). Payment for the reception food and servers is coordinated through the Funeral Director.

What if I desire to have memorials directed to St. John's or other organizations?

This is an honorable thing to do. St. John's and any other organizations you choose are blessed when memorials are directed to support their ministries and missions. The Funeral Director will be happy to include any memorial designation(s) in the notices about the funeral service.

FUNERAL PLANNING WORKSHEET

When planning your funeral or a funeral for a loved one, there are many choices to make. Facing some of those choices now will make the process less demanding for your loved ones later. This Funeral Planning Worksheet will lead you through a variety of decisions. After death, a Pastor of St. John's will meet with family members and review your worksheet to form the funeral or memorial service.

This worksheet may be used by:

- an individual making their advance plans known, or
- a family planning the funeral of a loved one nearing death or recently deceased.

Please supply as much information as you wish to share on any parts of the worksheet.

Guide for the Christian Funeral of _____

Full Name: First, Middle (Maiden), Last

Date Completed: _____

For the Person Making Advance Plans:

When you have completed this worksheet, please consider sharing it with a St. John's Pastor. Your information will be kept in a confidential file available only to the Pastors of St. John's. It will be used in consultation with your family or whomever you have directed to carry out these wishes upon your death.

Also, after completing the worksheet, consider telling someone you trust about it. You may wish to discuss with them what you have written to be certain that it is clear. Consider providing copies:

1. To your Family
2. Attached to your Five Wishes Booklet and/or your Will or Trust Plan
(see www.agingwithdignity.org/five-wishes.php)

3. To a Funeral Director

Or simply give it to someone you trust with a note that says,

*I have recorded my desires regarding my death and burial. I keep this information in the following place: _____ (i.e. on file at the church, with my will, etc.). At the time of my death, I ask that you use this information to provide guidance for my family and my church in making arrangements for the funeral I desire. Although this information is being left for safekeeping, I understand that it is not legally binding or enforceable. This worksheet does not make the church or anyone obligated or responsible for the execution of these instructions. With gratitude,
Signature and Date*

For Family Members Making Plans for the Funeral of a Loved One Nearing Death or Recently Deceased:

Please use this worksheet to assist with plans that will honor your loved one's expressed wishes or desires and will reflect his/her values. If you haven't already contacted a Funeral Director, please consider doing so now. The professional services, compassionate care, and guidance they provide will greatly assist you in the days ahead.

When death occurs, please contact the church office at 715-834-9571. Area Funeral Directors also have personal contact information for all the St. John's Pastors and will contact them on your behalf.

Visitation

A Visitation is an informal gathering for friends and family to express sympathy, view photographs/video tribute, etc. You are invited to consider St. John's for the visitation when you work with a professional Funeral Director.

Will a Visitation be Held?

- Yes
 No

Location of Visitation

- At the Funeral Home
 At St. John's Lutheran Church
 Other: _____
-

Will the Remains be Present at the Visitation?

- Coffin with Viewing of Body
 Closed Coffin
 Urn with Photograph next to it
 No Remains Present

Time of the Visitation

- Evening Prior to the Funeral or Memorial Service
 Before the Funeral or Memorial Service Only
 Both

Displays

- Photographic Displays
 Momentos (Awards, Certificates, etc.)
 Bible of the Deceased
 Video Tribute (Usually Produced by the Funeral Home)
 Other: _____
-

Christian Worship Service Plans

Location of Service

- St. John's Lutheran Church
 Funeral Home
 Cemetery (A Graveside Service Only)
 Other: _____ (i.e. Care Facility Chapel, etc.)

Time of the Worship Service

- Morning
 Afternoon
 Evening

Will the Remains be Present at the Worship Service?

- Yes (Coffin or Urn with Ashes)
 No

Display Items to be On or Near the Casket/Urn

_____ Floral Spray and/or additional Flower Bouquets

_____ Bible or Other Symbol of Faith: _____

_____ Photograph

_____ Cross

_____ Flag (*Only Used During Visitation and at Cemetery*)

Please Note: The Funeral Pall will always be used to cover the casket or urn during the worship service.

Favorite Biblical Theme or Image _____

Readers

_____ The Pastor who officiates will read.

_____ I would like this/these person(s) to read at my service: _____

Bible Readings

_____ The Pastor who officiates may choose the readings.

_____ My Family will choose the readings.

_____ I have chosen the readings as indicated below.

Old Testament

Job 19:23–27

Isaiah 40:1–11, 28–31; Isaiah 40:28–31; Isaiah 65:17

Psalms 23; Psalm 46:1–5, 10–11; Psalm 90:1–10, 12; Psalm 121; Psalm 130; Psalm 139:1–12

Gospels

Matthew 5:1–12a

Luke 23:33, 39–43

John 11:17–27

John 14:1–6, 25–27

New Testament

Romans 8:14–23, 31–39

Romans 14:7–9, 10b–12

1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 35–38, 42–44, 50, 53–58

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:1

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Revelation 21:1–4, 22–25, 22:3–5

Revelation 22:1–5

Other Readings Selected: _____

Congregational Hymns

- The Pastor who officiates may choose the hymns.
- My family will choose the hymns.
- I have chosen the hymns as indicated below.

Suggested Hymns

- “Beautiful Savior”
- “Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer”
- “I Know That My Redeemer Lives!”
- “Love Divine All Loves Excelling”
- “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”
- “For All the Saints”
- “The King of Love My Shepherd Is”
- “Lift High the Cross”
- “The Lord's My Shepherd”
- “Lord Take My Hand and Lead Me”
- “A Mighty Fortress”
- “My Faith Looks up to Thee”
- “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”
- “Amazing Grace”
- “How Great Thou Art”
- “This Is My Father's World”
- “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Other Hymns Selected: _____

Soloist

If possible, I would like this vocalist to sing: _____

Vocal Solos Selected (*Selection of solos must aim to reflect the spirit of Christian worship.*)

Remembrances to be Shared during Worship by a Family Member or a Friend

- Yes
- No

I would like this person to speak: _____

Reception Following Worship

I would like a reception following the service for mutual conversation and consolation.

- Yes
- No

I would like the Reception

- Immediately Following the Worship Service; Before Burial
- Following the Worship Service and After Burial

Location for the Reception

- St. John's Lutheran Church
- Other Location: _____

Funeral Home

Preferred Company _____
(Specific arrangements in advance at the funeral home of your choice are encouraged.)

Have Pre-Arrangements Been Made?

- Yes
- No

Disposition of the Body

- Embalm Body *(Usually required if unrefrigerated over 24 hours before burial.)*
- Cremate Body Shortly After Death
- Cremate Body After Visitation and/or Service

Burial Wishes

- Bury Coffin/Urn in Cemetery
- Other: _____
(This might include keeping ashes with a family member, spreading ashes at a favorite spot, etc)

Bury Coffin or Urn

- Before Visitation
- After Visitation but Before Funeral Service
- After Funeral Service but Before Luncheon Reception
- After Luncheon Reception
- At a Later Date: _____

Grave Marker

I have made arrangements for a grave marker with this company: _____

I would like the following to be included on the grave marker:

- Name: _____
- Dates: (birth/death dates) _____
- Maiden Name: _____
- Bible Verse: _____
- Graphic: _____
- Other: _____

Eligible for Military Honors

Yes
 No

Names of Pall Bearers *(Six Pall Bearers needed only when there is a coffin for burial.)*

Cemetery

I have made arrangements for my burial.

Name of Cemetery _____

Location of Cemetery _____

I do not have arrangements for my burial. I suggest the following arrangements:

I have arrangements for a memorial marker with the following company:

(Include Contact Information)

Desired Expressions of Sympathy

Flowers

I desire Memorial Gifts in lieu of Flowers

Memorial Suggestions

St. John's Lutheran Church Fountain of Life Fund

This fund promotes active participation by congregational members or ministries in an outreach mission in the name of St. John's Lutheran Church.

St. John's Lutheran Church Endowment Fund

Five percent of the balance of this fund is used for outreach ministry. Some past recipients are: St. John's Christian Preschool, St. John's Youth Mission Trip, St. John's TV/Radio Ministry, Chippewa Valley Free Medical Clinic, Sojourner House, Luther Park Bible Camp, and Lutheran Mideast Development.

Specific Mission or Ministry: _____

Ideas include: TV/Radio Ministry, Capital Improvements, Weekend Kids' Meals, Hunger Concerns, St. John's Christian Preschool

Other: _____

Obituary

Full Name *(including Maiden Name)* _____

Birth Date and Location _____

Parent's Names *(including Mother's Maiden Name)* _____

Baptism Date, Church, and Location _____

Confirmation Date, Church, and Location _____

Marital Status, Marriage Date, and Name of Spouse _____

Other Marriages/Divorces/Spouse(s) _____

Names of Children _____

Additional Next of Kin _____

Personal History

On a separate page, record additional information including place(s) of residence, special events, hobbies/interests, schools attended and degrees received, accomplishments, memberships, employment history, volunteer activities, military service, etc. Include as many full names, city of residence, birth and death dates, etc. as possible. All this information is important to your family.

This information does not need to be prepared in paragraph form.

Important Documents and Advisors

It is important that survivors be able to locate vital records and important documents. Before your death, you should have a current will/living trust and related health care directives which express your wishes on important personal, financial, medical, and charitable issues for your survivors. If you need information regarding estate planning, planned giving, and/or the inclusion of a Christian preamble for your will, please consult your legal or financial advisor.

Location and Date of Will/Living Trust _____

Location of my Five Wishes Booklet or Living Will _____

Attorney/Will Preparer _____

Power of Attorney/Financial _____

Power of Attorney for Health Care _____

Executor of Will/Estate _____

Guardian (for Minor Children) _____

Additional Comments



St. John's Lutheran Church is a people formed in the waters of Christian baptism to be a ***fountain of life*** for all who gather here, overflowing into a ***river of compassion*** for the world.

St. John's Lutheran Church
A Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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