

FUNERAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR ST. MARK LUTHERAN CHURCH
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

"Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8)

A Brief Theology of Lutheran Funerals

Funerals and memorials are an opportunity to celebrate the life of the deceased. Services at St. Mark may be conducted for members of the congregation and any others for whom the pastor decides a funeral or memorial would be appropriate.

The funeral service is an occasion for thanksgiving and proclamation of the hope of the resurrection of the dead. We are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we confess in our creeds that we believe in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus Christ, in his resurrection from the dead on Easter, prepares the way to life for all who die in him. The funeral service in the Lutheran church is centered in the proclamation of this good news. This service, therefore, is a service of worship and of thanksgiving to God both for the life of the deceased and for the promise of resurrection.

A funeral service held in the church is a service of worship, celebrating the deceased's life and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Consequently, all parts of the service are to be consistent with the present worship practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and St. Mark Lutheran Church.

Although funeral services may be held in funeral homes, the preferred place for conducting a funeral is in the sanctuary of the church to which he or she belonged. At such times of loss, even the place of service may remind us of what our hope and assurance are in Jesus Christ.

There can be alternative methods for the conducting of services at the time of death. These could include a private graveside service for family members as soon after death as possible and/or a public service of worship (memorial service) conducted at the church later.

Support to the Bereaved

The pastor will discuss with the family how St. Mark can best minister to them in their time of loss and grief. Optional support includes, but is not limited to, hospitality and refreshments following the service, printed bulletins, memorial cards, and a separate visitation and viewing.

The pastor is available to go with the family to the funeral home to assist in making arrangements if desired.

The pastor will be happy to meet with the family to plan the funeral worship service and any arrangements or, if it is the desire of the family, the pastor will develop the funeral liturgy.

Funeral Practices at St. Mark

Who Will Officiate?

Pastoral ethics require that the pastor of St. Mark conduct all funeral services held at St. Mark, unless by agreement with another pastor, he/she is invited to share in the funeral service. By the request of the family and the approval of the pastor, visiting clergy may assist in the service. The Worship Assistant Team will arrange for an acolyte/crucifer and other service helpers as needed. Conducting funerals for people who have no connection with the church is a normal part of the ministerial obligation.

Holy Communion During the Funeral Service

The celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, shared in community around the familiar center of the table, is full of healing power for those who grieve. This sacrament is the gracious sign of the completion of baptism, the foretaste of the heavenly banquet, and the anticipation of all the faithful reunited before God and Christ, the Lamb of God. Therefore, it is appropriate to share Holy Communion as part of the funeral service. All those gathered for the service will be invited to the Table.

Funeral Music Arrangements

Normally, the Director of Music at St. Mark will play at all funerals in the church, as he/she is familiar with the instrument. If the Director of Music is unavailable for the service, she/he will make a reasonable effort to provide a suitable replacement. In cases where an outside Director of Music is desired, permission must be secured from the pastor and the Director of Music. Additional musicians or soloists may be utilized.

Music performed at a service of Christian burial is understood as an act of worship, offered to God in devotion, thanksgiving and praise. Therefore, all music used during the funeral service (including prelude and postlude) must be sacred in nature and approved by the pastor and the Director of Music. The pastor will consult with the family regarding special music to be used during the service.

The Use of the Pall

The congregation will provide a white funeral pall to be placed over the casket during the service. The pall recalls the white robe given in Baptism, the robe of Christ's righteousness. The pall further has democratizing value, for in Heaven all stand equally with Christ. This action of placing the pall over the coffin will take place prior to the liturgy. The pall will be the only thing covering the casket while in the church building.

Services by Fraternal Orders, Lodges etc.

Services by fraternal orders, lodges, veterans groups or other organizations are not appropriate at a Lutheran funeral service. If they are held, they should be limited to the funeral home or graveside, and must be coordinated with the pastor prior to the service. Such services are not to be confused or combined with the burial office and committal. If there is a graveside committal, military honors should appropriately be rendered there, following the committal.

Decorations in the Sanctuary and Nartex

Parameters on the altar, lectern and pulpit will remain the color of the day or season.

Families may wish to display the deceased's cremains, as well as certain mementos or pictures of the deceased and his/her family. The following guidelines would be applicable in these situations:

- * Any displays or pictures must be appropriate to a worship setting.
- * No nails, tacks, staples or screws shall be put in the walls or attached to the pews.
- * All decorations should be removed within 12 hours of the conclusion of the service.
- * No furniture shall be removed from the church building.

Flowers

If fresh cut flowers are not provided for the altar, the silk flower arrangements of the church will be used. Flowers and planters may be used elsewhere in the sanctuary and nartex. Flowers arrangements can be left in the sanctuary if pre arranged with the church office.

Closed Casket

All caskets must be closed for the burial service, but may be open during the viewing (or preceding the viewing, for the family only), if desired. When closed, the church pall covers the casket. The coffin remains closed throughout the service. When the service is in a funeral parlor or private house, the coffin is closed and in place before the liturgy begins. The funeral director shall be instructed by the Pastor about such matters as timing, closed caskets, music, flowers, etc.

A visitation and viewing may be held in the narthex of the church, on either the day of or the day before the service. The fellowship hall will be available to the family and their guests.

The coffin is to be placed in the position with the feet toward the altar. The position reflects the accustomed role of the deceased in the church -- facing the altar as part of the congregation.

Parking / Traffic Assistance

Parking assistance is generally provided by the funeral home. The church does not have any resources to assist in traffic control on city streets or highways.

Family Fellowship Meal

When available, the church will do everything possible to accommodate requests for a family fellowship following a funeral service. The care team at St. Mark will prepare some refreshments if needed. If the family wishes to provide its own food, the Fellowship Hall or Nartex may be used with prior approval from the pastor.

Bulletins

If bulletins are to be given out during the service, they will be prepared by the church office.

Memorials / Trust Funds

In certain circumstances, the family might request a trust fund or contribution to a charitable organization in lieu of flowers. These arrangements must be made with an organization outside the church. The church will not manage, receive or distribute designated funds for an outside institution.

Undesignated funds will be received by St. Mark as part of the St. Mark Memorial Fund.

If you wish to designate funds to a special ministry or need of St. Mark please speak to the pastor about your wishes and the funds will be accepted upon council's approval.

Fees

If the deceased or a member of their immediate family is a member of St. Mark, there is no fee for the use of the facilities. For all other individuals, an honorarium for the service, music and janitorial work is appropriate.