

McClure United Church

Death, Dying and Christian Burial



Guidelines for those under Pastoral Care
at McClure United Church, Edmonton, AB

**Prepared by McClure United Church
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Our Christian faith teaches us to have great hope in life, and in the hope of eternal life. In spite of this teaching death is still not a pleasant subject to discuss. But death is a fact of life even with the influence of our culture which frequently tries to deny death or suppress its reality.

In our effort to minister to the people of McClure, we have prepared some guidelines for your consideration. It is our hope that you will discuss them with your family, make your decisions known by recording them in print and storing these where they will be discussed at your death.

(A) CONCERNING CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DEATH

As Christians, we need to talk more openly about the meaning of death and resurrection using the Scriptures and Christian tradition as our guide. The following comments by Rev. Lynette Miller in the September 1987 "TOUCHSTONE" journal remind us of the important role our faith plays in our belief about death.

"The Things of Heaven and The Praise of God"

The time when Christians have something real and true to say is the time of death, for we do not grieve as those who have no hope, but as those whose hope is grounded in Jesus Christ. So it is that we do not need the words used so frequently by the rest of our society: words like "passed on", "passed away", "lost" or "gone". We do not need them because it is the truth that sets us free, and the truth is found in the word "dead". We are the people who can say the word "dead" because we can deal with the reality of death.

Death really is the end, the finish of the life we know. It is a genuine ending. Whatever the Christian belief in life after death means depends on that ending being final. The next life is not just a continuation of this one. It is not an expression of the Christian faith to say that we have fallen asleep only to wake in another better place. We are not caterpillars on our way to becoming butterflies. We do not move beyond the sight of our loved ones in-death to continue our life on a different plane. We are not at all like a rose, growing just the same, but on

the other side of the wall. We do not pass through a gate into a nice garden. We die. Our life ends.

What comes after is not resuscitation. It is not re-creation. It is resurrection. Since we are not resuscitated, we do not regard the dead as having the same kind of life as the living. There is more going on here than mere re-location to another place. Our dead then are not simply putting in time somewhere while they wait for us to die and join them so everything can be like it was before. They are concerned with the things of heaven and the praise of God.

Since we are not recreated, we do not shrug off the disposal of the body as a matter of little consequence. It is part of us. It is the body God will resurrect. It is as good and worthy in death as in life. The promise Paul articulates in I Cor. 15 is that there is an earthly body and a heavenly body. The work of God is to transform the earthly body into the heavenly.

What Christians are expecting is resurrection: a life transformed like the life of Christ. Because we are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, we will find in our death the consequence of his death. Our baptism, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, our death, and our sharing in his resurrection are events tied together by the ordering of the universe and the grace of God.

Understanding the faith is only a first step in the process. It is another undertaking to separate those things which express the faith from those which are offered to us by the funeral industry or by Hollywood. This is a task more easily accomplished in an ordinary time when we and our close ones are well than when we are in fresh grief.

(B) BEFORE DEATH TAKES PLACE

(1) At every stage in our life we should ponder the meaning of our lives on this earth and what it means to die. We should do this personally within the community of faith and with our close family members. The church offers opportunity for this in worship, in study, in conversation with one another, and with the minister. As we promise to support one another in our baptismal vows, so should we support one another in times of trial and tribulation. A selection of scripture passages about life, death and dying is available at the end of this booklet. We invite you to reflect on them as you ponder the meaning of

life, death and resurrection in your faith journey.

(2) We should also have a will, a personal directive and a power of attorney, and ensure that they are kept up-to-date.

(3) We should also have some guidelines or make some decisions regarding our funeral and burial plans. These should be discussed with all members of our family.

(C) IN SICKNESS AND IN DYING

When members of our community or church family are sick – we seek to be supportive of the family. Often it is those who are sick, dying or suffering who communicate a depth of faith to the rest of the community of faith. Therefore, we hope that in these circumstances the Minister and/or members of the Pastoral Care Committee of McClure will be informed and called to visit in the hospital or home. Please do not hesitate to call the Minister at any hour of the day or night. The Minister is also more than willing to administer the Sacrament of Communion to the sick.

(D) WHEN DEATH TAKES PLACE

(1) One of the first persons to call is the Minister of the church or some member of the Pastoral Care Committee or church family. The Ministerial staff can be of great help in sharing information, and help in setting the time for the funeral.

(2) Another person to contact quickly is the Funeral Director. The date and time of the funeral should be determined mutually with the Minister, Funeral Director and family. Under no circumstances should the family decide on a date or time without communicating first with the Minister and the Funeral Director.

(E) THE CHRISTIAN BURIAL SERVICE

(1) Ministry of those outside the church:

Many services taken by United Church Ministers will be for people who have little connection with the life of the church. We need not, in fact ought not, say things in the service that assume a Christian profession on the part of the deceased person to which he or she did not profess. Nevertheless, in these circumstances, the service will reflect the Christian leadership of the Minister in it's prayers, music and readings.

(2) Practice and Conduct:

The deepest moments of life from Baptism to Burial should take place before the altar of God. When a Minister conducts a funeral service s/he functions on behalf of the believing community. The believing community has set aside the sanctuary for this purpose and the people of the congregation should be present at funerals as much as possible. This same principle applies to funerals of people who did not belong to the church or attend it.

(3) The Funeral Service Order:

Presently the Minister uses the following Order of Service with some omissions and additions:

- Prelude music
- The Procession of the Minister and the family (the casket has been placed in the church prior to the service unless there has been a viewing. When a viewing has occurred before the service, the Minister precedes the casket and the family will then follow in after the casket)
- Greeting and Words of Welcome
- Opening Prayer
- Music
- Scripture reading
- Music (optional)
- Eulogy and other tributes (including a short life story of the person and/or poem)
- Music (optional)
- Prayers of the People and the Prayer of Jesus
- Music
- Commendation and Sending Forth

Music must be chosen in consultation with the minister and the music director. It may be a hymn, solo, choir anthem (if a choir is present), or other music appropriate to the person and occasion. We encourage the family to have a member read scripture when possible.

The possibility of a power point form of presentation is available, but needs to be prepared by family or friends of the deceased. Arrangements for use of the church's equipment (projector and computer) must be made when the service is being planned.

(4) Cremation:

Cremation is an acceptable practice. The traditional funeral service ends with the burial of the body or ashes.

The Cremated Ashes can be handled in the following ways:

- burial
- scattered at a place that has meaning to the deceased or the family
- interned at Crematoriums
- left with the Funeral Home to dispose of (please discuss this with the funeral home if you are making this choice - they need your signed consent to do this)

The Minister is available to be with the family to read scriptures and prayers when ashes are scattered or interned. The Minister may be able to assist in arranging for another Minister to be present should interment take place at a considerable distance from Edmonton.

(5) Burial:

The traditional funeral concludes with burial (interment) of the body at a cemetery. Where there is burial of ashes or body the worship moves from church to cemetery. At the cemetery there is a brief passage of scripture, the deceased is commended and committed to God, and prayer is offered. This is considered an extension of the service at the church; it is not a separate service. It may be private or public. This will be announced to people attending the funeral and the invitation to come made when it is to be a public time.

(6) Memorial Services:

When the body is not present a funeral service is called a "Memorial Service. At a Memorial Service it is appropriate to use a table on the lower platform to place a picture of the deceased and other meaningful symbols.

(7) The Respect of the Body:

The Body which has been the temple of spirit through life in this world, is worthy of respect and should be so treated after death. However, the Christian Funeral Service commends the departed to God and calls upon the bereaved to lift their thoughts above their concern for the earthly body to a new relationship within the communion of saints.

(8) Viewing of the Body:

It is important that especially family members and those grieving spend some time with the body. Sometimes this is done in a most helpful way in hospital rooms right after death takes place and with the Minister or Chaplain present. Other times this is done when the family and the Minister meet before the funeral.

The United Church of Canada's practise at funerals is that the casket is closed at the funeral service and not opened for public viewing after the service. At McClure there can be a public viewing in the "meeting room" before the funeral if the family wishes.

(9) The Casket and Funeral Pall:

In the Christian interpretation of life a person's worth is not measured by the abundance of the things one possesses. In death a person's worth is not to be calculated by the extravagance of the funeral or even the tombstone. Christian burials ought to be as simple as possible.

The Ancient Custom of the use of a "Funeral Pall" has been approved by the Worship Committee of McClure and is an option for those families who wish to use it. A Pall is a suitable cloth which is placed over the casket before it is brought into the sanctuary. It has appropriate Christian symbols on it reflecting our faith. There is no need of a casket spray, but the family flowers can be placed in a bouquet on a stand near the casket.

The Pall will be removed before the burial.

(10) Flowers:

Flowers are a source of comfort to many people, but an over abundance may not be either helpful or in good taste either at the church or when sent to the home. Sympathy and support can be expressed to the family by:

- a visit (especially in the weeks after the funeral)
- offering to help with tasks and responsibilities at the funeral or after
- making a contribution to the church or some charity

(11) Memorial Gifts to McClure - The Memorial Fund:

Money given to this fund is designated and administered by the Official Board of McClure United Church.

(12) Legion, Eastern Star, Masons and other groups

Frequently the deceased has been an active member of groups that wish to pay their respects by conducting a brief memorial as part of the worship service. This is normally done toward the end of the service at the church, or at the cemetery. It is important that families inform the minister and funeral home of this participation in the service. Such groups will be accommodated as best as they can. They need to provide their own materials (e.g.; poppies, cedar twigs, etc.) and speak with the minister when they arrive at the location of the service.

(F) MISCELLANEOUS SUGGESTIONS

(1) Children and Funerals:

It is most advisable to take children to funerals at a very young age especially if the deceased person has been very close to the child. The child is most helped spiritually and psychologically when everyone around the child openly discusses death and the funeral service with the child. The child may wish to bring a favourite “Teddy Bear” or “doll” to hold during the funeral service. If a child is having a particularly difficult time, or is simply uncomfortable or bored they may be taken to the “meeting room” where the service can be enjoyed through windows and speakers.

(2) Family Seating at Funerals:

The family members are encouraged to sit in the front pews of the church or chapel rather than in a separate “family room”. They are properly members of the congregation and belong in it as full participants in the liturgy. Traditionally they remain seated throughout the service, although are welcome to stand as they wish for hymns, blessings and at other times when the congregation is invited to stand. The congregation is always present to love and support them.

(G) CHURCH FEES

McClure United Church will invoice you the fees associated with a funeral or memorial service that is either held at McClure or that our Minister officiates at.

The fees will cover the costs associated with the following:

- the Officiating Minister
- the Organist
- the Caretaker
- the Church
- use of the Projector
- printing of Bulletins

Extra fees will be charged for the following:

- Rental of the lower hall
- Funeral Luncheon - if catered by our Funeral Lunch Committee

We request that the invoice be paid in full about one week following the funeral or memorial service.

If family of a member or non-member wishes to contribute to the Church, we invite you to make a gift of a monetary donation to the McClure United Church Memorial Fund. This donation is income tax receiptable. Specific memorial gifts are discouraged.

We hope that you have found this document helpful. If you have further questions, please feel free to address them to the Minister or the Administrative Secretary at your convenience.

To regard grief as somehow unworthy of a Christian who believes in the resurrection is to forget the example of Christ who was so often "moved to compassion," who wept at his loss of Lazarus and prayed the longer in his agony. We cannot short-circuit human processes; we have to give the experience time to come home to us before it can become a motive for hope and a promise for a fuller life. Grief is only unchristian if it is wholly self-centered or if we never emerge from it. - Marias Boulding, Prayer: Our Journey Home - (used with permission Editor Clips Feb 03)

Miss Me-But Let Me Go

*When I come to the end of the road
And the sun has set for me*

*I want no rites in a gloom-filled room
Why cry for a soul set free?*

*Miss me a little, but not too long
And not with your head bowed low*

*Remember the love that we once shared
Miss me-but let me go.*

*For this is a journey we all must take
And each must go alone.*

*It's all a part of the Master's plan
A step on the road to home.*

*When you are lonely and sick of heart
Go to the friends we know*

*And bury your sorrow in doing good deeds
Miss me- but let me go.*

Author Unknown

SCRIPTURE SUGGESTIONS FOR FUNERAL OR MEMORIAL SERVICES

Job 19:1, 21-27a

Proverbs 31:10-31

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Isaiah 25:6-9

Isaiah 40:1-11

Isaiah 46:3-10

Isaiah 61:1-3

Lamentations 3:17-26, 31-33

Daniel 12:1-3

Hosea 6:1-3

Micah 6:6-8

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-6 (7-9)

Psalm 23

Psalm 27

Psalm 42

Psalm 46

Psalm 71

Psalm 90

Psalm 95

Psalm 98

Psalm 103

Psalm 107

Psalm 116

Psalm 121

Psalm 130

Psalm 139

Matthew 5:1-10

Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 11 :25-30

I know that my redeemer lives

A strong woman

For everything there is a season

He will swallow up death forever

Comfort, O comfort my people

I will carry and I will save

To comfort all who mourn

God's steadfast love never ceases

Everyone found written in the book

Come, let us return to the Lord

Do justice, love kindness...

Souls of righteous in God's hand

The Lord is my Shepherd

The Lord is my light

As a deer longs for flowing streams

God is our refuge and strength

In you, O Lord, I take refuge

Lord, you have been our dwelling place

O come, let us sing to the Lord

O sing to the Lord a new song

Bless the Lord, O my soul

Some went down to the sea in ships

I love the Lord, who heard my voice

I lift up my eyes to the hills

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord

O Lord, you have searched me

Blessed are those who mourn

Do not worry about tomorrow

Come to me... and I will give you rest

Matthew 18:1-5
Matthew 25:31-40
Mark 9:2-8
Mark 15:33-39; 16:1-7
Luke 23:39-56
Luke 24:13-16,28-35
John 3:1-16
John 5:24-27
John 6:35-40
John 11 :21-26a
John 11 :32-39a, 41-44
John 12:20-26
John 14:1-6,18-19,25-27
John 20:1-9
Acts 10:34-43
Romans 5:1-11
Romans 6:3-9
Romans 8:9-11
Romans 8:18-23
Romans 8:26, 28, 31-33, 35,37-39
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
1 Corinthians 15:20-27a
1 Corinthians 15:35-49
1 Corinthians 15:51-57
2 Corinthians 4:7-18
2 Corinthians 5:1-9
Ephesians 2:1-10
Ephesians 3:14-21
Philippians 2:5-11
Philippians 3:20-21
Philippians 4:4-9

He called a child
As you did it unto the least
And he was transfigured
He is risen, he is not here
Today you will be with me in Paradise
Known in the breaking of the bread
God so loved the world
Who hears my word, has eternal life
I am the bread of life
I am the resurrection and the life
“Unbind him, and let him go.”
Unless a grain of wheat falls
Do not let your hearts be troubled
The stone had been taken away
God raised him on the third day
Since we are justified by faith
baptized into Christ and his death
He who raised Christ will give life
The sufferings of this present time...
All things work together for good.
If I speak in the tongues of mortals.
In Christ shall all be made alive
How are the dead raised?
Listen. I will tell you a mystery!
The things that are unseen are eternal
We have a building from God
By grace you have been saved
To know the love of Christ
Every knee shall bow
To be like his glorious body
Rejoice in the Lord always

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
2 Timothy 2:8-12a
1 Peter 1 :3-9
1 John 3:1-2
1 John 4:7-18
Revelation 7:13-17
Revelation 21 :1-7
Revelation 22:1-5

So we shall always be with the Lord
Having died with him, we also live with him
We have been born anew to a living hope
We shall be like him
God is love, and those who abide in love
God will wipe away every tear
Behold, I make all things new
They will reign for ever and ever