

CHRISTIAN BURIAL

On Anglican Use and Custom Regarding Christian Burial

"Into Thy Hands, O Lord..."

This material is not only intended to point out certain Christian emphases regarding death and burial, but with the prayer that our religion may be to all of us a source of help and strength, especially in a time of bereavement.

Life and Death

"Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept ..."

The chief emphasis of Christian burial should be not upon death but on life eternal. "We praise and glorify God for the fulness of joy which he gives to all who put their trust in him."

All life is a preparation for dying and for eternity, and there is, therefore, the need to be prepared both materially and spiritually. The former includes making provision for one's family – the making of a will in accordance with Christian principles.

A part of our preparation for death as Christians is regular worship and the receiving of the sacraments. Even when age or infirmity or illness come upon us, we can still participate in the worship of the Church through the priestly ministrations of our clergy.

Sickness and Emergency

As the Book of Common Prayer directs, it is the responsibility of the family to call the rector in circumstances of sickness, emergency and death.

Funeral Arrangements

In the making of funeral arrangements, we are reminded as Christians of the simplicity of our Lord's own burial, and that extravagant expenditures at the time of death are not a valid indication of our love and concern for the deceased, but in many cases an unnecessary burden on the bereaved. Any undue concern about the body is a worldly and pagan emphasis, not a Christian one. The Christian's emphasis should be Godward: the lifting of our hearts in prayer, the commending of ourselves and those we love to the care of God, and the conduct of rite and custom in simplicity with dignity.

The priest should be consulted BEFORE arrangements are made for the funeral. Permission must also be obtained to use the burial ground and if a church building in another parish is desired.

The Family Corporate Communion

Church families are encouraged to take part in a service of Holy Communion in the parish church at the time of bereavement, with the Burial Office, or as soon afterwards as possible. The Anglican tradition of a family corporate Communion should be more commonly observed.

Family Prayers at Home

On the day of the funeral, if family prayers are requested where the coffin is present, the coffin should be closed prior to the prayers.

The Funeral Service

The proper place for the funeral service is the parish church, or one of the church buildings of the parish. The Office of Burial is an ancient service of the Church, and the same service continues to be used for rich and poor alike. It is an expression of our oneness in Christ and our corporate life, as of those who have already known and shared the eternal life which God has given and will give.

A Funeral Pall

In keeping with the thought of the equality of people under God, it is an ancient custom of the Church to cover the coffin with a funeral pall for the service in the church. In any case the coffin should be closed before the service.

(Directions for making an appropriate and inexpensive pall may be obtained from the Sanctuary Guild, Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton)

Participation in the Funeral Service

The Funeral Service is the congregational form of prayer appropriate to the death of a member of the flock. The whole congregation, including the relatives of the deceased and the pallbearers, should stand for the Sentences and join in the Psalm, the Creed, lesson(s), hymns, and prayers, as at any other form of worship.

Choice of Hymns

The hymns should be chosen from authorized hymn books and in consultation with the minister. They should witness to the Christian belief in life everlasting.

Flowers and Memorials

It is recommended that only the immediate family send flowers, and it is suggested that opportunities be given for friends to make donations to some church purpose or charitable fund, in memory of the deceased. It is suggested that the Rector be consulted.

Flowers at the Funeral

It is recommended that the flowers brought into the church building be limited to those used at the altar and two or three floral-pieces from the immediate family. Flowers should not be placed on the pall.

Sunday Funerals

Sunday funerals are not a custom of the Church as this is the Church's festal day of worship.

At the Committal

The coffin should be lowered fully into the grave at the beginning of the service at the graveside. Earth shall be cast on the coffin.

Cremation

In cases of cremation, the ashes may be committed to the ground by the parish priest.

At the cremation the following words are used: "Forasmuch ... we commit his body to be cremated in sure and certain hope, etc." At the burial of the ashes, the following words are used: "Forasmuch ... we commit his/her ashes to their resting place in sure and certain hope, etc.".

Additional Ceremonies

The Burial Office of the Church is complete in itself. If the family desire the rites of any fraternal society to which the deceased belonged, it is recommended that such rites take place apart from the Burial Service of the Church, preferably the evening before in the home, or funeral home. After the final blessing at the grave is also permissible.

Tombstones

It is suggested that tombstones be moderate in size and simple in design, and of a character that symbolizes our Christian hope in the cross of Christ.

Issued 1970
Reissued September 2023