



**Grace Presbyterian Church**  
**5500 Mansfield Road**  
**Arlington, TX 76017**  
**(817) 468-0868**

## **FUNERAL/MEMORIAL SERVICE POLICY**

The funeral service is a congregational act of worship, helping mourning Christians to find a new confidence in Christ's victory over death. Ministering to the gathered family of God, the service comforts and strengthens us and helps us to accept the reality of death.

One of the most valuable services the church provides its members at the time of death is that of pastoral counseling. The Pastor should be contacted immediately when a death occurs, for he/she is uniquely equipped to give those Christian services which the bereaved family needs. The Pastor is able to discuss with compassion and with objectivity those matters on which the family needs to make important decisions; therefore, it is strongly advised that the Pastor accompany the family to the funeral home prior to making arrangements.

The Funeral Liaison should also be immediately contacted when a death occurs. The Funeral Liaison or his alternative, the Worship Ministry moderator or Session Liaison, will assist the family and coordinate arrangements for the funeral at the church. The Liaison will ensure that the Pastoral Care Moderator or Session Liaison is notified about the death and the desires of the family with regard to a reception or meal at the church or at the home.

The Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (GPC) shall perform all funerals/memorial services that take place in our facility. Only under special and unusual circumstances, or if no GPC Pastor is available, will another Pastor be allowed to perform a funeral/memorial service in our church. If another Pastor is to perform the service he or she shall be invited by the Pastor and the Session of GPC. If appropriate and desired by the family, another pastor may be invited by the Pastor and the Session to share in the leadership of the worship service.

The funeral service is a witness of God's love given to all people, a love which strengthens and supports even in the midst of grief. It is a witness to God's promises in Jesus Christ, as attested by Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to the certain hope that Christ has gone to prepare a place for the children of God. Emphasis is placed upon reading of scripture for the declaration of the Christian hope. Scripture readings should be chosen that are appropriate to the life of the person who has died, using selections from both the Old and New Testaments, concluding ordinarily with a passage from the Gospels. Thanksgiving is offered for the God-given life of the one who has died as well as intercession for family members and other loved ones who grieve.

# **GUIDELINES CONCERNING THE FUNERAL SERVICE**

## **NOTIFICATION OF SERVICE**

When a church member passes away, the Clerk of Session will initiate the Congregational Calling Tree to notify church members of service time and place.

## **PLACE OF SERVICE**

In keeping with the emphasis on this service as an act of corporate worship, it is recommended that the service be held in the church sanctuary, rather than the funeral home. The church should lead the way to a more meaningful expression of Christian worship and witness at the time of death. The church is where all of our worship centers, and all events in the Christian life are celebrated (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Marriage, and Ordination).

The Funeral Liaison will ensure that all arrangements are coordinated for the funeral and will ensure that the sanctuary is appropriately tidy and ready for the worship service.

## **SUNDAY SERVICES**

Funerals or memorial services may be held on Sundays. The Pastor should be contacted immediately when the death occurs so that suitable times can be arranged for the service in consultation with the funeral director.

## **COMMUNION**

The Lord's Supper may be included as a part of the funeral service. This provides a rich and profound opportunity for consolation and strength, with the communion of the saints a visible reality. Decision about celebrating the Lord's Supper should be made only after consultation with the Pastor and as authorized by the Session. The Lord's Supper in Presbyterian churches is open to the entire community of faith.

## **OTHER RITES**

The desire of the armed services, fraternal or civic organizations to pay tribute through ritual to members when they die is recognized by the church as a valid witness but should be distinct from the religious service. The proper time for such services is at the conclusion of graveside services. The service of worship conducted at the church is considered complete in itself.

## **MEMORIAL GIFTS**

If gifts are made to the church, they are acknowledged, both to the donor and to the family.

## **MUSIC**

Music selected for the funeral service should express the hope of the resurrection. As an expression of common faith, it is not only appropriate, but also encouraged, that those assembled join in the singing of hymns which declare belief in everlasting life. A hymn suited to the liturgical season can assist the congregation to see this service in relation to other services of worship of God.

If recorded music is desired, an operator of the church sound system will be made available. An audio recording may be provided if desired.

## **MEMORIAL SERVICES**

The family may choose to have a memorial service rather than having a funeral service. A worship service without the casket present often lets friends and family concentrate in celebration for the life of the deceased.

## **NURSERY**

A nursery will be available for memorial services upon request at no charge.

## **SERVICE WITH A CASKET PRESENT**

Viewing of the body is not practiced at the time of the funeral. The casket shall be closed in order that the attention of those assembled may be directed to worship.

By long tradition, the most liturgically effective way of bringing the body of the deceased into the sanctuary is in procession, after the congregation has been seated. The usual order is: Pastor, lay participants, pallbearers with the coffin (foot first), and the family (if not previously seated). As the procession moves forward, a psalm or hymn may be sung by the congregation, or the Pastor may say scriptural verses (e.g. Romans 6:3-5). The closed coffin should be placed in a position perpendicular to the communion table, rather than crosswise, so that attention will be drawn to the cross and the worship service, rather than to the coffin itself.

## **RECEPTION**

If the family desires a meal at the church after the service, the Funeral Liaison should be so notified. The Funeral Liaison will notify the Pastoral Care Moderator or Session Liaison who will coordinate preparation, service and clean-up of the meal. If the family desires a meal at the home, the Funeral Liaison will so notify Pastoral Care.

Revised March 2008

Date of Session Approval \_\_\_\_\_