

Guidelines for Funeral Ministry

Practical guidelines for ministers on how to conduct a funeral.



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INTRODUCTION

When I retired in 2007 a newly ordained minister, Gareth Shepherd, came to serve the church where I continued to worship. I copied to him the "Funeral Folder" on my computer. This has about 50 templates for funerals to be conducted for people in different circumstances. For example, one family may have watched their child die, whilst another person may be mourning the death of a parent. I also passed on some guidelines and a template which can be used when there are no obvious exceptional circumstances. Gareth has found these very helpful and for some time has been urging me to make this resource more widely available. I was somewhat reluctant because I had promised myself I would not write about funerals again having written a thesis on the subject of funerals for a PhD in 1994 (*"Pastoral Implications Of A Postmodern Theological Perspective For Christian Funeral Services And Associated Pastoral Care"*). But nearly twenty years on I have actually enjoyed producing a more practical and very much shorter work. As I am still regularly involved in the conduct of funeral services this has also been an opportunity to reflect on what I do.

Please note that everything offered in this work is intended to be a resource which needs to be set in the context of a minister's own pastoral heart, devotional life, and understanding of what it is "to minister". I am a Free Church (Baptist) minister and my experience is predominantly of conducting funeral services with this "hat" on.

The majority of funerals I have conducted over a period of forty-plus years have been at the local crematorium or cemetery chapel at the request of funeral directors. They have needed a minister for people the majority of whom have no direct connection with a church. What follows will reflect that, but I have found the same principles apply when serving members of the church in funerary ministry.

The organist and an attendant at our local crematorium observe anything up to 70 funerals services a week. I asked them what advice they would give to a minister taking their first funeral service. They made two very important points. First, even if the minister is not confident she or he should act in such a way as to inspire confidence in the mourners, "*There is nothing worse than a dithering minister!*" The second point was, "*Keep it simple*". Experienced ministers will know that to achieve something which is both meaningful and simple requires discipline in preparation and presentation - but this provides a sound basis for confidence on the part of the minister. A part of this apparent simplicity is that ministers should give very clear instructions: e.g. "*We are going to sing a hymn. The hymn is 'Great is Thy Faithfulness'. You will find it in the service sheet provided for today. Would you please stand and we'll sing together.*" If what follows should appear complicated for people new to conducting funeral services, the outcome has always been an uncomplicated, but well orchestrated service or ceremony for the congregation.

I have kept in chronological order hard copies of the service details and associated notes of all the funeral services I have conducted for the past thirty-plus years. It also helps to have a list of names and dates on computer for ease of reference. A minister will often be asked to take a second funeral service - or several more - for a family. Notes from previous involvement can be very helpful for the minister, but also at times for the family. For instance, a wife may have given her thoughts about her husband at a previous funeral visit, and now the wife has died. Other family members may not know or remember some of the things which were previously shared with the minister. Of course, a minister will not assume that all relationships previously documented are still accurate, but the basics will be.

As mentioned earlier, I keep templates of services for different situations. For example, a service at the crematorium for a lesbian with no hymns, a service for a husband in church followed by committal at the cemetery, a graveside service for a bachelor, etc. I also keep a number of templates for service sheets so that when families wish to produce their own I can offer them a start and perhaps ensure that the hymns at least have "the right words" as opposed to words downloaded from the internet which can be awful. In addition I keep a file on computer of readings and prayers which may be useful. These are some of the tools of a minister's trade.

Chapter One - WHO IS THE FUNERAL SERVICE FOR?

This may sound an obvious question. But I have attended and heard of funerals where this question has definitely not been asked in any depth; or an answer given which I would consider Christ-like. As a result they have not been helpful occasions or worthy of the name "Christian".

The funeral service is in some senses for the person who has died. It may seem unbelievable now, but for a number of years there were those who tried to deny this in their authorised liturgies. I know of priests who ignore the advice, but The Roman Catholic Church's instruction for priests conducting funeral services is still "*there shall be no eulogy*", though the priest may share how the spirit of God has been evidently at work in the life of the now deceased person. On the other hand priests are encouraged to show proper respect for the corpse, because it has been the temple of the Holy Spirit. I agree with that, but would add that most often the corpse when he or she was alive was loved by those who now mourn. Love is how God's spirit has been seen at its best, not in some theological/Biblical mantras. The mourners will value continuing respect for their loved one: but almost always they will want something said about the life of the person who died, and feel cheated if it is not. But we will come to that later. For now let it be registered that the funeral service would not be happening if someone who was alive had not died. The service is to mark that reality and to offer a life back to God for blessing and redemption

Because the service is for the person who died, their beliefs will often need to be taken into account. Many times I have conducted funerals where the majority in a congregation have not shared the faith or beliefs of the person who died. For example, they may believe in God, but the person who died was an avowed atheist. It is not easy to balance these two factors, but if the service (or "ceremony" as it might sometimes be better described) pretends that the one who died was a believer it will be less than honest. When Jesus said he was the truth I believe that had much to do with being honest. This is demonstrated by his cries of "Woe" when he was confronted by hypocrites. Mourners will share Jesus' sense of anguish if the farewell for their loved one is hypocritical.

Incidentally, the reverse may be true. A believer is often mourned by a predominantly agnostic congregation. The same principle of honesty should be applied, but with deep sensitivity; because the service is not only for the person who died but perhaps even more for those who now mourn. In contemporary Britain the typical funeral congregation will hold a wide range of attitudes toward faith. It is right to try to bear in mind the probable presence of the wider and diverse group of people who will come to pay their respects or to support a family, but I quite deliberately give priority to the thoughts and feelings of those who have been closest to the person who has died. If it is at all possible I will meet with them or speak to them. Then usually by simple enquiries, such as "Would you like any hymns or prayers?" begin to get a feeling of what would be most helpful for them when the service takes place. The service is for those who have been closest to the person who has died.

I believe strongly that I am serving God when I serve my bereaved "neighbour", but there is a separate sense in which the service is "for God". It is an offering to God. Even on those rare occasions when conversations with a family lead to there being no mention of God (For example, "Because that was the dead person's wishes") I will always make it plain that I will be bringing my own unexpressed faith to the ceremony. I have never found that a problem, and some have obviously been relieved that God will at least tacitly be acknowledged. I have been asked by two or three other ministers how I could possibly conduct a funeral for an atheist; and I respect those who feel they cannot. My underlying principle is that God as seen in Jesus, and whose Holy Spirit I am called to breathe in and out, is not a God who domineers and condemns, but a God who loves and serves. Every human being is made in God's image: equally all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. There are no "them" and "us". Funerals more than anything else should remind us that we all lie naked before God and all are in need of God's blessing and redemption. Even if it is only through vicarious ministry, the person who has died is being offered to God the only just judge and gracious saviour of us all. I would very seldom use such "religious" words in a funeral service, but in other ways it would usually be apparent that God as the loving saviour is the backdrop for all that is being done.

In some traditions the service belongs to "the church" and it is primarily for "the church". This often means that the minister tells the bereaved what they can or cannot do on the basis of what "the church" does or does not allow. I am sorry to say that for "the church" one often has to read "the particular minister". Sometimes the minister is honest enough to say "I do not allow that in *my* church". But any minister who pretends to own the church, or own the liturgy, or own anything else which is intended to help people in their search for God's

blessing is subverting the ministry of Jesus Christ. I love the extra-church company which funeral ministry provides. I hope I am a good representative of the church at its best in such ministry, but the funerals are generally speaking "on behalf of" not "for" the church. Of course, when the saints gather in their usual place of worship to bid farewell to a church member who has died, the service will be for the church, because that is who the congregation are - though even here words should be spoken which are intelligible for the "stranger" who may be present (cf.1 Cor.14:16).

A funeral service is usually for the person who has died, for those who need to pay proper respect to a loved one, and for God. In some circumstances it may also be for or on behalf of a church.



Chapter Two - THE PRE-FUNERAL VISIT - SOME GUIDELINES

It will probably be helpful to read this chapter alongside Appendix A.

My assumption is that as a minister you like people. If so, you will highly value the privileged opportunity which funerary ministry gives to meet new people, to be welcomed into their homes and families, to be trusted to serve them professionally and compassionately. I will generally use the term "family" in what follows, but many visits are just to one person, the partner, parent, son or daughter, or a friend. The same basic principles will apply.

Unless the family are already well known to you, always introduce yourself and let people know how you would like them to address you. Many will be uncertain, perhaps apprehensive. The way you introduce yourself can put them at ease. So, for example, I invariably ask people to call me Ted. I think only twice in forty years has anyone said they would rather call me by a title - and we settled for Mr. Hale.

Of course, more often than I care to remember when I have said that most people call me Ted it has resulted in the jolly response, "Oh, Father Ted". Unless your name is Ted you are unlikely to get this response, but it is indicative of the common need of families to steer the visit away from doom and gloom - which might have been their experience with the funeral director or well-meaning Job's comforters! As a minister of the gospel which proclaims that the love of God, not death, is the ultimate word about us all, we do not meet anyone without the hope which inspires - even though the gospel includes pain.

Jesus believed that his friend Lazarus would be brought back to life. Nonetheless, Jesus wept with those who wept. There will be times when we will rightly do the same, or times when we and those with whom we are sharing are blessed because we genuinely mourn; but a sense of God's blessing and resurrection hope will mean we are never gloomy, never exude a feeling of defeat. Often my parting words to a family have been, "By the way, we may have laughed a lot, but I am aware that someone has died and I'll do my best for you at the funeral". To which the common reply is along the lines of, "Oh no. Thank you for helping make it easy for us. We thought this would be very difficult."

It is easy to assume that as ministers we must have something to say to a bereaved family. The opposite may be true. God may have a great deal to say to a minister through the family. A top priority for funeral visits is to ask the family if they have their own ideas for the service, or if there are particular things they would like included. They need to feel that we are competent, not that we are authoritarian. Their ideas and hopes may shape the whole service.

Most people, however, will not know what they want and will look to the minister for guidance. The aim is still to provide a service in which their needs will be met. So, when making visits in preparation for a funeral I have a basic "check list" in my head which I believe leads to most funerals being helpful for a particular group of people who have been bereaved (See Appendix A). After introducing myself and perhaps engaging in "small talk" for a short time I will say that I would appreciate being allowed to ask them a few formal questions to make sure I get the basics right. What follows is a rough guide to what I consider the essential knowledge base. Please note: this is not an exam. All the questions do not need to be asked or answered - though some are quite important.

Please also be aware that funeral visits are generally made within a few days of the death. People have usually had little time to adjust to this new reality. Some people may be surprisingly relaxed and happy; others will struggle to keep back tears. Two common expressions for how people have felt in the short-term following the deaths of a long-time partner are: "*It was like walking about in a fog*" and "*It was as though someone had smacked me over the head with a club and taken away me senses*". There is no "normal" reaction to death. It can be helpful, but not always possible for more than one relative or friend to be involved with a pre-funeral visit.

GENERAL QUESTIONS (Paragraphs 1-3)

1. Always check with the family that you and they have the same day, date, time and place for the funeral. Very occasionally there will be a discrepancy which may need clarifying there and then (or ASAP) with the Funeral Director. More commonly it is a way of reassuring the family that you will be there. It is a part of trust-building.

2. Always check with the family that the funeral director has given you the correct name and spelling of the deceased person's name and their age. Funeral Directors regularly get some of this wrong. But beware, so do families (and ministers!).

3. Ascertain the name you should use for the deceased when talking about them. John Henry Smith may have been called Dave! Eliza May Entwistle possibly hated the name Eliza and promised to come back to haunt the relatives if they allowed it to be used. By agreement I will often introduce the service using the person's full "official" name, adding they were usually known as "whatever", and use that name for the remainder of the service. In some traditions priests are duty bound to use the name by which a person was baptised. We are neither priest nor necessarily bound by tradition.

QUESTIONS AS BASES FOR PRAYERS (Paragraphs 4-7)

4. There is no absolute rule for who should be included in prayers at funerals; but there are some obvious candidates.

Ask for the names of the "closest family members". These are likely to be the most deeply affected by the death. This request will usually get people talking confidently. They generally know this, although you may need to prompt with regard to siblings, or children from a previous relationship. Be prepared for it to be complicated! If you only know families where two people have married, had children and stayed together "*till death us do part*", you are living in a time-warp. They are not the norm. Deep sensitivity may be needed in this matter, but it can provide the basis for prayers which name before God and the congregation those who are most in need. This research based naming of significant individuals will provide a level of comfort and demonstrate genuine pastoral care which is not achieved by standard/general prayers. In my research into funerals a common complaint of mourners about services they had attended was, "*It was all from a book - It could have been anyone*".

Also be aware that asking about families can unearth serious family divisions, even hatred. We are unlikely to heal these, and it might cause offense to challenge them. We will not hear "both sides of the story". At the very least we should not affirm hatred, and if we feel it is right we might mention the "better way" (1 Cor.12:31b). Where the breach has occurred between the deceased person and a family member or friend, the inclusion of a general petition for forgiveness in the prayers is especially appropriate.

One oddity is praying "for those who mourn", when the named family members include children, usually grandchildren or great grandchildren, who are too young to know what is going on. If there are not too many I will name them for two reasons. First it is a testimony to the re-generation of this family. Second it indicates that all God's children are worthy and in need of prayers. If there are dozens of them, individual names are not possible, but we can still pray "*for each one of the grandchildren (etc.)*" There may also be family members with dementia or other disorders which mean they have no sense of bereavement. They are equally children of God.

The family can be asked if there are really close friends who should be included in the prayers. It may become obvious that some friends or neighbours have been closer than some family members. Wise judgement will be needed as to how this is managed. People will understand that if it is a large family or circle of friends it can seem like a shopping list to mention everyone by name, but general terms can make them feel included - e.g. *all her nephews and nieces* - or *everyone at Timken's* (where they worked).

It is worth asking if there have been close family members or very special friends who have died. This often gives the basis for a brief prayer of remembrance.

5. If there is, or has been a partner find out how long they were married or the partnership existed. Sometimes people do not know exactly how long, but they will usually know if it was into the silver/golden/diamond years. I always ask if the relationship has been good. The first funeral I conducted turned out to be for a man who regularly beat up his wife. The woman did not tell me this when I visited, but as the funeral director was giving me a lift to the crematorium he mentioned this fact. Much of my service became irrelevant so I needed to do a quick review. It was a very short service. I asked another woman how long she had been married and she replied, "*Five life sentences*". She meant it! People staying together who have stopped liking each other is not

uncommon. It would be inappropriate to mention the dislike in the service, but it will be an important consideration in selecting appropriate words to be used in the prayers or eulogy.

6. If an older person has only been in a partnership for a comparatively short time, it is worth asking if there have been previous partners, and do they want these mentioned? If the family agree, previous partners who have died can be named in prayers of remembrance. If they are still alive, and especially if they will be at the funeral service, their formal inclusion will be a matter for discussion with the family. It is possible that a previous partner is the parent of offspring who are present at the visit or will be at the service. There may be strong, contrary feelings. One way conflict may be avoided is to suggest that the person or people involved are mentioned by name in the prayers, but with no elaboration. In this way they are not ignored nor given unwanted significance.

7. It is worth asking whether the family have appreciated any care that has been given: e.g. hospital staff, home-care teams, GPs/District Nurses, care homes, neighbours. A brief mention in prayers is often appreciated. But be prepared for negative feedback from families about "agencies" who have not served them well. As a minister I have on occasions written to let an institution know that their service has been found wanting. Very occasionally I have asked the family for permission to mention their particular complaint, but usually my complaint is couched in general terms, and always bears in mind that we are probably writing to people who have done their best in often stressful situations. But we are ministers who believe in wholeness. When bereaved people have been treated in ways which diminish them part of our calling may be to speak out.

NOTE: 3-6 above will give a personal feeling to the prayers, and may also inform what is to be said about the deceased person.

QUESTIONS FOR THE EULOGY (Paragraphs 8a - j + 9a - f)

8. If the minister is asked to give the eulogy, the following questions may be asked carefully/sensitively:-

a) Has there been, or is there any "church" connection?

However tenuous these may be, they are often of great importance to those who mourn; perhaps subconsciously even giving some legitimate reason for them as to why they are using a minister of a church to conduct the service. It is important to me. I have deeply valued the contribution of people to the life of churches in which I have shared. Although some of them seemed to me not to have "stayed the course, I have no way of knowing how God may have used them in other ways and how their time in the church influenced them. Men who were raised to accept the objects of The Boys' Brigade, for example, often continue all their lives to show "*Obedience, discipline, reverence and self-respect and (nearly) all that tends toward a true Christian manliness*". They may not have been in a church very much (for which Jesus never asked), but they have been salt and light in the world (which Jesus highly commended). We do the church no favours if we imply that even a short acquaintance with its life is of no value.

It is also possible that a church or minister has hurt or offended either the deceased person or the family. The fact they are still using a minister may indicate they have not totally rejected churches, but an apology on behalf of "the church" and even an encouragement to re-engage with a church may be possible and helpful.

b) Where was the person who died born and raised, and was this important to them?

Their whole life has possibly been based in their home town. They may have been evacuated during the war, or brought to a particular town as a prisoner of war. The possibilities are endless; and I find it awesome to continually discover the journeys people have made and how people's paths have crossed or come together. This information may also be useful for prayers of thanksgiving - and possibly be a major theme linking various parts of the service.

c) Who will be at the service?

This is often a way to discover what a person's interests have been and in what circles they have moved. It can also help in choosing what style of service will be appropriate. If the majority are going to be the deceased person's co-regulars at *The Fox and Hounds* it probably requires a different approach to when the majority will be just the immediate family, or their friends at church.

d) Who has been important to the deceased, and perhaps how was this shown?

Many times I have heard it said, "*She/he lived for her/his family*". That may be all that needs to be said, but usually the word "family" needs unpacking, and with a little gentle probing a wider picture will usually emerge of other important friendships past and more recent.

On several occasions I have been told that as well as living for her family, "*She got on with everyone. Everyone just loved her*" - only to discover in further conversation that there is a son or daughter who is not to be mentioned because, "*They haven't spoken for twenty years*". It is not for us to be judgemental or to speak ill of the dead at a funeral service, but a sensitive, passing reference in the eulogy or in the prayers to the fact that someone's life has not been without its difficulties may be a welcome touch of honesty.

e) What has been important to the deceased - and perhaps how this was obvious?

It has been a constant delight to discover how life like love is "*a many splendored thing*". From the man who like his father and grandfather still made shoes in his back parlour (only he did it as a hobby), to the woman who in her eighties started to travel every other year to Australia to visit an old friend, to the woman whose home was literally wallpapered with Elvis Presley posters, to the Italian man whose home-made wine was not to be refused, to the church secretary Jesus said, "*I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly*". There are those who want to limit what "abundantly" means and are unaware of the incongruity of their wish. Hopefully any minister will be open to discovering and at least delighting a little in the very different worlds people inhabit - which are all part of God's wonderful world.

*Yea, we know that thou rejoicest
o'er each work of thine;
thou didst ears and hands and voices
for thy praise design;
craftsman's art and music's measure
for thy pleasure all combine.*

f) What was the person's work - and was it important to them or to others?

It is often possible as part of a eulogy to say, "*It is right to give thanks for the contribution people have made to the common good through their daily work. And we give thanks now for what "x" has given of herself to others in this way*". There are some occupations of which I would find it difficult to say they contributed to the common good, but they are few in number and probably the result of my prejudices. So I am careful never to demonise anyone's work, but may share what they have done without the thanks. On the other hand some workers will have left a legacy which can be seen. The bricklayer's handiwork will possibly be seen for generations to come. The local midwife or maternity unit worker will have helped bring into the world, or sustained the lives of countless people who walk our streets. Other legacies will be less apparent, though no less valuable. Take for example, the teacher who inspired a love of learning; or the checkout operator who always had a kind word for the old man who came in at 6 a.m. every day and would then lock himself away. The world of work is more than just work.

One very common reason for work being important is that it earned the money which provided for a family's needs. This is seldom without the corollaries of a sense of self-worth which being able to provide brings, and the gratitude of family members.

The subject of work can include time spent in the armed forces. For some this will be enormously important, even though the period of service may have been relatively short, especially if the time of service included a time of war or exceptional travel. For others their war experience was so traumatic they never wanted it mentioned. It may even have caused them to have nightmares for the rest of their lives. For an older generation of women "war service" of various kinds will sometimes be mentioned. The common dislocation of war for a man and/or a woman often led to meetings which resulted in a marriage.

A person's work may have been relatively unimportant in their life: simply a means to an end. Or they may have spent long periods unemployed. Attentive listening will guide a minister in what is to be said or remain unsaid.

g) Did they belong to any clubs, etc - and if so, who went with them?

Clubs are formed around myriad interests. Holiday Clubs, Sports Clubs, Choirs, the Local Pub are all likely to attract one predominant age group, but they usually serve a social function and to varying degrees meet the needs

of their members. Of course, there are "clubs" that do not actually meet, especially in the days of the internet, but where the club has a social element it has the potential to provide opportunities for love shown in care for, and commitment to others. Theologians might like to say that a church is not a club; but that is an important part of what it is for many church members. If people use different institutions for some of the same purposes it would be curmudgeonly not to give thanks for what those institutions have given to someone's life. Working Men's Clubs are among the few institutions to rival the church in offering a social activity for all ages meeting together and often serving as centres for mutual concern and charitable enterprises. I recall my time as a member of a WMC with gratitude.

The group or groups to which people have belonged will sometimes be very evident on the day of the funeral service: especially if the group had a uniform. It can be good, with the family's agreement, to give such groups a special mention or welcome. Be aware that some groups have made some partners prematurely "widowed".

h) Hobbies?

The evidence of some people's hobbies may be plain to see if you visit their home: The Cutty Sark made out of matchsticks, the water colours adorning the walls, the glass cases replete with Dinky toys, the home-made furniture, and so on. It is not always easy to be enthusiastic about the results of people's hobbies, but they can be mementos of tremendous importance to a family - so we balance honesty with understanding. Other hobbies, such as fishing, walking the dog, "the car", may be less obvious, but they possibly absorbed innumerable hours of the person's life and in that sense need recognising, and if possible even affirming. If they were important to the person who died they are likely to be important to those who now mourn. Just a passing mention may be all that is needed.

i) Holidays?

As well as being important for some people simply because they have been a break away from mundane employment five-days-a-week thirty-nine weeks a year, many families remember holidays as significant times together for children and parents. In addition, or alternatively, holidays may have been when couples could give each other quality time unhindered by other responsibilities or commitments. In so many ways holidays can include really precious, possibly unique family memories - or indications that a person had a sense of adventure which was normally stifled.

It will probably not be mentioned, but holidays which refresh the spirit are not only connected linguistically with Holy Days. There are hints that the first ever Holy Day - or Sabbath - was spent resting and rejoicing in creation. It can be a godly thing to do.

j) What kind of person was the deceased?

It is helpful to have an idea of the personality of the subject of a eulogy. Some leading questions might be: "*Were they the life & soul of the party?*" or "*Were they quiet and private?*" But sometimes it is helpful to ask a family, "*What do you think really HAS to be said if we are to pay proper respect to 'x'? What would you say?*" The answers tend to be along the lines: "*Just a nice bloke/lass*" - "*Always a gentleman*" - "*Would never see anyone go without*" - "*The best mum/dad in the world*" - "*A really hard worker all her life*". These and numerous other little epithets can be extremely helpful in succinctly capturing what the family need to hear when tribute is paid as part of the funeral service.

Notes:

i. Sensitive listening should accompany the general questions along the lines of a-j above. This will often lead into further areas of importance to be shared about what the deceased person has meant to those who have loved and been loved by them. It may also be possible to look at one or two cards of condolence which will have words that can be shared as part of the eulogy. Families will often point a minister to a card which they think has said something special to them.

ii. Two rules for funeral eulogies are *never speak ill of the dead* and *never tell lies*. Sometimes for this and/or other reasons (e.g. the deceased may have spent most of their adult life in prison!) there may seem to be very little that can be said by way of a eulogy. In such circumstances a reading of Psalm 23, parts of Psalm 90 or Psalm 104, or Ecclesiastes 3, or 1 Corinthians, or some other suitable scripture, with a two-minute homily will often be acceptable as a way of offering the life of a person to God.

iii. From e - j above it is very easy to be judgemental about how other people have used the gift of life. If we are it will show that we have neither come very close to the people we are called to serve, nor to the spirit of Jesus (Matt.7:1; John 8:15).

9. Some people will want to offer the eulogy themselves or have a friend who has (been?) volunteered. In these circumstances I always offer them these guidelines:-

a) At a crematorium the eulogy needs to be approximately 4-5 minutes, assuming there will be only one eulogy. If more than one person will be speaking they need in total to take no more than 6 minutes. In reality they will usually take 8-10 - and may take longer! So be prepared to adapt by leaving out something else planned for the service or conflating two or three things. It is not unknown for me to follow a long family eulogy with just the singing of a reduced number of verses of a hymn while the curtains close and a brief benediction. (Funerals at Cemetery Chapels are seldom so time-constrained. Advice will take this into account.)

b) A eulogy cannot include everything, so they should try to focus on a few things that have been MOST important to them of their close family. It can be helpful for the person who is going to give the eulogy to make sure that others who have been close to the deceased are comfortable with what is being said - &/or their thoughts are included.

c) There are no rules for what should be in a eulogy or tribute. For some a potted biography is alright, for others a couple of anecdotes, for some a mention of their deepest passion or greatest achievement. Sometimes, especially if the prayers have include thanks for a life and the names of the closest family and friends, just a grandchild saying a few words about how much their grandparent mean to them is enough. The aim is that when people leave they will be able to say, "*That was a service for Joe/Jill*" or "*That paid proper respect to him/her*".

d) If the deaf people at the back can hear you, so can everyone else.

e) If the person giving the eulogy chokes up, they should just take a few deep breaths and a moment to regain their composure, and then continue. BUT if they are unable to do so and the script is typed out the minister will advise that they will always be on hand as a back-up. This knowledge of a plan 'B' can in itself help people to get through. It can be helpful to say to someone, "*You will do it, because you'll be saying to yourself, 'I'm doing this for my dad'*".

Note: Most of a-e above equally applies to eulogies given by family or friends in Cemetery or other Chapels.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HYMNS, MUSIC AND COMMITTAL (Paragraphs 10a - f, 11, 12a-c)

10. Are hymns (or a hymn) to be sung?

a) Discuss with the family what hymns, if any, they would like. The Funeral Director may have already done this: but the service is the minister's responsibility, not the funeral director's. A hymn takes on average 3-4 minutes for a congregation to sing, so at crematoria it is advisable not to have more than two hymns, or if three hymns are to be sung to use selected verses.

b) The choice of hymns will preferably have some rationale behind it. Was it sung at their wedding? Is it part of the family's tradition? Was he in the Navy? Did she give her whole self to everything she did? Was it his/her favourite hymn? Is it right to offer praise and thanksgiving? The congregation will appreciate being given a reason for what they are asked to sing.

c) Some people want a hymn or hymns, but cannot think of any. Always go with some hymn suggestions in mind - and make them ones which people stand a chance of knowing or learning very quickly. If possible, check out with the family the tune to be used.

d) Hymns are a way of people participating. If there are to be no hymns, how will people participate? They are often happy to say The Lord's Prayer and/or the 23rd Psalm.

e) It is increasingly popular for a CD of a hymn to be used (e.g. Cat Stevens *Morning has broken*). It is sometimes suggested that the congregation might sing along with it. In my experience this rarely works well, and I advise people accordingly. Singing along with a CD at the working men's club after a jar or two is no guide to trying Karaoke in the crematorium or cemetery chapel. Just listening is fine - provided it is not for too long.

11. What music is required?

There are three normal "opportunities" for a piece of music or a song to be played. What music do the family want played as people come in and go out - and possibly when the curtains close at the crematorium? In theory most crematoria or funeral directors can provide any music the family want. Also worth noting is that many people assume the curtains closing is the last part of the service and immediately followed by them going out. There are ministers who follow this pattern, but that is not how I usually order the service. I put a "buffer" between the curtains closing and people leaving, which may be offering a blessing for the deceased person sharing a prayer and the Lord's Prayer and the benediction.

Some ministers are very uncomfortable with anything other than what is generally regarded as "Church Music" or pre-twentieth-century classical music. It is not what most families want or need. The music used at a funeral service usually needs to relate to the person who died and to the family's experience of and taste in music - it is primarily their funeral service. And please note: "*You'll never walk alone*" is a positive answer to the prayer "*Abide with me*". "*You are the wind beneath my wings*" is resonant of the symbol of the appearance of the Holy Spirit as a dove at Jesus' baptism. "*Swing low sweet chariot*" is about being swept into the presence of God through wind and fire. If people choose songs with which a minister is not familiar, it is easy to find the words via "Google". Hardly ever is there no connection with the Bible and Christian faith - and it is a wonderful opportunity in a sentence or two to let people know that words they value can speak to them of God, perhaps even bring them close to God.

We may be asked if a family member or friend can sing or play an instrument. If they expect to sing accompanied by the crematorium organist, they should be asked to liaise as soon as possible. If they wish to provide their own accompaniment and this requires a power source they need to check with the crematorium that this is possible. Some crematoria do not allow it on the grounds of health and safety. A gentle request should be made to ensure that the "item" lasts no more than two-three minutes. The quality of what is performed is not the minister's problem. It may seem to us excruciating, but it will literally be "music to their ears", because it is offered in love. My time in Jamaica impressed upon me how relatively unimportant so-called high standards are in comparison to sincerity - *God looks not on the outward appearance* (1 Sam 16:7; Matt.23:25). As a good friend of mine often says, "*The Psalm encourages a joyful noise to be made to the Lord It does not say it has to be tuneful*".

12. What is going to happen at The Committal?

For crematorium services a minister can ask a family what they would like to be happening while the curtains close. If they do not know, I offer them three options:-

1) The organist will play quiet music while I say words of commendation. The family or the minister may request a particular piece of music to be played in the background.

Most commonly I will say:

Seeing that the days and years of 's life have come to an end we commit his/her body to be cremated. The scriptures remind us that our bodies come from the earth and to the earth they will return—earth to earth ashes to ashes, dust to dust—BUT the scriptures also invite us to have faith that the spirit within us is the very breath of God, has a life that is eternal, a life that belongs to God always. The Gospels tell us Jesus physically died, but the spirit of his living was never lost. So with, his/her spirit lives on in God's eternity, and in those with whom shared his/her life and love.

(Full name) has come to his/her eternal rest, may our continuing lives honour his/her memory through the words we speak, the thoughts we harbour, and the spirit of everything we do. In the name of the F S & HS Amen.

Through discussion with a family or following our own inner promptings other words may be used. If a minister is conducting several funerals on the same day, it can be helpful to use different words for the committal in order to keep the services "fresh". There are a number of blessings which are appropriate. Parts of Psalm 90, Psalm 23, other Psalms or many other passages of Scripture can be used. The family may request a specific reading such as

Footprints or Henry Scott Holland's *Death is nothing at all* (I often point out that this line is not exactly true; but the meditation taken as a whole does reflect the words of Jesus in John 14:1-3). The basic question for a minister to be asking is, "Does what is being said help this family to leave their loved one to God's care?"

Although I am a Free Church minister I am asked occasionally to conduct a service for a "lapsed" Anglican or Roman Catholic person. In these circumstances I will respect their traditions and have devised a simple liturgy for committal based on the rites in the Funeral Services Book which almost every Crematorium has. I find it indispensable to have my own copy. A minister may also use a prayer with which the mourners can identify, such as:-

Support us, O Lord, all the day long of this troublous life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, The busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done.

Then, Lord, in your mercy grant us a safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

Even more unusually I have been asked to conduct services for people who have been Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness, or avowed atheist. Through discussion (and inter faith contacts) it is usually possible to arrive at a form of words for the committal which recognises the faith or unbelief of the deceased person as well as that of the close family - but sometimes option 'b' (next paragraph) will be a more acceptable or better way forward

2) The family can choose a song or piece of music to be played while the curtains close.

Ideally this will be no longer than 90 seconds, or it can be faded (and possibly continued when the congregation leave). In my experience listening to a song or a piece of music in the Crematorium for more than two minutes is seldom comfortable for a congregation. If families are obviously committed to hearing the whole piece, then so be it, but I would gently advise against it.

The Music chosen will be as varied as the families that we meet. But as mentioned earlier, if we take the trouble to research the words; or failing that, to listen carefully while it is played, there will usually be an interconnection of the song and our faith. It may be that just the style of the music suggests an aspect of Jesus' life. So when Russ Abbots *I love a party with a happy atmosphere* was played it was very easy to say that when Jesus died his friends were overcome with grief, but in time they remembered how much Jesus loved a party and this was written into the gospels. Comfort and inspiration was given because his fullness of life was such that it put his death into perspective.

If there is a specific reason for the choice of music and it does not break a confidence, tell or remind the congregation why it is being played. As with the hymns and the introduction, to give a reason for doing something in a service is important. I find it interesting that when Jesus talked about the greatest commandment he added in a word to the Hebrew Scriptures. He added the word "mind" to what we should offer to God - and John called Jesus the Logos, the Word or reason (see also Paul in 1 Cor.14:15 on worship). Christian ministers will conduct worship which is mind-ful.

If the family would like music or a song, but do not know what to choose, a number of suggestions can be made. For example, Il Divo, Hayley Westenra, Elvis Presley or The Soweto Gospel Choir all sing *Amazing Grace* - but the choices are limitless. Often in family homes there is internet connection (or the visit may be by the family in my home) so it is possible to use "YouTube" to listen to some possibilities. For reasons of available time it may be necessary to leave a family to do this after the minister has left them. The minister should ask them to let him/her and the Funeral Director know their choices.

3) The congregation could be singing a hymn, saying a Psalm or praying together: e.g. The Lord's Prayer.

People who have chosen this option ('c') have often said that they appreciated doing something to "take the edge" off what for them might have been the most traumatic part of the service

It should be pointed out that for '1' & '2' the congregation will be seated - for the hymn choice in '3' they will be standing.

If the family wish to sing a hymn, they may need the minister to suggest what might be sung. I happen to like *The Old Rugged Cross; When I Survey; There is a Greenhill* or other hymns often associated with Good Friday. *Lord of the Dance* is generally well known, as are the ever popular *Abide with me; The Lord's my Shepherd;*

Love Divine all loves excelling. Probably less well known, but not too difficult for a congregation to pick up are *The Day Thou Gavest* or *O Love that wilt not let me go.* Each minister will no doubt have their own selection which can be set alongside the needs of a particular family.

Notes:

a) Families may ask, so it is helpful if the minister knows what physically happens while the curtains close. At the crematorium for Northampton the coffin stays where it is as the curtains close around it. Only after the congregation has left are small doors opened at the back of the catafalque and the coffin taken through into the room with the cremators. An optical illusion may suggest the coffin is moving. In other places the coffin is moved on a hydraulic lift - and at one Crematorium near Rotherham several years ago there were no curtains to close, but the coffin descended somewhere into the depths accompanied by rather hideous mechanical noises. I am sure the local ministers had found ways to cope with this - and hopefully lodged complaints!

b) There will occasionally be a family who do not want the curtains to close. That is not a problem; but in some way as part of the service there will be an act of committal giving people the opportunity to say their farewell (go in goodness) and goodbye (God be with you). This approach may also be necessary if there is a power-cut or some other systems failure which prevents the curtains from being closed.



Chapter Three - GENERAL ADVICE

1. USING THE BIBLE

There are times when a family ask for a Bible reading. Sometimes they even know what they want - even if they do not always know where it is to be found: "*You know, it's that one about the tinkling cymbal*" (and they do not mean Psalm 150). With help a passage might be chosen which already means something to the family.

The Bible does not always have to be used. God is best made known through love not scripture (John 5:39f). It is not the sole medium for God's self-revelation, or for conveying a sense of God's presence. But the scriptures will always be in the hearts of ministers and guiding them (Ps.119:105).

The Bible is a treasury of life experiences, often contained in word pictures. If we know and use our Bibles well, then very often listening to a life story or a description of a person will bring a particular passage to mind. For example, one widow's strongest memory of her husband was hearing him in the distance coming to visit her in all weathers on his motorbike. She always knew it was him. Relating this in the service to the picture of Jehu who was recognised because he drove his chariot like a madman (2 Kings 9:20), not only brought a smile to people's faces, but served to make the point that sometimes what we do shows who we are, and the most unlikely actions can be part of the ongoing story of God's purposes being fulfilled in human life. Or, it may be said, "*He was just an ordinary working man*". Well, Psalm 23 begins with an invitation to picture God as an ordinary working man: or Psalm 104, perhaps using verse 1a to begin, has a lovely passage (vv 19-24) which sets the working man in the context of all God's creative works (perhaps the inspiration for the chorus, and a good introduction to *All things bright and beautiful*). If verses 27-31 of Psalm 104 are added, the outworking of God's purposes in the cycle of "life-death-new-life" is expressed in the most appropriate setting. Ecclesiastes 3:9-14 is another relevant passage for a worker - and there are many more. A selection from Proverbs 31:10-31, or a snippet from the story of Ruth may be helpful in paying tribute to someone who has been primarily a fine, faithful wife and mother. Such people stand in a fine tradition which out spans the Bible and is deserving of a wider application than Sunday sermons, Bible studies and church-goers. If a minister loves the Bible and loves people it is easy to bring the two together.

Ministers who are regularly involved in funeral services are likely to build up their own selection of Bible readings which are generally appropriate. Selected verses from Ecclesiasticus 44, especially the line "*Some lived peaceably in their own homes*" has often resonated with the life being remembered. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (adapted) is what I call a "catch-all" passage; and since it was a pop song it is familiar to many people. Psalm 23 is full of word pictures. I have especially enjoyed using the picture of the cup running over when asked to celebrate the life of a former publican. You have to generously pour more than a pint to get a good one! Of course, with a suitable introduction and the right kind of family/congregation passages such as John 14:1-3 (which goes well alongside Ps.23:6), Romans 8:18-21 or 38-39, Hebrews 6:19-20a (especially for ex-Boys' Brigade members), or Revelation 21:1-4 can all be used to good effect.

All readings from the Bible merit at least a little introduction, because the majority of people, including church members, do not easily make sense of the Bible. They may even begin to automatically switch off because previous experience of the Bible being used made no sense to them. I have experienced many services in which there has been a Bible reading with no introduction and no exposition - as though the meaning is obvious.

Have no qualms about prayerfully adapting a Bible passage so that the meaning is made plainer or the words seem more relevant. For example, when using Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 at a funeral I will usually move v2a (*a time to be born and a time to die*) to the end of the passage. I may also omit two or more verses so that it is less demanding for people who may not be thinking very clearly. If ministers feel uncomfortable with this idea of "altering scripture", they may prefer to use Eugene Peterson's *The Message* in which he has done this for us.

2. CHILDREN AT FUNERALS

We may be asked, "*Should I bring my children to the funeral?*" The honest answer to this is normally, "*I don't know if you should bring 'your' children. I do not know them*". It will probably not be helpful to say this, but it should shape any advice we give.

This is my advice. Children of any age should always be welcome at a funeral provided they want to be there, and their presence is not so disturbing that any kind of peace of mind or meaningful sharing is impossible. Of course, infants will not be able to say whether they wish to be present, but their presence may symbolise that life goes on and bring great comfort to those who mourn. But parents should be prepared to take them out of the service if necessary. When children are old enough to know their own mind, my advice is that they are asked some days before the service if they would like to be there, but then asked again on the day. Ideally the question is asked in such a way that the child can genuinely make their own decision. Contingency plans will need to be made for child-care, or getting them to school, should they decide not to go.

If a child is old enough to make up their own mind, then they are old enough for parents to talk with them about death and funerals. Both of these are times to say goodbye, perhaps to say a prayer, and hopefully to be grateful for what someone has meant to those who now mourn. Children can be told that death can seem very unkind, but like sadness it is a natural part of being human and neither death nor funerals, nor sadness are things of which to be afraid. Reminding adults of these things is often as much a message for them as for their children.

The conduct of some adults at funerals induces parallel behaviour in their children. Some families always cry copiously at funerals. It is their family tradition; and they have every right to weep. Only they can decide whether this is what they want for their offspring.

3. DRESS CODE

"*Oh, I don't want him to take the service. He did my mum's and he wore green crocs.*" This comment about a minister led to the funeral director asking me to conduct the service because he knew I would not be wearing "green crocs". There is, of course, nothing wrong about wearing green crocs, even for a funeral, if you and the mourners know each other well enough for it not to matter. Teddy Boston, one-time vicar of Cadeby and model for the fat controller in his friend W. Audrey's train books, regularly conducted weddings and funerals with grease coated boots and grimy hands having come directly from working on his very large steam roller. He was known and loved in his locality for the eccentric he was. But families who have no close links with a minister or church connections seldom respond well to eccentric ministers at funerals. In my experience they are generally much more conservative in their thinking about what is "proper" conduct and clothing for a minister than church congregations. Sometimes, of course, it is not eccentricity, but sheer laziness or ignorance which leads to a minister's slovenly or inappropriate appearance. To work in Heston Marc Blumenthal's kitchen a man has to be clean shaven. It signifies the right mental and physical approach to preparing the best food. At a funeral ministers are responsible for a much more important task. We have the privilege and responsibility of handling what may be one of the most important ritual occasions in someone's life. The mourners are right to be offended if we have not taken trouble about how we dress for the occasion. The old time excuse of not being able to afford smart clothes is no longer valid. Though they vary, in most places the fees from just two funerals would pay for a reasonably smart suit and shoes - and they are tax deductible.

I have changed my habits over the years. As a minister on a small housing estate where I also taught full time at the local school I was very well known and hardly ever wore a clerical collar, partly as a matter of principle. I did not conduct many funerals, but when I did I wore a dark suit, collar and tie, and well polished black shoes. I am sure the absence of clerical garb was never a problem. One of the most popular conductors of funeral in Northampton was a former Anglican lay-reader who dressed in similar fashion. However, when I came to Northampton I began to minister in a rapidly growing area of new housing. I was also a full-time church minister and initially lacked the connections with the community which teaching had given. After some soul-searching about the matter, as well as becoming chaplain to the major local retailer and governor for two schools, I began to wear a clerical collar so that people would see an obvious representative of the church out and about in their new community. It followed on naturally that I wore a clerical collar for their funerals - though I rarely wear one to conduct church services when it is fairly obvious that I am a minister. Then for my fiftieth birthday my family bought me an academic gown and I wore it to conduct a funeral for an ex-Anglican teacher friend. It felt so right 'for me' that I have worn it consistently ever since: though there are still times when just a suit and collar and tie seem right for a particular family - and may even be requested.

I would not commend any specific form of attire for conducting funerals, but I would urge the principle that a minister should give considerable thought to what they wear, and have special regard as to what message their clothing will be sending to those who mourn. *Does this minister really care about OUR feelings; and does*

his/her clothing show the professional approach to this business which means we will be well served? God may not look at our outward appearance, but our neighbours do. God is not honoured when our neighbours' needs are neglected.

4. FEES

There will be circumstances when no fee will be paid. Traditionally to minister at the funeral of a child is a gift - no payment is expected.

Some ministers ask for no fee to be charged for their services when they conduct funerals for church members. Throughout my ministry I have always tried to treat all people as of equal value, save for children who have a special place in God's heart. I therefore accept a fee for almost all adult funerals. There have been exceptions in cases of genuine hardship.

In most places funeral directors will automatically pay a minister the fee agreed with the Church of England. Other fees, such as use of chapel, steward or organist will be agreed on an individual basis with Free Churches; but generally Funeral Directors will pay whatever is asked and it will be charged to the family as "Church Fees". Sometimes the minister's fee is included in this figure. I believe Free Church ministers who receive a fee in line with their Anglican counterparts should treat the fee in like manner. A Church of England priest conducts funerals as part of the duty of care for which they are already paid. Therefore a large percentage of their fee is paid into diocesan funds. Retired Anglican clergymen are an anomaly, but this is the general practice. It has been my practice too. For Free Church ministers the appropriate percentage will be a matter for individual decision, but in full-time ministry we are paid not just to minister to the church, but to be ministers of Christ and the church in the world - and even in retirement the moral basis of ministers' funeral ministry is that they are a minister recognised and accredited by their church and denomination. The use of funeral fees hopefully reflects this.

5. THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR (FD)

There is no single description for FDs. Some are a part of a multi-national business others are very small family operations and there are seemingly infinite variations in between. But generally speaking we will be liaising with a particular funeral director whose aim is the same as ours - to serve well those who are bereaved. Their motivation - money, good for the reputation of the business, job security or whatever - is not our concern: and many will not have hidden agenda. They, like us are in the business because they find deep satisfaction in helping people through difficult times. They will value being treated as colleagues and possibly become good friends - even, perhaps, asking you to conduct their family's funeral services.

It can be frustrating when the FD has already agreed details with a family and then makes contact to ask if the minister is available. But it is a natural instinct to put the family's needs with regard to date and time first. However, this does mean that if we know a particular family require our services, with the family's permission we need to contact the FD as soon as possible to offer some times when we can be available. The family may also be advised that when contacting a FD they need to let the FD know they require the services of the particular minister so that the FD can take that into account. Ministers need to give the FD some options. It is unreasonable to expect a funeral director to be able to arrange a funeral at one specific time for the minister's convenience. The family's circumstances, crematoria or cemetery availability, their own schedule for other funerals, for larger funerals the availability of extra limousines, these and a host of other possible factors need to be harmonised. Just as "The church" had to learn the earth was not the centre of the universe, so we must recognise that though our role is significant we are not the most important players in the arrangement of funerals (see Romans 12:3).

One thing that frustrates a FD is the failure of ministers to respond to telephone messages in a reasonable time. They usually have a family who want to know as soon as possible "when" so that relatives can be informed, notice put in the paper, work schedules re-arranged, or leave requested, etc. I know some FDs will avoid at all costs certain ministers because they have found them to be elusive and uncooperative. If we know we are going to be away for a while or never available on certain days of the week, it is good practice to let funeral directors know.

Very occasionally FDs will overstep their brief and start to impinge on the conduct and content of the service. Feel free to talk through anything about the service with the family and amend anything; and if necessary have a polite word with the FD. The reverse of this coin is that I will never give people information about funeral arrangements except for the service. I may ring the FD while I am with the family to find something out for them, but I am a minister not a FD.

(See also comments related to The Lord's Prayer in chapter four below.)

6. FLOWERS

Ministers may be asked their opinion or for advice about floral tributes to be used at a funeral service. There are those who will say, "*Don't you think it is a waste of money. The flowers are thrown away afterward. The money would be better given to charity*". If the family have already decided and publicised that there will be no flowers (or flowers only from the family), it is probably wise not enter into any discussion of the matter.

When families appear to be genuinely thinking through what they will do I will often tell them about a story in the New Testament. The story is of a woman who most people thought wasted some expensive perfume by anointing Jesus' feet with it (Mark 14:1-9). People said, "*It could have been sold and the money given to the poor*". So Jesus made two points. The first was that the woman's act of over-the-top generosity was a sign of her love for someone who was close to death. I come from an East End of London tradition when sometimes the floral tributes do seem outrageously extravagant - and sometimes they may be compensation for a guilty conscience - but most often they speak of the deep love and resulting sense of loss which needs to be given expression in bereavement. I believe it would have Jesus' approval. The second thing Jesus said was, "*You will always have the poor with you*". Buying flowers for a funeral is not a substitute for supporting worthwhile charities - and my suspicion is that when people are asked not to buy flowers but to give to a charity instead, people do not always give the equivalent amount to what flowers would have cost them.

Balancing arguments are that when mourners are invited to support a charity in lieu of flowers charities receive funds that would not otherwise be given. Furthermore the family may find comfort in knowing that an organisation is being supported which the deceased person supported (e.g. "*He gave regularly to the NSPCC*"), or which benefitted the deceased person (e.g. "*The British Legion were always there for him*"), or which might prevent others from sharing their fate, for example, cancer research. It is also the case that many people who would not have bought flowers will give to a nominated charity. It is helpful if there is a receptacle in which to place donations as they leave the chapel.

It is clearly not a case of it is right or wrong to encourage or discourage flowers or donations to a charity. But if a minister can give some rationale for making a decision it is usually appreciated.

7. PALL-BEARERS

If family members express a wish to carry the coffin themselves, or to share in carrying it, they need to discuss this with the funeral director. The family are entitled to do so, even if on occasions the funeral director's men/women will fuss around them because they do not trust the non-professionals "to do it properly".

This is just one of many possible examples where the professionalisation of funerals inhibits the kind of participation by families which in the past gave them a sense that "they" had paid their last respects.

The upside of professional pall-bearers is that, like Funeral Directors, and others regularly involved in funerals (e.g. crematorium and Cemetery staff) they often become a minister's friends.

8. BURIAL OR CREMATION?

Ministers may be asked whether they favour burial or cremation. This may be because some Christian traditions have favoured burial on the basis that our bodies lay in the ground waiting for the general resurrection (see e.g. Isaiah 26:19; Matthew 27:52-53). I have to be honest with families and say that I have no theological or practical basis for preferring one more than the other, but if their family has a tradition they might choose to follow it.

I once met a Roman Catholic priest as he was coming away from the crematorium. He was a good friend and I mentioned to him that it was not that common to see him there. I loved his humorous reply: "*Yes: you Protestants like your bonfires. We generally prefer gardening*". I didn't mention church history, but did mention his own church's teaching, which I know almost be heart and which was therefore accepted in the spirit in which it was said, that "*Cremation is understood in liturgical law as a technologically accelerated process of physical decomposition*" (The Roman Rite 1991 - *Order for Christian Funerals*). This is probably a somewhat reluctant recognition that Roman Catholics are increasingly choosing cremation, and of the indisputable fact that bodies do not lay in the ground for ever. As I very often say at a committal whether in the cemetery or crematorium, our bodies come from the earth (Genesis 2:7) and to the earth they will return (Genesis 3:19) - *Ashes to ashes, dust to dust*. The speed and manner of this return is not of eternal significance; but it may be a source of real anxiety for the family and an honest conversation may be helpful.

Note: If more than 120 people are expected to attend a funeral a family might be well advised to use a suitably sized church building for the service rather than try to cram everyone into a confined space in which people may need to stand for the whole service. This should be discussed by the minister with the family first unless the family have already contacted a funeral director and made firm arrangements.

9. THE RECEPTION

If invited, ministers will need to make their own decision whether or not they attend a reception after a funeral. It is usually appreciated. It is almost always an opportunity to have conversations with people the minister might otherwise never meet. It is time consuming.

In recent years some people have opted to alter the order of proceedings for funerals which are to be in a church building as well as in the crematorium or cemetery. In this revised order the committal takes place first. It will be a relatively brief act of worship; sometimes for family members only. This will be followed by a service of thanksgiving or a memorial service "in church" to which everyone is welcome. This service is followed immediately by the reception. As with most innovations some people will not like this - perhaps because the absence of the body/coffin in the thanksgiving service reduces the sense of saying farewell and goodbye. Examined rationally this is a questionable line of thought; but rationality in bereavement is not necessarily paramount. On account of such feelings it is probably not best for the committal to be restricted to family members. The advantage of the service following the committal is that there is no problem about the family standing at the chapel door at the end if they wish; and I suspect a greater number of people attend the wake knowing they will not have wait around for half an hour for the family to return from the committal.

10. TIME

It will probably happen to any minister who takes many funerals, but being late for a funeral is one of the worst things of which a minister can be guilty. There is no second chance to put it right for the family concerned or the minister.

Ministers should always bear in mind that services should last for an agreed period of time. At crematoria and cemeteries this may be stipulated. In any case others involved in the funeral may have commitments which assume a minister will honour arrangements made.

This is especially important at crematoria when:-

There is usually another service to follow shortly. The next family deserve their full allocation of time.

The crematorium staff will have things to do between services.

If it is the last service of the day some of the crematorium staff will quite rightly want to go home. (Though some, like the people who operate the cremators will be staying for some time since by law a cremation must take place on the day on which the body is brought to the crematorium.)

CHAPTER 4 - THE SERVICE

This chapter is probably best read in conjunction with Appendix B

Though some churches may have their own rules, there are no legal requirements for the conduct of a funeral service. Many families find instructions in a will or in a pre-paid funeral bond helpful in doing "*What they would have wanted*", but the instructions are not legally binding. So a Free Church minister can be genuinely free to work with a family to achieve the best possible outcome for them.

Some families will know exactly what they want. The minister's role is to facilitate. Other families will have little or no idea of what format the funeral service might take. They will value a minister's guidance. It is helpful if a minister has one or more "templates" for an order of service in his or her head (or even on a piece of paper) to call upon as a basis for discussion.

After many years of conducting funerals most ministers will have a range of possibilities, but what follows is based on the template I have used most often. It regularly and pleasantly coincides with what people have wanted but been unable to think through for themselves.

Anything may be omitted or moved, and there is always leeway to add in anything which is requested or becomes obviously "right" - even on the day. I think that is called being open to the Spirit.

Please note that any comments offered under the various headings below are a supplement to the thoughts already shared on most of these things in chapter two - "The Pre-funeral Visit"

ENTRY MUSIC (See chapter 2 paragraphs 10 & 11)

One family arranged for '*Anything Goes*' to be played as the coffin was brought into the crematorium. That could have been a comment on the choices of music which people currently make for funerals.

If asked for advice it is good to say that the music will ideally be part of paying proper respect to the person who died, but will also serve as a prelude for the act of worship or ceremony. Sometimes I just keep a little quietness after the entry music has faded so that in effect it is not part of the worship. However, I may mention later in the service why the particular piece of music or song was played.

When no music has been requested the organist will usually play some quiet background music. If the minister has prepared a word about the person who died it is sometimes possible to suggest something relevant to be played by the organist. For example, *Ye Banks and braes* if someone has been very proud of being a Scottish Highlander or *I am sailing* if they were an avid cruise-ship holiday maker. This, of course, depends on the organist being competent to play a wide range of music. Northampton has been blessed with such talent for many years.

WELCOME OR CALL TO WORSHIP

Exactly how a funeral service begins; and whether a welcome or a call to worship is most appropriate is a matter for the minister's discretion. Ministers should take account of the age and health of the congregation in deciding how long they should remain standing.

I know that the fashion for some ministers and churches in the past twenty-five to thirty years has been to begin Sunday worship with a welcome. That has never been my practice. Worship of a church properly begins God-focussed. A funeral "service" may be an act of worship, but it will generally include people who have not come to worship and/or who have little or no experience of sharing in an act of worship. This may include the closest family members. The pre-funeral visit will most commonly have led to an expectation that worship will be the underlying principle of what happens on the day of the funeral, but in an increasingly non-religious society honesty or truthfulness will guard us against over exaggerating the capacity of people to easily or immediately engage in worship. On the other hand I have very occasionally been specifically asked to begin with a verse of scripture. Empathetic listening will be our guide.

When I have experienced it, the practice of those who ostentatiously intone disembodied verses from the Bible as they lead the coffin into the chapel has seemed to me to be pompous and overbearing. I never copy this custom.

If a welcome is given (which may come before or after a call to worship), it will usually be on behalf of the family of the deceased person. The minister is not welcoming people to his or her service (see above on who the service is for). Whilst ministers will hopefully be offering worship themselves, a minister always conducts worship on behalf of others. The bereaved should not be invited to share our worship. We have the privilege of aiding theirs - but they may need time to acclimatise.

Whatever kind of opening is chosen, it is helpful to state the reasons for being together in this place at this time. For example:

We come together to share our sadness because someone who has been important to us has died.

We come to say farewell and to pray that one we have loved will now rest in peace.

We come together to comfort one another and as much as can to breathe in God's Holy Spirit as the Comforter and giver of peace.

We come each one to pay our respects; and to give thanks for the gifts of a life that has been lived, of love that has been shared, and for the memories and hope which live on.

HYMN (See Chapter 2 Para.10 above on questions about hymns, music and committal)

If there are to be hymns or a hymn, inviting people to stand together and to encourage one another by singing together takes the risk that this particular congregation will not sing. It happens, but it is not the norm - and if possible the minister should sing anyway.

The advantages of the corporate nature of singing a hymn, especially early in the service, far outweigh the occasional unfortunate experience. Moreover, if the rest of the service goes well then poor singing will not matter. Sometimes the deceased person or a member of their family will have chosen the hymns for a special reason. If it is not breaking a confidence, share the reason with the congregation: this may well encourage them to sing. It may also be possible to say a just a sentence or two about a hymn so that the words of the hymn begin to have some meaning for people who are not used to them.

Although singing a hymn early in the service has advantages, if there is to be only one hymn this corporate act might be kept for use before or after the closing of the curtains where it can also have real benefit.

READING (On using the Bible see Chapter 3 above).

If the service does not include a hymn, it can be helpful at this point to have a shared reading (I often use Psalm 23) so that the congregation actively participate, and share a corporate act as an expression of solidarity with each other. If the congregation have remained standing for the welcome and no hymn has been sung, the congregation might even be asked to remain standing for a congregational reading.

Ideally, readings at funeral should never be very long. If people request an obviously lengthy reading it is quite in order to remind them of both the time constraints and concentration levels which need to be taken into account.

If a hymn has been sung the reading might pick up on thoughts in the hymn. If not, or alternatively, the reading might lead into the next part of the service. For example, from the Apocrypha, *The Wisdom of Solomon (7:1-7)* is a reminder of our common humanity in which birth and death are the same for every human being, and an invitation to prayer. An excerpt from Kahlil Gibran's meditation on Death ends with an invitation to see how ends can be gateways to experiences which surpass all expectations - just like prayer!

People will sometimes ask for a particular reading. Funeral Directors sometimes suggest readings to be used in the service or to be on the service sheet. One local FD in Northampton gives every bereaved family a book, *When we Remember* by Melissa Abraham which as well as offering advice on what to do when a death occurs has suggestions for music, secular songs, hymns and readings. This is a mixed blessing since the quality of the material varies considerably. Ministers may be irritated by some regular choices. For example, the opening line of the all too popular Canon Henry Scott Holland's meditation, *Death is nothing at all*, is simply not true. I have

heard Footprints so often that even with my abysmal memory I almost know it by rote. Generally speaking, however, if a family has taken time to choose a reading my inclination is to accept their wishes - it needs to address their needs, and reflect their beliefs, not mine.

As with every element in a service the basic question to be asked before using any reading is: "*Will this help the people at this funeral service in their worship?*"

PRAYERS (See chapter 2 paragraphs 4-7)

Jesus did not seem to like long prayers being said in public. There was too much chance of showing-off (Matt.6:5-7). The attention span of people who are mourning is also likely to be short - long prayers will not help them. Prayer is not a natural part of the lives of many people at funeral services. It can be helpful to introduce prayers as "*a time for prayer or reflection*". In this way no one need feel coerced into "praying".

On occasions I will introduce prayers by saying, "*In the Christian faith we are encouraged to think of prayer as being like little children talking to a loving parent. The words do not matter that much. The thoughts and feelings are often already known. But the sharing really does matter and can bring strength and comfort. So in this time of prayer we share our thoughts with one another and as much as we can with a loving heavenly Father*".

If I am going to use two or three brief prayers I may also invite people to "*repeat the "Amen" after me at the end of each prayer as a way of encouraging one another and making the thoughts of the prayer your own*".

Typically either as one prayer or as short prayers the content for prayers at this point in the service will be:-

- a) Thanks for the gift of life - especially for the life being remembered/ commemorated/celebrated today and for what the person has given of themselves for the benefit of others.
- b) *We rightly hold in our hearts and prayers those who have been closest to offering prayers of remembrance for those who have died before ----* (names and relationships may be appropriate here). *But we also pray for those who remain to mourn his/her death* (names will usually be included here - but sometimes general terms like "the grandchildren" may be necessary to avoid prayers becoming like genealogies or shopping lists).
- c) Give thanks for all the love that has been given and received - and perhaps mention any who have shown special care in recent times (neighbours, care staff, medics, etc)
- d) Pray for comfort for those who mourn *through rich memories to treasure, good friends to share our sadness, and trust in God as eternal and loving world without end.*

[e) When it seems appropriate there may be a brief prayer for forgiveness for unspecified wrongs done to or by the person who died.]

READING (See above on a possible reading earlier in the service - and Chapter 3 on using the Bible).

A reading at this point in the service often either forms part of the eulogy or tribute or prepares the way for one. It can be a way of a family member or friend participating without the stress of talking personally about the person who died. In such circumstances the participation will probably be more important than the quality. In any case, who decides on what constitutes "good quality"? I have heard many "poems" read which would be heavily criticised by any competent English literature teacher, but they have expressed feelings of love and affection in the vernacular of the "audience" - which I believe was Jesus' method (Mark 12:37b).

Well selected, relevant Bible passages can be used to advantage. The most common Bible readings requested are Psalm 23, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (or 1-14), and selected verses from 1 Corinthians 13: but there are innumerable short pieces of prose or poetry which will "speak" to an individual family.

A part of a minister's craft is to garner resources for other people's benefit! There are ministers who maintain a book of sayings of readings which (like many of the things in my garage) may come in handy one day. Sometimes they do. We are not all Boy Scouts, but we should all be prepared.

EULOGY/TRIBUTE: (See chapter 2 paragraphs 8-9)

In my research on funerals the absence of any word about the person who died occasioned more heartfelt complaints than anything else. Not to have told at least a little of someone's story said to their family that in the estimation of the minister the person who died was not worth talking about or remembering. That Christian ministers can apparently be unaware of this is incredible. How is Jesus remembered? By the sharing of his story! That is how the gospel writers kept Jesus alive or brought him to life in the mind and memory of those who were or wanted to be close to him. It may be supremely through telling his or her story that we help bereaved people to know that death does not have the last word about their "loved one". Ministers may offer a theological rationale for such a belief, and even cite Bible passages at funerals to try and share that belief with the bereaved, but such ministers are almost certainly using an incomprehensible "tongue" for the majority in British twenty-first century non-church funeral congregations.

I cannot emphasise too strongly the importance of a minister genuinely listening to a family telling the story of someone who has been important in their life; and then ensuring that the story has a place in the service. Only in exceptional circumstances will this not be appropriate for anyone who has lived for more than a few years.

On rare occasions a person may have left instructions that there is to be no eulogy at their funeral. Most families will usually want to respect their wishes. Nothing about a funeral service is mandatory.

SIGN OF RESPECT

At the end of a eulogy I often say something like, "*To have known is quite clearly to have many reasons for thanksgiving and to have a memory which is worthy of respect. We are going to take a few moments of quietness so that each one here as part of this service can hold their own memories of ... But as a sign of respect for for this quietness of remembrance we are going to stand. If you are able, would you please stand.*"

We usually stand for about half a minute. At the end of this time people may be asked to sit down, or remain standing while a blessing is given for the person who has died, or to sing a hymn. What is done will take into account what else is going to be done, and especially what form the committal will take.

HYMN (See Chapter 2 Para.10 above on questions about hymns, music and committal and the paragraph above on a hymn in this chapter)

There is normally only time for two hymns in a service at the crematorium. Though there are times when it seems right to sing the second hymn before the final benediction, my personal preference is to include a suitable hymn at this point in the service, either to be sung as preparation for the committal, or to be sung while the curtains close. Many hymns include aspects of the gospel. By congregational singing the gospel is shared rather than offered by one person to others.

It can be most acceptable to highlight some words in a hymn which give it special significance for using at this time. For example, Psalm 23, *The Lord's my Shepherd*, concludes, *and in God's house for evermore my dwelling place shall be*. It is possible to relate this in a few words to Jesus' words preparing his friends for his death when he said, "*In my Father's house are many rooms*" (John 14). Or simply to say that it is part of the abiding faith of God's People that whether in life or in death we have an eternal home in the presence of a loving God. The hymn *The Old Rugged Cross* is a testimony to the fact that at the heart of the Christian faith there is a death - but this death, the death of Jesus says to people of faith that death is not the last word about our lives (See also the words *Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes* in the hymn *Abide with me*). The final word belongs to the death defying love of God. The hymn *Love Divine* includes the words, *Changed from glory into glory* which is just one of the pictures in the New Testament of God at work in and for us throughout our lives and even in our dying. *Make me a channel of your peace - In dying we are born to eternal life!*

The practical value of a hymn at this point parallels that of a hymn near the beginning of the service. It can help give people a sense of solidarity, or reinforce it if the congregation have already stood together in silence as a mark of respect. For people who have sung hymns in the past, the singing of a traditional hymn can also provide a sense of security in a world where the *change and decay* (which) *in all around I see* has quite literally become a pressing personal reality.

THE COMMITTAL (See chapter 2 paragraph 12. What is going to happen at The Committal?)

Forty years ago there was one common format for the committal or closing of the curtains at a crematorium. The minister said some words of commendation while organ music played quietly in the background. As covered in chapter two, there is no longer a "usual" format for the committal, but it does help if ministers have thought through for themselves what they consider to be the significance of closing curtains, and ally this to conversations with the family around the choices available to them. It can be a very traumatic moment in the service, but handled well it can also be meaningful, memorable and leave a sense of satisfaction for those who mourn.

A brief word before the closing of the curtains can be helpful. There are so many Biblical images which relate to the closing of the curtains that a book could be written just on this subject. One or two examples must suffice. Hebrews 6:19-20a "*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf*" is not just useful for those with a Boys' Brigade connection - though where such a connection exists, the reading followed by the hymn, "*We have an anchor that keeps the soul*" can be a most uplifting experience. With sensitivity the story of Elijah in which a chariot of fire passes by while Elijah is swept into God's eternal presence in a whirlwind might be used, especially if the not strictly biblically accurate song "*Swing low sweet chariot*" has been sung; or will be played quietly in the background. With predominantly church congregations the story of the faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego unscathed in the fiery furnace and accompanied by an angelic presence might be shared with a brief exposition. (See Chapter 3 paragraph 1 on using the Bible.)

When children are present for the committal I often share one of the responses made when I did my research connected with funerals. One woman wrote about the funeral of her husband. She sat next to one of their young grandchildren, which itself was a comfort. But as the curtains closed the child said to her grandma, "*It's a bit like a good play, ain't it Grandma? You're sorry it's over but you're glad you saw it*". My guess is that many adults have probably got as much comfort, if not more than the children whenever I have shared this story - which in a way relates to Jesus' story and especially his death. *It is finished* - but it has been wonderful. (John 19:30 & Matthew 27:54)

BLESSING FOR THE DECEASED PERSON

If the closing of the curtains has not been accompanied by words of commendation; and if a blessing has not been given before the committal; then a blessing for the person who died might be given after the curtains have closed.

To introduce the blessing the minister might invite people to bow their heads for a moment and then say, "*I would like to offer a blessing. As I do so perhaps everyone here, according to their own faith, might like to breathe their own thoughts of love and blessing and farewell in God's eternity for*" This will be followed by my words of blessing. Most commonly the blessing will be, "*..... may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.* (With the possible addition) *In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*" But there are times when this Judaeo-Christian and/or Trinitarian blessing is inappropriate. Fortunately there are countless other blessings available via the internet. Ministers may be able to devise their own words of blessing. Or a short silence may be observed in which people are invited to "*breathe their own thoughts of love and blessing and farewell*" and/or "*to offer your own private prayers*".

If, as I have unfortunately encountered, a minister has some hesitation about blessing those who have made no profession of faith, the example of Jesus might just be relevant. When the mothers of Jerusalem brought their children for blessing there is no record that either the mothers or the children had to pass any kind of test before Jesus would offer his blessing. As a minister representing the Body of Christ in funerary ministry I would find it bizarre not to include a blessing of some kind as the life of a child of God is offered to God for God's blessing and redemption.

PRAYER

I do not usually say a prayer at this point in the service, but if I sense that the closing of the curtains has been particularly distressing for the family then I will invite people to pray and offer the following prayer:

Father God it is never easy to let our loved ones find their eternal rest in you, because we now lose them from our sight. So we ask that we might have sufficient faith to trust that your love is stronger than even death itself: to trust that a loved one who has passed from our care is always in your safe-keeping, and to trust that our lives which are the poorer for our loss may yet be enriched by a deeper reliance on you. And may our confidence in your love fill us with the peace of your presence so that we find deep comfort for our souls, the strength we need for each day ahead, and faith such as befits us all for your eternal kingdom. AMEN.

This prayer leads naturally into the sharing of the Lord's Prayer.

LORD'S PRAYER

If there has been a blessing or a short time of quietness for private prayer or reflection the minister might introduce the Lord's Prayer along these lines, "*And now let us unite our prayerful thoughts with the whole company of God's people on earth and in heaven as we share together the traditional version of the Lord's Prayer*".

Ministers should not assume that everyone uses the same version of the Lord's Prayer, or that everyone knows it. Recent research has suggested that increasingly people do not. I often ask the funeral director to have the words of the Lord's Prayer included on the service sheet, but I always give FDs the words I wish to be used because they have a tendency to print the default Anglican version. The same will often be true if funeral directors are asked to include Psalm 23. Indeed the Anglican influence is so dominant that by far the best known version of Psalm 23 (King James' Bible) is not included in the Service Book produced by "The Churches Group on Funeral Services at Cemeteries and Crematoria".

If no hymns have been sung the sharing of The Lord's Prayer is a way of ensuring that those who wish to do so have actively participated, as with the possible congregational reading near the beginning of the service.

Notes:

1. A hymn may be sung at this point - but as noted above there is normally only time for two hymns at a crematorium service
2. Some ministers choose to make the closing of the curtains the penultimate act in the service, being followed by just the benediction. My preference is not to send the congregation out with the closing of the curtains "in their face", but to provide a "buffer" which gives them time for their emotions to settle, and through a time of prayers and blessing to find some peace.

BENEDICTION

Most commonly I will close the service with words to this effect:

"As we have prayed in our hearts that will know God's eternal blessing, so may grace, mercy and peace be with you all now and always."

But as with everything else in the service, thinking about the needs of a particular family may lead to the use of "*The Grace*", one of the several Celtic blessings which have become popular in recent years, or some other form of words which express the sense that (hopefully) this group of people gathered to say farewell to someone who has died also want to say fare well to each other.

EXIT MUSIC

The subject of music has been well covered above, but if the congregation are sitting down, prior to the exit music the minister may say, "*As a final token of respect for here in this chapel we stand together*". As well as the psychological benefit to mourners of feeling that right to the end of proceedings respect is being shown for the deceased person, this has the practical advantage of making it easy for the funeral director to lead the mourners out.

In leaving the crematorium the minister might pause in front of the catafalque, face the curtains and bow as a sign of respect. The Roman Catholic advice for priests conducting funerals makes the point that the body of a deceased person has been the temple of the Holy Spirit and is worthy of respect for as long as possible. Some ministers will make the sign of the cross as a last symbol that this and every death can be seen in the light of the crucifixion of Jesus.

It is also my custom to stand at the crematorium door and shake hands with everyone as they leave. At the crematorium it is usually not advisable for the family to do this. It will usually take too long because it tends to become hugs and conversations rather than just handshakes. If the minister knows in advance that the family intend to do this, appropriate counsel needs to be given.

Chapter five - AT THE CEMETERY

When asked to conduct a funeral in a cemetery chapel followed by burial/internment, the above order of service can be easily adapted. The Committal will invariably be moved to the end of the proceedings. There is nothing to say that the internment cannot happen first, but the cemetery officials would need to be alerted to this. I also reserve The Lord's Prayer for use at the grave so that the family can participate in this "final act" of saying goodbye at the funeral. There may be a stone-laying or blessing of the gravestone later, but that is not part of the funeral.

Few, if any cemetery chapels have a resident organist. Some do not have any kind of instrument. There is usually a power supply. If hymns are to be sung then an organist and probably one with their own keyboard will be needed. The funeral director will be expected to arrange this, but the minister should check it is in hand a few days before the service.

Music on CD for entry and exit from the chapel is often agreed between the funeral director and the family. For cemetery funerals the family may be expected to provide the CDs. The funeral director will be responsible for providing the CD player. If a CD track is to be used during the service the minister needs to be aware of this. It is particularly important for families to be made aware that when using a CD as part of the service it needs to be relatively short. Cemetery chapels are often cold places with uncomfortable seating. Some church-goers or sports fans will be familiar with this experience, but most of the population are not.

Whilst music for the committal at a cemetery is not common, it may be requested. This is usually possible and with good audio equipment can be very effective. I conducted a funeral at which *Danny Boy* was played while the coffin was lowered into the ground. I had never really listened to the words before. For this lapsed Roman Catholic long-time-widowed man who was born and bred in Dublin I felt it was perfect - and was deeply moved. It is not worth doing at a grave with poor equipment or in a howling gale, but in inclement weather a CD might be played prior to going to the grave.

If the weather is dreadful, it is possible to share in the chapel most of what would have been shared at the grave. A brief explanation of what is going to be done and why; and some indication of the assent of the family for it will be helpful to the family and the funeral director.



Chapter six - UNCOMMON FUNERALS AND CEREMONIES

a) A Traditional West Indian Service.

A minister may be asked to conduct a traditional West Indian Funeral at a cemetery. They vary enormously, so no assumptions should be made. However, most often in my experience the burial will take place following a service in a church.

The service in church may last anything up to two hours. The order of service is often referred to as "The Programme" and is likely to include several pre-arranged items, such as readings or solos/duets/singing groups, and not only one or more main eulogies, but opportunities for anyone to speak about the deceased person. In addition there will be a sermon. In my experience 20-30 minutes is an acceptable length, but if there is a guest preacher it may be in excess of an hour. There may also be an open coffin at the front of the church and the entire congregation will be invited to process to pay their respects to the deceased person at the coffin. The minister will be expected to give firm directions so that this is done in an orderly fashion. All these things need to be agreed with the family plus relevant liaison with the funeral director - and a realistic estimate made of the time to be allowed for the service. Ministers, when asked to conduct a traditional West Indian funeral, are probably well advised to allow about 4-5 hours for their involvement.

For traditional West Indian funerals, following the minister's words of commendation and prayers at the grave, the family will usually fill in the grave themselves and then "dress" the grave with flowers. This takes some time and the custom is to sing a selection of hymns while the grave is filled. It is helpful for the service sheet to have an insert with 8-10 hymns which can be sung at the cemetery. The choice of the hymns should be agreed with the family. If all hymns have been sung and the grave still not filled and dressed, repeating hymns is no problem. After the grave has been dressed there is usually a final song "*Sleep on beloved. Sleep and take your rest*" (Like most other things, the words are available via Google); then the minister will be expected say a prayer and offer a final benediction for the deceased person and the family.

Allow extra time for the pre-funeral visit.

A personal footnote: One of my best ever worship experiences has to be standing on the platform with three West Indian pastors - all with good strong voices - at the front of a packed church all singing with real gusto and conviction: "*When the roll is called up yonder - I'll be there*". Funerary ministry really can be an uplifting of one's soul!

Slowly, as generations of families with West Indian roots become more anglicised, their requests for just a short service at the crematorium increase. The family may also prefer a shorter sermon. Sensitive enquiries will make a minister aware of a particular family's preferences.

b) For a Child

In the twenty-first century UK requests for ministers to conduct the funerals of children are infrequent. Pastoral care at many neonatal or postnatal deaths in families with no church connection is usually given by a hospital chaplain who may also conduct the funeral service. But all ministers are likely at some time to be asked to conduct a funeral for a child.

As with all deaths, some families show remarkable fortitude in the face of what is always a tragedy. Others will find it very difficult to cope and will need considerable support from relatives and/or friends who will themselves be grieving and possibly in shock. Ministers will need to decide how much support they are able to give over and above providing an acceptable service of blessing and farewell for a child who has been wanted, loved and "lost". In no way should a minister try to minimise the sense of hurt which families will feel in such circumstances. There are times when we simply *weep with those who weep*. But ministers will hold in their heart a faith which whilst it does not deny the reality of *the valley of the shadow* which is death, nonetheless claims God's presence as hope and love in the midst of it (Cf. Romans 8:35-39).

Especially with infants, there is no eulogy as such, but a brief homily may be given. However, these services are usually fairly brief - often by request. A "big" service would be a mismatch for the physical and temporal tiny frame being offered back to God.

What follows is based on a service conducted for a fifteen year-old boy called Adam.

Welcome

This was given by the minister to Adam's family and friends on behalf of Adam's parents.

An Introduction

In keeping with conversations with Adam's family in preparation for the service I was able to say that this service provided an opportunity for each one to bring their own love and respect for Adam. The service was also intended to help Adam's family and friends to share their sadness: but also their gratitude. Adam had been a precious, loving and dearly loved person - with a life and personality worth remembering. He would not be forgotten.

Hymn/Reading (On this occasion a hymn was sung, but very often a Psalm or reading will be shared)

Prayers

The congregation were told that three brief prayers were going to be offered and they were invited to repeat the "**Amen**" at the end of each prayer as a way of making the prayers their own and encouraging one another at such a difficult time.

Prayer 1. Thanks were given for the precious and sometimes fragile gift of life - especially Adam's brief span of 15 years - and the more precious gift of love and all the love that has surrounded Adam - remembering his granddad, Stan and others whose lives ended before him... but sharing Jerry and Jayne's deep gratitude for all who have cared for Adam and loved him in his lifetime - and today giving thanks for every sign of love at work in Adam's life. Amen

Prayer 2. This prayer was for comfort for those who were mourning Adam's death. We prayed first by name for Adam's closest family - especially for strength and comfort for his parents - but also his remaining grandparents. We prayed for other family members, though not all of them by name. Prayer was offered also for Adam's friends; plus an invitation made for everyone to hold in their hearts and prayers each and every one who would miss Adam. Amen

Prayer 3. This prayer was a plea for God's blessing for Adam. God has shown us in Jesus how much children should be loved and honoured, so in faith we commended Adam to our heavenly Father. Amen

Closing of the curtains

On this occasion the curtains closed as we shared The Lord's Prayer: but there are many options (see above Chapter 4 on The Committal)

Brief Quietness

Benediction

For this service the benediction took the following form:

As we have celebrated all the love that was part of Adam's life; and as we pledge ourselves to love and support one another: may the power of God's love fill each one of us with the faith we need, the peace our minds and hearts desire, and the hope which leads us through good and bad times with dignity. So may we honour the memory of those we have loved and lost awhile by the way we live each day of our lives. In the name of The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Notes:

1. I was called upon to conduct a graveside service for a two-week old boy. At the visit I discovered the mother was Ukrainian but spoke Russian and could not converse in English. The father was from Malawi and could speak some English. He repeatedly told me that in his country he would not have been expected to attend his own son's funeral; but there would only be the two of them at the ceremony so he felt obliged to be there. We managed to agree on a little form of service using Psalm 23, the Lord's Prayer and Matthew 19:14. I usually prepare a little sheet for graveside services with the words to be shared included. By using Google it was possible to produce one copy with Psalm 23 and The Lord's Prayer printed in Russian for the mother's benefit. As it happened a neighbour came on the day and the five of us, including the funeral director, shared what was a very brief service in which I included a few words based on Matthew 19:14. But at the end the father stepped

forward and spoke for about ten minutes on his feelings about the situation he found himself in - and I listened and felt his bitter shame and sorrow. When I tried to re-visit they had gone.

My reason for sharing this is to point out the need for great flexibility in funerary ministry related to infants and children, and the possibility of what I would call "raw pain" which might just need to be endured for a while. It is humbling, but essential to realise that the Holy Spirit does not always give us words which will bring healing or peace for the bereaved or for ourselves.

2. If a minister is asked to conduct a service for a foetus (miscarriage late in a pregnancy), a wise selection of verses from Psalm 139 can be helpful. The Psalm combines a sense of wonder about life in the womb, but also a sense of ignorance about how God orders our lives. We share Job's need to acknowledge the limits of our understanding.

c) Internment or Scattering of Cremated Remains

As far as I am aware there are no laws governing the disposal of cremated remains. But these ashes are acidic, so they are unsuitable as an aid to propagating plants, or for spreading on a small area of lawn.

My experience of cremated remains from other countries is that there may still be recognisable pieces of bone. Be prepared for this. British Crematoria usually crush the cremated remains to a fine powder which makes them suitable for scattering. When scattering ashes scatter them low to the ground and take the wind direction into account. If the family wish to scatter the ashes themselves give them this advice before they do it.

Whether the cremated remains are to be scattered or interred, some families will ask for a minister to officiate. This is usually, but not always, the minister who has conducted the funeral service. In these circumstances I usually prepare a small service sheet so that the family can participate. (I find some of the Microsoft Publisher templates for greeting cards easily adaptable for use as small service sheets.) It is helpful to get some idea of how many people will be present. If no estimate can be given, a dozen sheets will cater for twenty or more using one-between-two.

The front cover of the service sheet will say: "*An act of worship to inter (scatter) the mortal remains of*" followed by the place, date and time - and possibly giving the name of the minister and the funeral director. There will be a psalm which may be chosen with the funeral service in mind, a prayer, a space for the committal or scattering, a second prayer, the Lord's Prayer and a benediction. I will point out that this is not a re-run of the funeral service, and will therefore be brief (no more than 10 minutes): but it is part of showing continuing love for the person who died and treating them with due respect.

As an example of prayers which might be used, these two prayers were offered for a man called Jim whose ashes were to be interred:

A Prayer of commendation

*Heavenly Father, we come in faith to pay our respects, to show our love, and to fulfil our duty to a loved one who has died. We commit Jim's ashes to the ground, but commend his spirit to your safe-keeping. We entrust Jim's soul to you, and ask you to hold him in your peace and loving mercy. Grant us the faith we need to let go of those we love, and to move on in our lives. By looking forward we honour those who have gone before us: by thinking of others we find our better selves: by accepting death we can find a new life. So we commend Jim and all our loved ones to your eternal love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

(At this point the ashes were interred)

A Prayer for those who mourn

*Father God, we bring to you all who mourn at this time for the death of their loved ones; and we bring ourselves. We ask that the promises of your Son will fill us with hope, and the presence of your Holy Spirit give us strength; and the power of your love will bring us the comfort we need both now and in the days to come. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. **AMEN.***

d) A DIY Scattering of Cremated Remains

There are times when a family will ask a minister for help because they intend to conduct their own scattering or internment of ashes. This may be because the minister is not able to perform the ceremony at the time convenient to the relatives, or it is to be done in a distant place, or for some other reason.

If the ashes are to be scattered, the minister should give the practical advice given earlier about taking the wind direction into account, scattering low to the ground, and the acidity of the ashes. If the ashes are to be scattered or buried the family should obtain any permissions needed to carry out the ceremony. Some Local Councils and some church "authorities" have strict rules or expectations about the use of their graveyards or cemeteries. It is as well to act in advance to avoid possible confrontation and upset.

The family may need help in finding some words to use at the time of the internment or scattering. The prayers and readings which a minister would use can easily be passed to families for their use, though they may at times need adapting.

For one family I offered them the following to use:

Words for use at the scattering of ashes:

A Meditation

Do not stay in this place and weep; I am not here, I do not sleep. I am a thousand winds that blow; I am the diamond glints on snow. I am the sunlight on ripened grain; I am the gentle autumn rain. When you awaken in the morning's hush, I am the swift uplifting rush of quiet birds in circled flight - I am the soft stars that shine at night. Do not stay in this place. Have no fear. I am not here. I am at one with infinite space.

A Prayer of commendation

Heavenly Father, we come in faith to pay our respects, to show our love, and to fulfil our duty, to a loved one who has died. We commit Keith's ashes to the ground, but offer his spirit to your safe-keeping. We entrust Keith's soul to you, and ask you to hold him in your peace and loving mercy. Grant us the faith we need to let go of those we love, and to move on in our lives. By looking forward we honour those who have gone before us: by thinking of others we find our better selves: by accepting death we can find a new life. So we commend ourselves, Keith and all our loved ones to your eternal love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **AMEN**

After this prayer The Lord's Prayer might be said.

A blessing for the mourners

May the road rise to meet you, May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face, the rains fall soft upon your fields.
May green be the grass you walk on, May blue be the skies above you.
May you be poor in misfortune, Rich in blessings.
May the warm rays of sun fall upon your home
May pure be the joys that surround you, May true be the hearts that love you.
May the hand of a friend be always near.
And until we meet again, May God hold you in the palm of his hand. AMEN

e) Grave-side Service

A graveside service will usually follow a similar format to the internment of ashes, with a very similar service sheet: but the service will normally be slightly longer. There may be a short eulogy or homily. The prayer for those who mourn may be adapted to include the names of those who have been very close to the person who has died. There may be some music played: but remember, this requires good self-powered audio equipment to be effective.

My own custom, with the agreement of the family, is for the coffin to be lowered into the grave before the "service" begins. This allows the pall-bearers to move away from the grave and the family to come closer and have a better sense of being involved. It should be pointed out that it is not possible for a sizeable group of people to stand near all graves. Other graves, headstones, trees, fences, etc., can all make it difficult. Ministers, perhaps with the assistance of the FD will do their best but standing on someone else's grave may be unavoidable.

f) Environmental

Ministers may be asked to conduct a service which is being paid for out of the public purse. Because they have generally been arranged by the local council's department of the environment they are often referred to as "Environmental Funerals" - not to be confused with "green" or "environmentally friendly" burials. At one time "environmental funerals" were always burials, but increasingly they are cremations.

Only rarely will there be more than a handful of people. Sometimes there is no one. In such circumstances I have always found some of the pall bearers willing to share in a brief act of worship.

It is always worth preparing at least six service sheets in case anyone comes - or to use with the pall bearers. The service sheet can be very simple. The front cover will carry basic details. The centre-fold will be used for Psalm 23 and The Lord's Prayer. The minister will say some words of committal and commendation.

If relatives or friends come to the service I will always do my best to find out, and then to use the actual name used in a person's lifetime. I will also ask if anyone would like to say a few words about the person who died.

g) Pre-funeral Prayers in the Family Home

When asked to offer prayers with the family in their home prior to the service, I will inform the family that I shall share with them a psalm, a prayer and a blessing for those who mourn.

The psalm I use is Psalm 90 verses 1, 2, 4, 10, 12, 16-17.

The Prayer will be along the following lines:

Heavenly Father, today in faith we will pay our respects and fulfil our duty to one of your very special children, our friend who has died. We shall commit her body to earth, but commend her spirit to your safe-keeping and entrust's soul to you. We ask you to hold her and us in your loving mercy and grant us your peace.

As we share our joyful memories and we share our sadness with each other, and as we share our worship with others today, we ask for the promises of your Son to fill each one of us with hope; for the presence of your Spirit to give us your strength; and for faith in the power of your love to bring us the comfort we need both now, during this day, and in the days to come.

By looking forward we honour those who have gone before us, by thinking of others we find our better selves, by accepting death we find a new life. Help us so to do. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. (A brief silence is observed.) AMEN

The Blessing is: *May the God of peace fill you with the Holy Spirit, so that you may be kept safe and blameless in soul and body until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory, and may the grace ...*

h) An Atheist (or Non-Religious)

A minister may be asked to conduct a funeral service for someone who has been an avowed atheist. Some ministers feel unable to do so, perhaps believing that if someone has deliberately chosen not to trust in God in their lifetime they will have put themselves beyond the reach of God's love. On this basis it would be hypocritical for the church, represented by the minister, to in effect offer its blessing and to offer the family false consolation. As mentioned in chapter one, I take a different view, and whether the deceased person has been an atheist or the family are predominantly atheist I will serve them to the best of my ability.

The minister will, of course, be aware that it is highly likely the congregation at the funeral will include members who are not atheists. Though they will not be the focus of the primary ministry, just the actual presence of a minister may be a comfort to them.

It may seem odd, but at the pre-funeral visit, especially when the request has been for a non-religious service, the minister still needs to ask whether the family would like any hymns or prayers. They often do. What they do not want is over-the-top pomp and ceremony and to be told by someone else what they ought to believe (see Philippians 2:12). Unfortunately there are many people who equate this with religion and Christianity. In these circumstances I have had some most enjoyable conversations about faith. Many people are surprised to hear that Christian faith based on Jesus' teaching is an encouragement to trust in God rather than to accept dogma about God.

However, there will be occasion when it becomes clear that what is required is a ceremony which has no mention of God. Only on one occasion was there also no wish for love to be mentioned. It is biblically justifiable to celebrate love without mentioning God by name. The Song of Solomon does precisely that. Large sections of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs refer to God as Wisdom or Logos rather than as "God". People of faith have sometimes struggled and disagreed when deciding if such approaches are "acceptable". Each minister must follow their own conscience in the matter.

What follows is an example of non-religious service. This was for a female divorcee I have re-named Helen Adams. On this occasion the ceremony included one hymn:-

The introduction:

*On behalf of the family **Helen Adams**, may I welcome you all to this ceremony of remembrance. There will obviously be some sad thoughts and feelings here today because the life of **Helen** has run its course - but those closest to Helen know today ought also have an air of thanksgiving about it, because to be too solemn, and certainly to be too religious would not be in keeping with Helen's life or with the thoughts and feelings of present company.*

Hymn: *We are going to sing a cheerful hymn, which has also been a pop song, and recognises that in many ways each day of life is a gift in that it is full of potential. The hymn is "Morning Has Broken". Please stand to sing. (Had there been no hymn, a reading would probably have been shared at this point)*

Meditation: *Prayers addressed to a deity are not appropriate today, but this place reminds us that we all live within the great mysteries of life and death, so let us bow our heads for a few moments of meditation, not as a sign of sorrow or submission, but as a sign of respect -*

*It is surely right for us to think with compassion today of Helen's family - Some like her brother Christopher died before her, others of her own generation like Peter & Ruby remain. Lynette, James and Robin are here to mark the passing of a mother and their sadness is shared by Mark, Tanneth and Seph. There are also other absent family & friends, who will miss the presence of Helen in their lives - and we think especially of Helen's mother, Eileen. But let us find comfort from the care given by the General Hospital for Helen's family, and the good wishes of supportive friends. Let us hold fast to good memories, and give thanks for a life well lived and now complete. Indeed, let us now lift up our heads as a sign that we will face the future in a way that dignifies the human spirit and honours the memory of one we have loved - **Mrs. Helen Adams**.*

Eulogy: *The Eulogy, celebrating Helen's 61yrs has been provided by Lynette about her mother and will be read by me on her behalf. (The reading of the eulogy followed.)*

Sign of Respect: *Let us stand together in quietness as a sign of respect and an opportunity for private remembrance.*

Closing of the Curtains: *As the curtains close today we are invited to listen to "Days" by The Kinks.*

Closing Blessing:

Helen Adams: Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you. Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you. Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.

i) With Other Faiths to be taken into Account

We live in an increasingly multi-faith society. The minister can always take this into account. For example when offering a blessing for the deceased person each person present can be invited "*according to their own faith to breathe their own thoughts of love and blessing for*" Or, when shaking hands at the door a minister needs to be aware that in some faiths or cultures for a man to shake a woman's hand is not acceptable.

On some occasions a family might have been part of the Christian tradition, but the person who died had adopted a different faith. It may be requested that this be recognised in some way. If a minister has friends of other faiths it is possible through these friendships to find prayers or readings which are appropriate. If not, there are myriad resources available on the internet.

Some ministers may not feel able to offer a prayer from a different religious tradition. Where this applies a family member or friend might be asked to help. But I have usually managed to find something which I can share in good faith, whilst respecting the faith of others. For example, I was asked to conduct a funeral service in which the deceased had converted to Islam and one or two of his Muslim friends would be at the service; so with accompanying explanations I shared the following as the curtains closed:

Death is a very painful and emotional time, yet one that may be filled with hope and mercy. Most Muslims and Christians believe that death is a departure from the life of this world, but not the end of a person's existence. Rather, eternal life in God's presence is to come, and we pray for God's mercy to be with the departed, in the hope that they may find peace and happiness in the eternal presence of God.

Muslim Funeral prayers (salat-l-janazah)

Glory be to you almighty God, and praise be to you, and blessed is your name. Exalted is your majesty, and there is none to serve beside you.

Almighty God, shower your mercy upon your prophets and all who follow their teaching, as you showered your mercy upon Abraham and the followers of Abraham. Behold you are praiseworthy, glorious.

Almighty God: forgive and bless those of us who are alive and those of us who have died; those of us who are present and those who are absent; those of us who are young and those of us who are adults; our males and our females.

Almighty God, whomsoever you keep alive, let them live as a person of faith, and whomsoever you cause to die, let them die trusting in your mercy. As - Salamu 'Alaykum.

j) Blessing of a Grave

There are increasing numbers of green burial sites. These are not generally "blessed as consecrated ground" as is the case for many churchyards and cemeteries. The idea of "consecrated ground" (in spite of Exodus 3:5) has little meaning for me, preferring the Psalmist's view: "*the (whole) earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*" (Ps.24:1; 1 Cor.10:26). But it is important to some people. They need an appropriate ministry. When I was first asked to bless a grave I was unable to find anything which seemed to show some serious thought had gone into the action of blessing.

I have therefore used the following - sometimes slightly adapted:

Heavenly Father, Jesus sanctified Golgotha, a place of death, by his faith in your eternal loving purposes; so may faith in you sanctify this grave. And as Jesus passed through death to resurrection life and was then received to be with you in your glory; so may and all who put their trust in you find peace and joy in your presence for ever, and ever. AMEN

j) Planting of a memorial tree

I had a very good friend who mostly found his "fellowship" in his local pub. When he died they planted a tree in the back garden of the pub in his memory; and they offered me the privilege of blessing it! I was told there would be about a dozen of the "regulars" present and they wouldn't want it "too religious". It would not have been in keeping with their needs, or with the life of my friend. What follows is the little service-cum-ceremony

which I devised. It might serve as an example of how the faith of a minister allied to a professional approach can speak to non-church-going people. I produced a little A5 folded sheet with the readings and prayers for those who wished to follow; and to take away as a keepsake of the occasion. The feedback I had was very positive.

The Ceremony

Introduction

We come to plant a tree in memory of our good friend, Rob.

We are going to use three short readings from sacred writings, each one followed by a brief prayer. I hope this will help us to share our thoughts and feelings with each other at this time, drawing on the insights of people of other times and different places. As trees plunge their roots deep into the soil for nourishment, so may we draw from the depths of human history and faith and find strength for our souls.

The Book of Genesis Chapter 2:8-9, 15-17

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Prayer

Heavenly Father, this reading reminds us that life includes good and evil, and all of us fall to temptation sometimes – So as we plant this tree may it be sign that we accept each others failings and weakness in a spirit of love and forgiveness. We pray that in this same spirit you will hold Rob in your love, and mercy, and grace, for all time and eternity. Amen

The Book of Psalms - Psalm 96:9-13

Worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. ***Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;*** they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, this reading reminds us that the whole of life, in all its forms, can at times be celebrated and enjoyed and honour you. We thank you for all the joys and happiness that Rob brought into our lives. May this tree be a source of delight to many, and may it remind us of good and happy times – and inspire us to live with joy in our hearts and lives. AMEN

The Book of Revelation Chapter 2:7and Chapter 22:2

The book of Revelation consists of a dream or vision of how things will be when the old heaven and earth pass away, and by God's grace a new earth, a new order, come into being.

"He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the **tree** of life, which is in the paradise of God. Down the middle of the great street of the city flowed a river. On each side of the river stood the **tree** of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the **tree** are for the healing of the nations."

Prayer

Heavenly Father, this reading invites us to have faith that within your ultimate purposes of love there will be a life in which there are no more tears, no more sorrow or sickness and disease, no more bitterness, and no more death. May our hearts and minds have faith that Rob is now part of that new order; and as this tree begins to reach up for the sky, may we reach out for you so that we find all the comfort we need now, all the faith we need to live and die in peace, and a hope which is eternal – We ask these things through him who is the resurrection and the life. AMEN.

I invite you to share with me in saying **the Lord's Prayer** as a close to this simple ceremony:
Our Father, who art in heaven AMEN.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Template for a Pre-Funeral Visit -

To be read in conjunction with Chapter 2 above.

From the funeral director (But always check these details with the family)

Name and contact details of funeral director

Date & Time of service

Place of service

Name and relationship of next of kin &/or main contact

Address to visit

Telephone number (s) of the family

Date and place of death

Full "official" Name of the deceased person

The family's choice of hymns and music

Hymn choices (if any)

(If no hymns are to be sung, I usually encourage sharing Ps.23 and The Lord's Prayer so that people take an active part.)

Music choices (if any) - 3 usual possibilities are during entry of the family, while curtains close, and at the end.

The family and/or the minister MUST liaise with the funeral director to ensure the music requested will be available on the day.

Regarding the deceased (for use in the prayers &/or the eulogy):

Name by which the deceased person was most commonly known

Their date and place of birth (and how important was this to them?)

Name of "partner" (Plus: how long have they been together/married? Was it good or bad?)

Names of children / grandchildren / parents? / etc

Names of any other close relatives past and present

Names of any really significant friends

Further questions

Are special thanks due to anyone (Drs., nurses, hospitals, care home, etc.)?

Is there anything the family particularly want included in the service?

(e.g. Favourite reading, someone to sing, etc.)

Is there anything the family particularly want included on the service sheet?

(E.g. invitation to the wake)

If there is to be a eulogy, how and by whom will this be done?

If the minister is to give the eulogy will the family provide a script? *If not the minister needs to ascertain what is most important to say about the deceased person in order to pay proper respect to them in approximately 4 minutes of the service?*

(See Chapter 2 above Paragraphs 8a - j + 9a - f)

Is there anything the family need to ask the minister?

Appendix B. Template for a funeral service

Welcome

On behalf of her family I welcome you all as we come together to share our worship in respect for the life and precious memory of (Usually and affectionately known as)

Introduction

We come in a spirit of faith and love to share a sense of **sadness** because a friend has died. We come to say fond **farewells** as we pray that one we've loved will rest in peace. We perhaps come to seek and to find **comfort** for our sorrow and that inner strength which dignifies the human spirit and honours the memory of those who have died before us. If we can, we open our hearts and minds and take to ourselves the hope of all faithful people that trust in God can bring peace even in the face of death.

Also we come, as much as we are able, to give **thanks** for the gifts of life and love which bless us in our earthly days, and to pray that the love of God will keep ... and us all in God's eternal day.

May the gifts of grace, mercy and peace be with each one here as we worship together in this place.

Hymn:

PRAYERS

We give thanks for life itself which is a precious and sometimes frail gift: especially for the life of in whose memory we are gathered. We give thanks for all that endears her memory to us, and for all the ways in which life has been enriched by what has said and done, the kind of person she has been, the way her life has touched the lives of others. We give thanks for a life well lived. AMEN

We come to ask your eternal blessing for We know we all make mistakes and fail ourselves and others sometimes, but we are grateful that we have seen in Jesus Christ that your kind of love always reaches out with grace and mercy and forgiveness and acceptance. In keeping with the gracious spirit of Jesus we commend into your eternal loving presence and pray that will rest in your love and peace for ever. AMEN

We think prayerfully of those who have been closest to We pray especially for We think with compassion of any who may have wronged and give thanks for those who have loved and cared for her through the years of her life - giving special thanks at this time for the care of But for every evidence of your love at work in ...'s life we give thanks today. AMEN

Lastly we pray for ourselves. Help us to rest content knowing that ... has always been and will eternally remain a child of your love, forever in your safe keeping. And may we find the comfort we need through rich memories, the sharing of our sadness, the presence of real friends, and above all our trust in you as God, eternal and loving, world without end. AMEN.

The Word (Might begin with a reading and lead into a homily and/or eulogy)

The eulogy might begin: "*We are here to pay our respects yet representing many others who down through "x" years have been touched by the life of*"

and end with "*To have known Is to have many reasons for thanksgiving, and a memory which is worthy of respect. We keep a time of silence for private memories, and **stand** as a sign of respect".*

HYMN:

The Committal: *seeing that the days and years of 's life have come to an end we commit her body to be cremated. The scriptures remind us that our bodies come from the earth and to the earth they will return—earth to earth ashes to ashes, dust to dust—BUT they also invite us to have faith that the spirit within us is the very breath of God, has a life that is eternal, and a life that belongs to God always. The Gospels tell us Jesus physically died, but the spirit of his living was never lost. So with, her spirit lives on in God's eternity and in those with whom shared her life and love.*

..... has come to her eternal rest. May our continuing lives honour her memory through the words we speak, the thoughts we harbour, and the spirit of everything we do. In the name of the F S & HS Amen.

QUIETNESS FOR PERSONAL FAREWELLS

Prayer of Farewell &/or LORD'S PRAYER

Father God it is never easy to let our loved ones find their eternal rest in you, because we now lose them from our sight. So we ask that we might have sufficient faith to trust that your love is stronger than even death itself. Help us to trust that a loved one who has passed from our care is always in your safe-keeping, and to trust that our lives which are the poorer for our loss may yet be enriched by a deeper reliance on you—and may our confidence in your love fill us with the peace of your presence so that we find comfort for our souls, strength for the days ahead, and faith such as fits us all for your eternal kingdom. AMEN.

A Blessing/Benediction.

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