

# Preparing for Christian Death and Burial Information for Family, Friends and the Church

## Why plan for my death and burial?

When an individual dies, those left behind normally respond with great emotion and are often troubled. At the same time, loved ones are often put in the situation of having to quickly make many decisions of a significant and unfamiliar nature – at a time when such decisions are particularly difficult.

- “Didn’t Dad want to be cremated?”
- “How did Mom feel about an open casket for the visitation?”
- “Whom would my husband (or wife) want me to call?”
- “What kind of service should we plan for my sister (or brother)?”

The ability to take part in meaningful leave-taking rituals and to receive the comfort of family, friends and the church may be hindered by having to wrestle with questions like these. In situations where the wishes of the one who has died are not known – especially where those left behind have conflicting values, opinions or financial resources – some decisions can also create regrettable divisions.

While you are still living, you can give a crucial and meaningful gift to those whom you love by finding the courage and time to consider and communicate your wishes at the time of your death.

## How can I plan?

Making a plan for your death and burial generally involves a few steps, as follows:

- Take time to review and **fill out the form** found on the following pages. Most funeral homes and many churches offer similar forms, if you wish to consider alternatives.
- You may want to gather more information before filling out some sections. For instance you may want to inquire about the existence of a family burial plot; or research the services provided by various funeral homes; or speak with your priest or pastor about any of these matters.
- You or others may be helped if you **share this information** with – and explain your decisions to your spouse, a child or sibling, a trusted friend, and/or your priest or pastor.
- At a minimum, you should **file this information in a clearly marked envelope or file** and let at least one other person know where it is kept.
- You should **speak with your priest or pastor** if you have unusual requests about the worship services at the time of your death. Ask about the appropriateness of any unusual plans.
- Please consider **giving a copy of your wishes to your priest or pastor**. He or she will likely plan a key role in seeing that your wishes are carried out. You may also wish to give a copy of your wishes to your spouse or another trusted family member or to a friend.
- You should **revisit your death and funeral plan** every few years, and amend it as appropriate.
- If necessary, you should come to terms with the fact that it will not be possible to perfectly follow all of your wishes. With the support of your clergy, the funeral home staff and others, your family and friends will do their best to honor you, and you will have honored them by giving them some thoughtful guidelines.

## I. End-of-Live Medical Wishes and Instructions

What are your wishes relative to the presence of clergy in the event that your death is immanently anticipated?

- I wish to receive the prayers and rites normally offered by and available through my own church.
- If clergy from my own church are unavailable, I wish for prayers to be offered by any available clergy.
- I leave this decision to loved ones who will be in the best position to decide at the time.
- I prefer that clergy not be involved or present when my death is anticipated or at the time of my death.

Special Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

## II. Care and Disposition of My Body

When an individual dies, some decisions about the care and disposition of the body must be made right away. (Many hospitals, for instance, prefer that the deceased be removed from the premises within a few hours.) Other decisions can be delayed a day or two. Still others can be delayed indefinitely. (Families have great latitude, for instance, about the disposition of ashes after cremation.) Any or all of these decisions can present surviving loved ones with considerable added stresses if prior wishes are not known. The awkwardness or difficulty in committing some decisions and wishes to paper now can save your loved ones considerable anguish later on.

A. Have you made clear and legally appropriate arrangements for you body to be donated to medical research?

- No, I do not wish, nor have I made arrangements, for my body to be donated to research
- Yes, I've made arrangements for my body to be donated to medical research.

If yes, please explain:

Name on Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** when an individual makes an election to donate his or her body to research, the appropriate institution (medical school, hospital, etc.) is notified in close proximity to the time death and a determination will be made, normally within a few hours of death, about whether or not the institution wishes to retain and use the body for research. If so, the residual remains will eventually be cremated (at the expense of the institution) and returned to the next of kin, normally in about a year. If, for whatever reason, the institution chooses not to accept the body, the surviving loved ones must make the usual decisions, as follows:

The following questions presume that you do not wish for your body to be donated to research, or you may answer them, in anticipation of the possibility that the institution to which you have donated your body for research is unable to satisfy your wishes:

B. Is there a funeral home in your community where you wish for your body to be cared for after your death?

Yes.             No.

If Yes, Name of funeral home: \_\_\_\_\_

Location/Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

C. Is there a funeral director whom you prefer to serve the needs of you surviving loved ones?

Yes.             No.

If Yes, what is his/her name: \_\_\_\_\_

D. Do you have a pre-paid contract or agreement with a funeral home or memorial society?

Yes.             No.

If Yes, please provide more information: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E. Please explain any wishes in regards to personal items (jewelry, prosthesis, hearing aids) that you may wish to have removed or kept with the body upon death:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

F. Do you wish for there to be a visitation with a viewing of your body (sometimes called 'open casket') after your death? *Note: this can be done even if you wish for your body to be cremated later on. Funeral homes will rent caskets for this purpose. This nearly always requires the procedures and expenses related to embalming and otherwise preparing the body.*

Yes.             No.

If Yes, do you prefer for the viewing – open casket – to take place (check any that are appropriate):

Private viewing for closest survivors only (normally does not require embalming)

At a funeral home at an appropriate time prior to the funeral/memorial service.

At the church, on the day of or prior to the funeral/memorial service at the church.

I'm comfortable with any choices made by my surviving loved ones.

Other. Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please indicate your wishes, if any, regarding clothes, jewelry, make-up, or other items to be placed with your body in the casket **for the purposes of the viewing(s) only:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

G. Regarding the disposition of your body, use the following to indicate your wishes and to provide additional information, as indicated:

**Option 1:**  Body to be placed in a coffin and buried in a cemetery plot or crypt.

Please provide information about the name of the cemetery and any family burial plot or crypt you have purchased or to which you are entitled, or, in the absence of any such prior arrangement, indicate in what cemetery you would prefer to be buried (give name of cemetery, city or town, state and phone number, and any plot location, number or other information.

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If you wish to be buried in a coffin, please indicate your wishes, if any, regarding clothes, jewelry, make-up, or other items to be placed with your body in the casket *for the purposes of burial*.

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If you wish to be buried in a coffin to be placed in the ground, do you also wish for a cement vault to be provided? (If you are unaware: a vault here refers to an additional container, also buried in the ground, in which the coffin is enclosed to protect it from deterioration.)

Yes.       No.

If you wish to be buried in a coffin, please indicate your wishes, if any, regarding appointment of pall bearers. Provide name, relation to you, and explain, if necessary, how to contact.

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A. Are you a veteran?

Yes.       No.

If Yes, what branch of the armed services: \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, do you wish to be provided with the traditional services to which you are entitled?  
(Note: these may include use of an honor guard at the committal, burial with a US flag, etc.)

Yes.       No.

Further information: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- B. If an obituary is to be used, the task will normally be done by the funeral director (with varying results), unless a surviving loved one assumes this responsibility (no small task under the usual circumstances); or you may provide a draft or useful information to be included in your obituary and completed after your death.

The following lines allow you to suggest minimum information to be included in your obituary, or you may choose to provide a draft on a separate sheet and attach it to this form.

Name to be used in obituary: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents' name (incl. mother's maiden name) \_\_\_\_\_

Education/degree/military/professional/career achievements: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Survivors you wish to have named in an obituary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Family information to be included: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Community volunteer/membership/involvement to be mentioned: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal interests/hobbies/travels to be mentioned: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are there newspapers, other than the local newspaper, where you wish to have an obituary placed? (Note: obituaries are generally a per-line expense, charged by the newspaper to families or the estate of the deceased, normally billed through the funeral home.)

Yes.       No.

If Yes, please indicate what cities and publications: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are there preparatory school/college/university/grad school/professional publications (many of which include death notices) that you would like to be notified?

Yes.       No.

If Yes, please indicate what institutions or publications: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Option 2:**  Cremation. The body is consumed by fire in a special facility operated by a funeral home or under contract by more than one funeral home. The remains, coarse ash, normally 6 to 8 cubic inches, are returned to the family or to the funeral home or church for later disposition.

If you wish to be cremated, please check all below that apply and provide necessary information.

I wish for a family member or loved one to be present at the crematorium at the time of cremation.

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I have made prior arrangements for an urn or vessel for my ashes, or I wish for arrangements for an urn or vessel to be made as follows:

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**Note:** Unless other arrangements are made, 'cremains' are normally returned in a sturdy plastic box. Funeral homes also sell a variety of special urns appropriate for permanent storage or burial. There are no laws, however, covering what type of container may or may not be used.

The laws of most states provide a great deal of latitude in terms of the disposition of ashes. If you desire cremation, please also indicate your preferred disposition of the ashes (check one of the following and add appropriate further information:

a)  Ashes to be scattered above the ground or committed to the waters of a lake or the ocean in a place that is meaningful to me and/or to surviving loved ones (or portions in more than one place), preferably as follows:

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or b)  Ashes to be buried in a meaningful and appropriate location on land and a tree planted or other memorial or designation provided, as follows:

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or c)  Ashes to be conventionally buried in a cemetery (often up to four containers of remains may be placed in a single cemetery plot, subject to the covenants and restrictions of the cemetery or applicable laws). Please provide information about the name of the cemetery and any family burial plot or crypt you have purchased or to which you are entitled, or, in the absence of any such prior arrangement, indicate in what cemetery you would prefer (give name of cemetery, city or town, state, phone number, and any plot location, number or other information):

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### III. Immediate concerns: Persons to contact, important papers

*In the hours and first days after a death, surviving loved ones typically wish to know all of the persons who, for personal, business or other reasons, should be notified of the death. Other immediate concerns often include the composition of an obituary and/or location of important papers, such as a will, insurance policies, etc. These pages allow you to provide information that may eliminate a considerable amount of worry for others. The subjects in this section ask for you to provide information regarding the following:*

- Notifications: persons whom you wish to be informed at the time of your death.
- Veteran information, if any.
- Obituary information.
- Memorial gift designation(s).
- Existence and location of important papers.

C. Notifications. Please indicate the names, relations and phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses of individuals whom you wish to have notified at the time of your death. Attempt to put the names in order of immediacy or other priority. You may photocopy this blank page or otherwise add additional names and information to add more names or information.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Relation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail (if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Relation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail (if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Relation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail (if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Relation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail (if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Relation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail (if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

- D. Memorial gift(s) designation. Members of extended families and friends often like to make memorial gift contributions. Normal designations are: one's church; medical or health research organizations (e.g. American Cancer Society), an institution where one received care (e.g. Good Shepherd Hospital, Hospice Care); one's school; or any non-profit organization in which one has been involved or from which one has benefitted (a summer camp, social service organization, etc.). It is customary for such information to be provided in any obituary and in the printed bulletin used for the funeral or memorial service. It is normal to indicate at least one but not more than three options. Please indicate your preferences in this regard below, with special notes if the institution may not be generally known.

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#### IV. Immediate concerns: Persons to contact, important papers

This section is mainly for those who are Episcopalian, and it relies on the use of the *1979 Book of Common Prayer*. In general, however, the decisions are similar for individuals from other Christian traditions, and the following may provide a useful outline or format for making decisions regardless of one's affiliation.

The basic considerations in relation to rites of leave-taking after death involve the following:

- A **funeral** normally refers to a service in a church with the body (or ashes) present, immediately followed by a procession to the place of burial (or committal of ashes).
- A **memorial service** normally refers to a service without the body (or ashes) present and not including a committal of remains (burial). Memorial services are sometimes held several days, weeks or months following death.
- The **committal** refers to the prayers that are said when the remains are buried, scattered or otherwise committed to a permanent resting place.
- The planning of a funeral or a memorial service and committal normally includes decisions about:

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| -Leadership   | -Provisions of a eulogy or sermon |
| -Scripture readings   | -Music/hymns                      |
| -Use of Communion (Eucharist) or not  |                                   |
| -Particular Prayer Book rites (Rite II or Rite I, which Eucharistic prayers?) |                                   |

- A. Is it your wish to have a Christian burial or memorial service in the church?  
 Yes.       No.      *An opportunity for general comments is provided at the end of this section.*
- B. Normally, your current priest/pastor or other member of the clergy in your congregation would preside at a funeral/memorial service. Please indicate if you have additional instructions in terms of leadership of the service.

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- C. Please indicate in the lines below if there is an individual whom you'd prefer to offer a eulogy or sermon. Please consider the fact that persons closest to you are rarely in a position to perform this role. You may wish to consider someone close enough to know you well but not presently so close that they would be emotionally unable to fulfill your wishes.

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D. Order of Worship form the Book of Common Prayer

- Rite II (now used more often and nearly always easiest for the congregation.) BCP, page 491.
- Rite I (still preferred by many.) BCP, page 469.

E. Scripture readings. The following readings include selections provided in the Book of Common Prayer plus some additional options. These are suggestions only, not restrictions. It would be normal to include at least two readings and one portion of the Psalter, or as many as three readings and two selections from the Psalter. You may wish to check the boxes of any passages you believe would be suitable, leaving final decisions to be made in the context of what may be appropriate at the time of death.

**Note: the space after each Bible citation is provided for you to indicate a preferred translation, if any. If none is indicated, your priest/pastor will likely use the translation normally read in your congregation.**

**From the Old Testament**

- Isaiah 25:6-9 (He will swallow up death in victory) \_\_\_\_\_
- Isaiah 61:1-3 (To comfort all that mourn) \_\_\_\_\_
- Lamentations 3:22-26, 31, 33 (The Lord is good unto them that wait for him) \_\_\_\_\_
- Wisdom 3:1-5, 9 (The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God) \_\_\_\_\_
- Job 19:21-27a (I know that my Redeemer liveth) \_\_\_\_\_
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (12-15) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Selections from the Psalter**

- Psalm 23 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 27 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 42:1-7 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 46 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 90:1-12 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 106 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 116 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 121 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 130 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalm 139:1-11 \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**From the New Testament, Epistles and Revelation**

- Romans 8:14-19, 34-35, 37-39 (Who will separate us from the love of Christ?) \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-26; 35-38, 42-44, 53-58 (The imperishable body) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9 (Things that are unseen are eternal) \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 John 3:1-2 (We shall be like him) \_\_\_\_\_
- Revelation 7:9-17 (God will wipe away every tear)
- Revelation 21:2-7 (Behold, I make all things new)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**From the Gospels**

- Matthew 5:1-9, 14-16 (Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount) \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 24:13-35 (The road to Emmaus) \_\_\_\_\_
- John 5:24-27 (He who believes has everlasting life) \_\_\_\_\_
- John 6:37-40 (All that the Father gives me will come to me) \_\_\_\_\_
- John 10:11-16 (I am the good shepherd) \_\_\_\_\_
- John 11:21-27 (I am the resurrection and the life) \_\_\_\_\_
- John 14:1-6 (In my Father's house are many rooms) \_\_\_\_\_
- John 14:18-21(I will not leave you orphaned) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

F. Preferences regarding Communion. Some persons leave instructions not to include communion out of consideration of those who may be present for whom Communion might be foreign or uncomfortable, or in order not to burden others with an overly-long service. However, your own life and faith will be best exemplified in worship by including Communion if it is an important part of your own experience of faith and fellowship in the Church. Surviving loved ones may be unsure of you preferences, so it is helpful to indicate:

- I would prefer that Communion be included as part of the service.
- I would prefer that Communion not be included as part of the service.

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

G. Music. The following is only a small sampling of hymns that are commonly chosen or that have texts particularly appropriate for use at funerals or memorial services. You may check any that appeal to you, recognizing that final choices will be made by surviving loved ones in cooperation with the clergy. You may also indicate below any other music (prelude, postlude, instrumental....whatever) that you might like to have included. *Note: the clergy or others may choose to exclude suggestions of secular music that are not appropriate for the context of worship.*

Hymn suggestions (check those that seem particularly suitable to you or indicate others). The hymn numbers shown are from the Episcopal 'Hymnal 1982.' *Note: A section of music/hymns deemed appropriate for burial is found in the Hymnal selections 354-358. Other suggestions include:*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All hail the power of Jesus' Name! 450,451 | <input type="checkbox"/> Lift high the cross 473                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All my hope on God is founded 655          | <input type="checkbox"/> Love divine, all loves excelling 657         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound 671     | <input type="checkbox"/> My God, thy table now is spread 321          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> By all your saints still striving 232      | <input type="checkbox"/> O God, our help in ages past 680             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Come down, O love divine 516               | <input type="checkbox"/> O what their joy and their glory must be 623 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith of our Fathers! living still 558     | <input type="checkbox"/> Rock of ages, cleft for me 685               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guide me, O thou great Jehovah 690         | <input type="checkbox"/> Singing songs of expectation 527             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am the bread of life 335                 | <input type="checkbox"/> "Sleepers, wake!" A voice astounds us 61     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holy Ghost, dispel our sadness 515         | <input type="checkbox"/> What wondrous love is this 439               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jerusalem, my happy home 620               | <input type="checkbox"/> Ye holy angels bright 625                    |

Other hymns, other music (e.g. prelude, postlude, offertory) or instrumental preferences:  
(for hymns, include name, number and hymnal if not the Hymnal 1982)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

