



## Missouri Mid-South Conference United Church of Christ

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### **Suggested Guidelines for Funerals and Memorial Services During COVID Pandemic**

*Written by Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel on March 30, 2020*

The public expression of grieving the death of a loved one is as ancient and sacred as humanity itself. We remember the Easter story when the women went to the tomb to prepare Jesus' body for the ritual of burial. During the COVID pandemic, we will need to adjust our traditional rituals of funerals, gravesides, or memorial services if there has already been a death in your Church. I offer the following for your Pastor and Church leaders as suggestions for how to proceed during this time when we are expected to stay at home and practice social distancing.

Please know that as your Conference Minister, **I have no authority to tell your local Church how to proceed with funerals and graveside services.** However, in this time, I have been asked to offer suggestions for the health and wellbeing of our Churches. Please receive the following as my prayerful suggestion for you during this pandemic.

1. Contact your County's Health Department and local funeral home for their guidelines on what is/isn't allowed.
2. Church Council should discuss the various rituals your church normally provides regarding funerals and be clear what you think is best for your Church. This will include:
  - Visitation at Church the Hour Before the Service
    - I suggest the Church not provide a time for visitation before the funeral or memorial service at the Church (because of the CDC guideline not to have more than 10 people together).
  - Funeral/Memorial Service
    - I suggest the Church limit the funeral to the immediate family only and the Pastor (while practicing appropriate social distancing). A public memorial service can be scheduled after the pandemic is over.
    - If the family wanted the service now, the Church could provide livestreaming so that friends and family could participate from their homes.
  - Graveside Committal Service
    - I suggest the Church limit the graveside committal service to the immediate family only while practicing appropriate social distancing.
  - Reception After Service
    - I suggest the Church not provide any reception or meals for the family during the COVID pandemic.
  - Delayed Memorial Service After Pandemic is Over
    - I suggest that the Church encourage families to consider having a private service for the family now and a public memorial service after the pandemic is over.
3. Create a policy on funerals for your Church during the COVID pandemic.
  - I suggest the Church Council collaborate with the Pastor to create a funeral policy during the COVID pandemic. This provides clear information to members and prevents anger and frustration with the Pastor if the family wants a more public service than is appropriate during the pandemic.
  - See below for a sample policy
4. Communicate Clearly with the Church
  - It is important that everybody understand your Church's funeral policy during the pandemic. Communicate it in multiple places so that everyone is aware of why you made your decisions. There may be members who express hurt and anger because you can't have a public service. This is why a funeral policy will be helpful for your Pastor, Church leaders, family of the bereaved.

## Sample Funeral Policy for \_\_\_\_\_ Church, UCC, during COVID Pandemic:<sup>1</sup>

For Christians, gathering to mourn the dead, celebrate their life and proclaim the hope of Resurrection are essential practices of our faith. During the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID19 outbreak, our usual mourning rituals have been interrupted. We think of those women on that first Easter, who went to follow their familiar mourning ritual to anoint Jesus's body, to find it disrupted. We remember their initial shock and confusion and feel it too. We're waiting to feel the hope of resurrection. In times of trial like the death of a loved one, we turn to the familiar practices and rituals of our faith and ancestors. And so we know that this disruption for a grieving community is doubly hard. We grieve this disruption with you.

Until the CDC lifts the public-gathering restriction, we will be limited in our funeral practices in the following ways:

### **Visitation: (possible options to include)**

- a) We are not able to accommodate a visitation before the service at this time.

*[I recommend against having a visitation during this pandemic. The potential for large gatherings and contact is too high. Churches would need many volunteers/ushers to do impossible work of policing the casket, forbidding touching of the casket, preventing hugging of the family, limiting access of ten at a time into the church, lining up outside with appropriate distancing, restringing seating in the church, cleaning of the church. The logistical and safety considerations are too great. We advise against an in-person visitation at the Church during the pandemic.]*

### **Funeral: (possible options to include)**

- a) We are able to host a funeral service at the church but only allow in ten people in the sanctuary.
- b) We are able to host a funeral service at the church but only allow in ten people in the sanctuary, and we are able to live stream the service.
- c) We are not able to host a funeral service at the church at this time.

### **Graveside: (possible options to include)**

- a) We are able to host a graveside service outdoors and require that all people practice social distancing of 6 feet between one another. We are able to accommodate 10 people present.
- b) We are able to host a graveside service outdoors and require that all 10 people practice social distancing of 6 feet between one another and we can stream the graveside service.
- c) We are not able to host a graveside service outdoors at this time.

*[We recommend graveside memorial services outdoors where possible as a preferred venue, so as to limit the possible surfaces and spaces as sources of contamination]*

### **Reception/M meal for Family: (possible options to include)**

- a) We are not able to host a meal following the funeral at this time.

*[I recommend against the church hosting a reception or meal after the service during this pandemic. The logistical and safety considerations are too great in hosting at the church and cooking on-site. Family should limit the size of any home gathering to avoid spreading the virus and consider postponing a memorial meal to a time when the crisis is past.]*

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### **Further Resources on Funerals During COVID Pandemic:**

- Massachusetts Council of Churches Funeral Guideline During Pandemic:
- CDC Guidelines on Funerals: <https://www.masscouncilofchurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020.03.24-Christian-Funerals-during-COVID19-Version-3.0.pdf>  
[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#anchor\\_1584390222777](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#anchor_1584390222777)
- National Funeral Home Association Website: <https://www.nfda.org/covid-19/visitations-funerals>

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<sup>1</sup> Primarily taken from the Massachusetts Council of Churches Funeral Guidelines During a Pandemic. : <https://www.masscouncilofchurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020.03.24-Christian-Funerals-during-COVID19-Version-3.0.pdf>