

The Art of the Funeral Interview Continued

4. Why does the church strike a note of celebration in the funeral service while the family may be grieving?

Our Book of Common Prayer calls the funeral The Celebration of a Life. It is certainly right and good for the family to be sad, but we are essentially giving thanks for the life of a person and celebrating the life that they now have in Christ. We must be flexible and loving, allowing these two realities to speak to one another, just as Jesus moved through the cross and to the resurrection.

5. What about remembrances or eulogies at a funeral service in the church? Are there any norms or guidelines?

A eulogy must be short, three to five minutes, and it is not the summary of a person's life. It must be well rehearsed and is best done before the formal liturgy begins. It is not the sermon but rather provides some context for the service itself. Families must be gently taught about what eulogy is and what it is not, or we exhaust our congregations.

6. How might the clergy effectively structure their meeting with family members or others planning a funeral— helping them decide what the funeral should include and also in gathering from them what will be helpful in preparing a homily for the service?

The planning of a funeral is very important. Clergy must collect details and give good liturgical guidance while also counseling and hearing of the life of a person, finding the gospel threads or good news in that life and weaving a homily. It is a rich and important hour and often just as important as the service itself.

7. How do the clergy and other parochial leaders taking part in the funeral care for the grieving on the day of the funeral and during the service?

The bereaved are incredibly vulnerable and must be treated with great care. Tears, anger, outbursts, and forgetfulness are normal. We should have tissues at the ready and laity whose job it is to accompany them, show them the bathrooms, make sure that they don't fall, etc. It is a wonderful ministry for a lay person who themselves may have lost a loved one in prior years.

8. Is a funeral service an opportunity for the church to reach out and embrace those unfamiliar with it or who might wonder if they are welcomed in its services?

Oh yes, I would say that this is one of the most crucial moments when the unchurched enter our doors with a kind of openness and vulnerability. We must explain why we do all the wonderful ancient liturgical practices that we do. We must make ourselves accessible to them and make them feel welcome. This is crucial for the future life of the church.