remembering God’s promises

A FUNERAL

PLANNING HANDBOOK

Pastor’s Guide

Augsburg Fortress
Introduction

Remembering God’s Promises: A Funeral Planning Handbook is a resource for families with a loved one who has died or whose death is imminent, adults attending a course or forum series on death and dying, and individuals making funeral plans in advance. Consider purchasing multiple copies and making handbooks readily available to people.

This guide is available in PDF and RTF formats. The PDF format allows you to use the guide as is. If you’d like to revise and reformat the content, use the RTF format.

Planning a loved one’s funeral

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of Remembering God’s Promises are especially relevant for families and friends planning a loved one’s funeral. Chapter 1 deals with many of the immediate tasks and concerns that follow the death of a loved one. Chapter 2 presents the funeral service as it appears in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, with additional notes and commentary. Chapter 3 provides lists of suggestions for scripture readings and hymns, as well as information on other planning options. When a family meets with you to plan a funeral, the worksheet at the end of chapter 3 is a place for them to write down information as well as any decisions that still need to be made. The funeral planning worksheet is also included in this guide.

Teaching and learning about death and dying

To help adults talk about death and dying in the context of faith and the church, use the handbook as a support piece for an annual course or adult forum series. This guide provides a four-session course outline on end-of-life decisions, hospice care, funeral and burial planning, and funeral liturgy planning. The course outline can be customized to suit your time frame, the resource persons available in your community, and your congregation’s needs.

Planning funerals in advance

The handbook is also an excellent resource for individuals who want to pre-plan their own funerals. Chapter 5 includes “A guide for my Christian funeral” to assist with this process. The preplanning worksheet is provided at the end of this guide.
Related resources from Augsburg Fortress

*In Sure and Certain Hope: A Funeral Sourcebook* (9781506431451)  
Melinda A. Quivik, general editor and contributor, et al.  
This comprehensive guide for planning, presiding, and preaching at funerals includes a CD-ROM that allows you to customize, print, and distribute selected sourcebook pages within your congregation.

*Peace at the Last: Visitation with the Dying* (9781506415956)  
Paul Palumbo, writer; Wendy Schramm, artist; Rolf Vegdahl, composer  
Developed by a congregation as a resource for individuals and groups visiting those who are dying, this richly illustrated liturgy includes texts from the psalms, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, and other sources. The simple musical refrains can easily be sung without accompaniment.

Recommended reading for clergy


Even at the grave, we make our song:
Course outline

In our culture we tend to sidestep conversations dealing with death or dying, thinking the topic is too surreal or morbid. But as people of faith—resurrection people—we need to have these exact conversations. We are called to point to the resurrection that comes from death, as we proclaim in the funeral service: “When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (ELW, p. 280, based on Rom. 6).

Holding an annual course or adult forum series in your congregation is one way to help individuals, families, and the entire congregation engage in important conversations about dying, death, and funerals. This four-session course outline looks at end-of-life decisions, hospice care, funeral and burial planning, and funeral liturgy planning. Consider inviting local experts to lead discussion on these topics. The sessions could be held during the four weeks leading up to All Saints Sunday as a reminder that in life and in death, we are the Lord’s. At the end of the course or adult forum series, invite participants to leave copies of their funeral plans in the church office so that their wishes will be honored upon their deaths.

Week 1: End-of-life decisions and advanced directives

Preparation: Have copies of ELW and Remembering God’s Promises: A Funeral Planning Handbook ready to distribute.
Optional: Print copies of the essay “Tending to the dying: A nurse’s view” from the CD-ROM included with In Sure and Certain Hope: A Funeral Sourcebook.
Presenter: A lawyer who works in this field
Time frame: 1 hour

1. Opening prayer
2. Opening song: “O Christ the Same” (ELW 760)
3. Introduction of speaker and topic: End-of-life decisions and advanced directives
4. What does the ELCA say about this?
   • A look at “End of Life Decisions” (ELCA social message, 1992), available at www.elca.org (search “end of life decisions”)
   • Small-group dialogue at tables around the presentation and the ELCA’s stance, including the sharing of personal experiences with these decisions
5. Closing questions and answers
6. Distribution of flyers with suggested local resource persons

7. Distribution of copies of *Remembering God’s Promises* and recommended reading for the next session
   - *Remembering God’s Promises*, introduction
   - Optional: “Tending to the dying: A nurse’s view” from *In Sure and Certain Hope: A Funeral Sourcebook*, pp. 214-217

8. Closing prayer

**Week 2: Hospice care**

Preparation: Have copies of ELW on hand for the opening song.
 Presenter: Hospice chaplain or hospice nurse from local agency
 Time frame: 1 hour

1. Opening prayer

2. Opening song: “Day by Day” (ELW 790)

3. Introduction of speaker and topic: Palliative care and hospice care

4. Stages of grief

5. Local options for hospice care and the role of insurance companies

6. Closing questions and answers

7. Recommended reading for the next session
   - *Remembering God’s Promises*, chapter 1

8. Closing prayer

**Week 3: Funeral and burial planning**

Preparation: Have copies of ELW on hand for the opening song.
 Presenter: Funeral director from a local funeral home
 Time frame: 1 hour

1. Opening prayer

2. Opening song: “Into Paradise May the Angels Lead You” (ELW 222)

3. Introduction of speaker and topic: What is involved in planning a funeral?
   - Relationship between the funeral home and the church
   - Costs associated with the funeral, burial, cremation
• Services such as military honors, Rotary, Free Masons, and so on
• Other considerations regarding planning: pastor’s availability, church availability, funeral home vs. sanctuary, and others

4. Various options for burial
   • Green burial
   • Cremation
   • Burial of a coffin or urn
   • Other forms: graveside service only, scattering ashes

5. Local options for funeral homes

6. Closing questions and answers

7. Recommended reading for the next session
   • *Remembering God’s Promises*, chapters 2 and 3

8. Closing prayer

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**Week 4: Liturgical planning for a funeral**

Preparation: Have copies of ELW on hand for the opening song and the funeral rite. Optional: print out copies of "A guide for my Christian funeral" from *Remembering God’s Promises*

Presenters: Pastor and musician of the congregation

Time frame: 1 hour

1. Opening prayer

2. Opening song: “Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song” (ELW 808)

3. The funeral rite in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (see *Remembering God’s Promises*, chapter 2)
   • Shape of the rite—gathering, word, [meal,] sending, committal
   • Scripture—helpful ways to choose texts for the funeral
   • Music—the assembly’s song within the funeral
   • Considering the funeral in light of the liturgical season

4. Planning a funeral liturgy
   • Music
   • Scripture texts
   • The role of family and friends
• Other issues, such as whether and when to include remembrances by friends and family, use of military rites
• Helpful and unhelpful things to include or omit: the pall instead of the national flag, the role of altar flowers in relation to the funeral flowers, the role of a sermon and the intermixing of a eulogy or personal stories with the gospel proclamation

5. The role of the congregation in the funeral and afterward

6. Reasons to pre-plan your own funeral (distribute copies of “A guide for my Christian funeral”)

7. Closing questions and answers

8. Recommended reading
   • *Remembering God’s Promises*, chapter 5

9. Closing prayer
Funeral planning worksheet

If your loved one made any arrangements or requests for his or her funeral, use them in making these plans.

About your loved one
Full name
Nickname (if any)
Date and place of birth
Date and place of baptism
Date and place of death
Age at death
Military veteran
  • An honor guard will be present at the interment  ____ Yes  ____ No
  • The national flag will be presented to the family  ____ Yes  ____ No

Family information
Parents’ names
Siblings
Spouse's/Partner’s name
Children's names (including spouses/partners)
Grandchildren’s names
Other significant persons
Memories and stories
How would you describe your loved one?

Childhood stories

Favorite activities

Talents and skills

Interests and passions

What will you miss most about your loved one?

The body
___ Burial
   • Embalming ___ Yes ___ No ___ Only if legally required
   • Name/location of cemetery
   • Plot number

___ Cremation
   • What will be done with the ashes?

___ Donation of body for research

Visitation/viewing
Provide time for viewing of the body ___ Yes ___ No
   • Location
   • Date and time

Funeral service
Location

Date and time

The deceased will be present in ___ Coffin ___ Urn ___ Objects of remembrance
Pastor’s guide for Remembering God’s Promises

Baptismal pall
Name of person(s) to place the baptismal pall over the coffin or urn

Thanksgiving/remembrance, eulogy, poem, letter
Name of speaker or reader

Scripture readings
First reading
Psalm
Second reading
Gospel
Person(s) to read scripture
Why these readings have been chosen

Music
Entrance hymn
Hymn of the day
Communion hymn(s)
Closing hymn
Other preferred music
Choir, instrumentalist, and/or soloist
Why this music has been chosen

Holy communion
Will be celebrated  ____ Yes  ____ No
• Person(s) to process with the bread and wine
• Person(s) to assist with distribution
Pallbearers
If a coffin will be present at the funeral service, provide names of at least six people to serve as pallbearers

Meal following the interment
Will be provided ___ Yes ___ No
   • Location

Memorials
___ Church memorial fund, specifically for ____________________________________________

___ Church endowment fund

___ Other organization(s)
A guide for my Christian funeral

About me
Full name

Nickname (if any)

Date and place of birth

Date and place of baptism

Military veteran
  • I would like to have an honor guard present  ___ Yes  ___ No
  • I would like to have the national flag presented to my family  ___ Yes  ___ No

Family information
Parents’ names

Siblings

Spouse’s/Partner’s name

Children’s names (including spouses/partners)

Grandchildren’s names

Other significant persons

Obituary information
Important dates, events, accomplishments, and so on
Church information
Name
Address
Phone number
Pastor(s)

Funeral home information
Name
Address
Phone number

Have prearrangements been made? ___ Yes ___ No
  • If yes, when?
  • Location of prearrangement documents

My body
___ Donate my organs/tissues ___ as transplants ___ for research
  • Transplant and/or donor documents are complete and attached

___ Burial
  • Embalming ___ Yes ___ No ___ Only if legally required
  • Name/location of cemetery and plot number
  • Name of contact for green cemetery burial

___ Cremation
  • What would you like to have done with the ashes?

___ Donation of body for research
  • Donor documents are complete and attached

“ A guide for my Christian funeral” from Remembering God’s Promises. Permission is granted to reproduce this page for local use only. Copyright © 2018 Augsburg Fortress.
Visitation/viewing
Provide time for viewing of the body  ___ Yes  ___ No
• If so, your preferred location

Funeral service
Location

Baptismal pall
Name of person(s) to place the baptismal pall over the coffin or urn

Thanksgiving/remembrance, eulogy, poem, letter
Name of speaker or reader

Scripture
First reading
Psalm
Second reading
Gospel
Person(s) to read scripture
Why these readings have been chosen
Music
Entrance hymn

Hymn of the day

Communion hymn(s)

Closing hymn

Other preferred music

Choir, instrumentalist, and/or soloist

Why this music has been chosen

Holy communion
Will be celebrated   ___  Yes   ___  No
• Person(s) to process with the bread and wine
• Person(s) to assist in distributing communion

Pallbearers
If a coffin will be present at the funeral service, provide names of at least six people to serve as pallbearers

If an urn for ashes will be present, provide the name of someone who will carry the vessel into the sanctuary

Meal following the interment
Will be provided   ___  Yes   ___  No
• Location
Memorial gift preferences
Use memorial gifts to further support the following ministries and organizations.
___ Church memorial fund, specifically for _________

___ Church endowment fund

___ Other organizations (please provide name and contact information below)

Intent
Dear family and friends,
I have carefully considered these choices and preferences. Use them after my death to guide your decisions and to plan a Christian funeral that comforts you and proclaims the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

Signed ________________________________

Date ________________________________

Please review and update this document regularly. Give copies to family members and your pastor upon completion and each time a change is made.