



Southminster Presbyterian Church

799 Washington Road • Pittsburgh, PA 15228-2001

Phone: 412-343-8900

Fax: 412-343-1930

Web: www.spchurch.org

Email: info@spchurch.org

Death and the Witness to the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central doctrine of the Christian faith. As Christians we affirm a common faith which extends to our attitude toward death, our acknowledgement of the resurrection, and our firm belief in the life everlasting.

The reality of death is not to be denied, neither is the assurance of eternal life to be overburdened by sorrow or loss. Rather, at the time of death of a loved one, we witness to the hope of the gospel and reaffirm with confidence that life anew lies beyond and above the life we know on earth.

Those who grieve the loss of one they love do not face death's reality in isolation from other Christians for we are sustained, upheld and comforted by the believing Christian community.

Arrangements

Christians recognize the inevitability of death and the emotional stress that is present in this time of loss. There are often many decisions to be made at a time when family members need to comfort and be comforted without undue pressure for practical concerns. For this reason the Southminster Presbyterian Church in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, provides a way for members to give advance consideration to these matters and to record their personal wishes for procedures to be carried out at the time of their death. The information is kept in confidence and may be reviewed, revised, or withdrawn at any time. The form for recording this information is called "Expression of Personal Wishes for Procedures at Time of Death" and may be obtained in the Church Office. It is recommended that the decisions made be discussed within the family or with those persons close to the individual who may be responsible for carrying out the wishes of the church member.

While the information here is not a legally binding document, it does serve to aid and guide the family members in making decisions that they can feel confident reflect the desires of their family member.

Advance Considerations

The comments in this section parallel the information form, "Expression of Personal Wishes for Procedures at Time of Death."

1. **Clergy.** When a death has occurred, the Church Office should be notified immediately in order that the pastor may help the bereaved in relating the reality of death to the sustaining reality of the Christian community and the hope to which it witnesses.
2. **Funeral Director.** Designate your choice of a funeral director. If death occurs outside your home city, your family should contact the funeral director in your home town immediately. The funeral director will then make all necessary arrangements.

3. **Treatment of the Body.** If there is a desire to aid in medical research and/or organ transplant programs, advance planning or notification is necessary. Information may be obtained from your funeral director or the Anatomical Board of Pennsylvania. Organ donor cards can be obtained at your local *Registry of Motor Vehicles* or downloaded from the *Organ and Tissue Donor Initiative* web site: <http://www.organdonor.gov/>.

Your wishes regarding the manner of preparing the body for burial may be indicated on the information form. Burial or cremation without embalming is now permitted within certain time constraints. Your funeral director can provide the necessary information on this matter.

4. **Visitation.** It is appropriate for friends to visit the family and offer their support and consolation. You may indicate your preference for the place of visitation on the information form.
5. **Final Disposition.** If you have purchased a burial plot, it is important to indicate that on the form, giving the cemetery name and address, including city and state.
6. **Christian Worship.** The Christian funeral or memorial service witnesses to the resurrection. It is a celebration of worship which gives thanks to God for the life and witness of the individual and gives consolation and assurance to the living in this world.

The worship acknowledges God's love freely given to all people, a love that strengthens and supports us even in the midst of grief. The worship focuses our attention on God's promises in Jesus Christ and the sure and certain belief that Christ receives us into His everlasting Kingdom in the life to come.

The worship ordinarily should be held in the building set apart for corporate worship of God. Because the focus is the worship of God and the consolation of the living, the body of the deceased is not necessary to the worship. It follows then that the casket, if it is present during the worship, be closed at all times. Attention is to be focused upon the promises of God, not upon the earthly remains of one of God's children.

The worship should be conducted with dignity and simplicity as a witness to God's love given to all people, a love which strengthens and supports even in the midst of grief. It is a witness to God's promises in Jesus Christ, as attested by Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to the promise that Christ has gone to prepare a place for the children of God.

Emphasis should be placed upon the reading of scripture that declares the Christian hope. As an expression of their common faith, it is appropriate that those assembled join in the singing of hymns which declare belief in the life everlasting. Thanks may be offered for the God-given life of the one who has died and intercession for family members and other loved ones who grieve.

The worship generally includes a Call to Worship, a Prayer of Praise, the Lord's Prayer, readings from the Old and New Testaments, organ music or hymns, and Prayers of Thanksgiving, Supplication and Intercession. You are encouraged to choose scripture verses and/or hymns that you feel to be appropriate and have had special meaning to you.

The committal service at the burial site usually consists of brief scripture readings and prayers. While the committal is an emotionally difficult experience, it is an important part of the healing and reassurance that comes through seeing the bodily disposition through its proper conclusion.

7. **Memorial Contributions.** Memorial contributions are one way to honor the deceased through financial support of interests or concerns that were important to the individual during his or her lifetime.
8. **Additional Instructions.** Space is provided on the form for any other information you may wish to record. The form, in and of itself, is not a legally binding document, but may serve to guide your family in making decisions that are in keeping with your wishes.

We urge you to carefully and prayerfully consider the matter of death in light of its Christian promise, and sincerely solicit your cooperation in completing and returning the enclosed form to the Church Office. If you have questions which are not addressed in this material, please contact one of the pastors.

“O blest communion, fellowship divine,
we feebly struggle, they in glory shine,
yet all are one in Thee,
for all are Thine.
Alleluia, Alleluia.”

from For All The Saints
written by William Walsham How