



Christian Funeral Planning Guide

St. Mark's Lutheran Church – Bemidji, MN

Introduction

As Christians, we look forward with joy and anticipate that day when our Lord will call us from this life to our real home with Him in heaven.

Death is one of the clearest demonstrations of God's law. God tells us, *"The soul who sins is the one who will die"* (Ezekiel 18:20) and *"The wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23). Death is clear evidence of sin.

Yet, we have someone who did something about our sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ became your substitute living perfectly as your substitute and dying on the cross to pay for all of your sins. *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus died for your sins and yet he did not stay dead, on Easter Sunday morning Jesus rose from the dead proving His victory over sin, death, and the devil. *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He keeps on giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 15:56-57). Since Jesus died and rose for you, you know for sure that you will be with him in heaven. Death for you is the doorway to heaven! What peace to know this! As a believer in Jesus, your Savior, you are ready and prepared for your death.

This planning guide is meant to help your loved ones as they consider the outward details of your funeral. This guide is helpful because it

- Lets your wishes be known to all concerned.
- Enables you to give expression to your faith by choosing lessons and hymns that are especially dear to you.
- Eases the burden on your loved ones by eliminating the pressure of decision making at the time of your death. By putting them in writing it will help your loved ones in their grief to know what to do.
- Will also give you a certain degree of ease knowing that your affairs are in order.

Please share this information with: your pastor, your loved ones, and the funeral director of your choice.

Please also understand that times and circumstances may change and what is put in writing today may need to be changed upon the circumstances of your death.

Your pastor is available to discuss any of the items with you. When you are finished a copy of this planning guide will be kept in a confidential file at St. Mark's for future reference.

One final note:

The Christian funeral worship service revolves around Jesus Christ whose bodily death and resurrection have flung open heavens doors and won eternal life for you. Therefore, the service will not speak much about you. The fact that you are dead is proof that you were a sinner. The funeral service will spend much more time talking about the One who will be bringing you out of your coffin on the Last Day. It is Jesus and Jesus alone who will give comfort, peace, and healing to your grieving loved ones.

Common Questions

What is the difference between a funeral service and a memorial service?

Simply put, at a funeral service the body of the deceased is present, whereas at a memorial service either the deceased's ashes or no remains are present. Both services provide an opportunity to proclaim God's death defeating acts in Christ.

Is it sinful to have my body cremated?

It is very clear that burial was the regular treatment of the body by believers in Bible times. Christ's body was buried to await the resurrection. The Bible also compares burial to planting a seed in the ground with the confidence that new life will spring from it (1 Corinthians 15:35-38). We, therefore, prefer to bury the dead in order to follow the custom of Scripture and for the symbolism of burial. Scripture, however, does not forbid cremation. Burning the remains was condemned in Amos 2:1 because it was done to desecrate the dead. It was not condemned in 1 Samuel 31:12-13, where the intention was to protect the dead from desecration. Indeed, it can be sinful if the attitude is "I'm going to have my body cremated so God won't be able to put it back together again." However, for the Christian, who trusts in God's power to bring his/her body, no matter what condition, back to life, it is acceptable. It will make no difference to God on Judgment Day what condition the body is in. God's Word tells us that we are formed from the dust of the ground and we shall return "again to dust" (Job 34:15).

If I choose cremation, do I need to secure the services of a Funeral Director?

We highly recommend working with a Funeral Director. This professional will ease the strain upon family members by coordinating all the details and thus contributing to your wishes being carried out with dignity and honor. Even if cremation is your desire, a Funeral Director handles many details that are not taken care of by the church, the Pastor, or family members. Attempting to save money by not using a Funeral Director is likely to cause confusion and frustration at a time when you most need guidance and support. That being said, it is possible to have a funeral without a funeral home when the body is cremated.

Should I make pre-arrangements with a Funeral Director?

Making the decision to pre-arrange some aspects of your funeral and/or burial is helpful. An appointment with a Funeral Director in advance of death is a wise step to help you decide what you and your family need from the many services available. If you are a family member caring for a dying loved one, making an initial contact now with a Funeral Director can be very helpful and will lessen the decisions and demands you'll face upon death. St. Mark's pastor is available to talk with you about the selection of a Funeral Director or to refer you to Funeral Directors he knows.

How soon after death does a funeral or memorial service take place?

Funeral services are generally held within three to five days following death, thereby allowing appropriate time for family members and friends to gather for the service. Memorial services can be held at any time. However, waiting for weeks or even months after a death will have a bearing on

finding a sense of closure, and this will impact the grief work that follows the death of a loved one. Therefore, it is recommended that a memorial service be held within a few weeks after death. Funeral or memorial services on Sunday are more difficult, as Sundays are reserved for the worship services of the congregation.

What fees are associated with a funeral or memorial service at St. Mark's?

There are no set fees for funerals at St. Mark's. It is customary to remember those who serve at a funeral with an honorarium, like the organist, instrumentalist, or vocalist. If you choose St. Mark's Ladies Guild to host a luncheon, you are welcome to give the Guild a donation. If you would like to give the officiating pastor an honorarium, that is your choice.

Who makes arrangements for musician(s)?

If you would like to request a special organist or instrumentalist at your funeral, he or she must be a WELS or ELS member since a funeral service is a worship service and therefore an expression of church fellowship and unity in beliefs. Otherwise, the pastor will arrange for an organist to play.

May we have a visitation at the church the evening before the service, or must it take place at a funeral home?

The visitation may take place at St. Mark's the afternoon or evening before the service if there are no other events already scheduled. In addition, a visitation time is typically offered at the church prior to the service.

Who is responsible for submitting the death notice and obituary to the Bemidji Pioneer?

The Funeral Director will take care of this for you. A notice can be placed in the newspaper and an obituary usually appears 2-3 days before the funeral. There is a cost for this and the funeral director will assist you. If you are not using a Funeral Director, your family will have to make the arrangements directly with the Bemidji Pioneer.

Who plans the reception following the funeral or memorial service?

St. Mark's Ladies Guild is glad to offer this service for the families of members who have passed away. Included in this packet is a menu option the ladies have put together. They also would like to know an estimate of people who might attend, however, we realize it can be difficult to estimate such a number. If you are using a funeral home the cost for the meal will be handled through them. If not, the family typically covers the main cost for the meal and sides and desserts are covered by the Ladies Guild who will serve the meal.

What if I desire to have memorials directed to St. Mark's?

This is an honorable thing to do. St. Mark's Church and School are blessed when memorials are directed to support their ministries. The Funeral Director will be happy to include any memorial designations in the notices about the funeral service. You are also highly encouraged to speak with the pastor about "Planned Giving" offered through the WELS Ministry of Christian Giving.

FUNERAL PLANNING WORKSHEET

When planning your funeral, or a funeral for a loved one, there are many choices to make. Facing some of those choices now will make the process less demanding for your loved ones later. This Funeral Planning Worksheet will lead you through a variety of decisions. After death, a Pastor of St. Mark's will meet with family members and review your worksheet to form the funeral or memorial service.

This worksheet may be used by:

- an individual making their advance plans known, or
- a family planning the funeral of a loved one nearing death or recently deceased.

Please supply as much information as you wish to share on any parts of the worksheet.

Guide for the Christian Funeral of _____
(Full Name: First, Middle (Maiden), Last)

Date Completed: _____

For the Person Making Advance Plans:

When you have completed this worksheet, please consider sharing it with St. Mark's pastor. The pertinent information will be kept in a confidential file available only to the pastor of St. Mark's. It will be used in consultation with your family or whomever you have directed to carry out these wishes upon your death.

Also, after completing the worksheet, consider telling someone you trust about it. You may wish to discuss with them what you have written to be certain that it is clear. Consider providing copies:

1. To your Family
2. Attached to your Will or Trust Plan
3. To a Funeral Director

Or simply give it to someone you trust with a note that says,

I have recorded my desires regarding my death and burial. I keep this information in the following place: _____ (i.e. on file at the church, with my will, etc.). At the time of my death, I ask that you use this information to provide guidance for my family and my church in making arrangements for the funeral I desire. Although this information is being left for safekeeping, I understand that it is not legally binding or enforceable. This worksheet does not make the church or anyone obligated or responsible for the execution of these instructions.

With gratitude,
Signature and Date

For Family Members Making Plans for the Funeral of a Loved One Nearing Death or Recently Deceased:

Please use this worksheet to assist with plans that will honor your loved one's expressed wishes or desires and will reflect his/her values. If you haven't already contacted a Funeral Director, please consider doing so now. The professional services, compassionate care, and guidance they provide will greatly assist you in the days ahead. St. Mark's pastor is available to refer you to Funeral Directors he knows.

When death occurs, please contact the church office at 218.444.3939 or, after hours, please use the personal cell phone number of Pastor Nitz (218.766.0400)

Visitation

A Visitation is an informal gathering for friends and family to express sympathy, view photographs/video, etc. You are invited to consider St. Mark's for the visitation when you work with a professional Funeral Director.

Will a Visitation be Held?

Yes

No

Location of Visitation

At the Funeral Home

At St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Other: _____

Will the Remains be Present at the Visitation?

Coffin with Viewing of Body

Closed Coffin

Urn with Photograph next to it

No Remains Present

Time of the Visitation

Evening Prior to the Funeral or Memorial Service

Before the Funeral or Memorial Service Only

Both

Displays

- Photographic Displays
- Mementos (Awards, Certificates, etc.)
- Bible of the Deceased
- Video (Usually Produced by the Funeral Home)
- Other: _____

Prayer Service at Funeral Home during visitation (*about ½ hour, prayers, devotion, Scripture lessons*)

- Yes, I would like a prayer service
- No
- Other wishes for a prayer service: _____

Christian Worship Service Plans

Location of Service

- St. Mark’s Lutheran Church
- Funeral Home
- Cemetery (A Graveside Service Only)
- Other: _____ (i.e. Care Facility Chapel, etc.)

Time of the Worship Service

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening

Will the Remains be Present at the Worship Service?

- Yes (Coffin or Urn with Ashes)
- No

Where will the casket be positioned?

- In front of the church
- In the church Narthex
- Other: _____

Display Items to be On or Near the Casket/Urn

- Floral Spray and/or additional Flower Bouquets
- Bible or Other Symbol of Faith: _____
- Photograph
- Cross
- Flag (Only Used During Visitation and at Cemetery)

Favorite Biblical Theme or Image _____

Service folder

_____ I will provide my own service folder (<http://online.nph.net/s-812-3806-funeralfuneral.aspx>) (St. Mark's pastor will need it in advance to print it)

_____ I would like the pastor to use a general one and print it

Bible Readings

_____ The Pastor who officiates may choose the readings.

_____ My Family will choose the readings.

_____ I have chosen the readings as indicated below (typically 2 or 3)

Some Suggestions for Readings:

Old Testament

Job 19:23-27

Isaiah 40:1-11, 28-31; Isaiah 40:28-31; Isaiah 65:17; Psalm 23; Psalm 46:1-5, 10-11; Psalm 90:1-10, 12; Psalm 121; Psalm 130; Psalm 139:1-12

Gospels

Matthew 5:1-12a; Luke 23:33, 39-43; John 11:17-27; John 14:1-6, 25-27

New Testament

Romans 8:14-23, 31-39; Romans 14:7-9, 10b-12; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 35-38, 42-44, 50, 53-58; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 21:1-4, 22-25, 22:3-5; Revelation 22:1-5

My Selections: _____

Other Readings Selected: _____

Sermon Text Suggestion: _____

Congregational Hymns

_____ The Pastor who officiates may choose the hymns.

_____ My family will choose the hymns

_____ I have chosen the hymns as indicated below.

Suggested Hymns: (You are welcome to borrow a Christian Worship Hymnal from church)

Beautiful Savior
I Know That My Redeemer Lives!
O God, Our Help in Ages Past
For All the Saints
The King of Love My Shepherd Is
Lift High the Cross

The Lord's My Shepherd
Lord Take My Hand and Lead Me
A Mighty Fortress
My Faith Looks up to Thee
My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less
Amazing Grace

How Great Thou Art
What a Friend We Have in
Jesus
This is the feast of victory

Other Hymns Selected: _____

Soloist

If possible, I would like this vocalist to sing: _____

(must be a WELS or ELS member)

Vocal Solos Selected *(Selection of solos must aim to reflect the spirit of Christian worship.)*

Other Worship Suggestions: *(for example: special litany, prayers, etc)*

Reception Following Worship

I would like a reception following the service for mutual conversation and consolation.

_____ Yes

_____ No

I would like the Reception

_____ Immediately Following the Worship Service; Before Burial

_____ Following the Worship Service and After Burial

Location for the Reception

_____ St. Mark's Lutheran Church

_____ Other Location: _____

Menu for the Reception

_____ Dessert and Coffee/Beverage

_____ Light Lunch (Sandwiches, Salads, dessert)

_____ Secure your own caterer and wait staff.

_____ Other: _____

(Please also fill out the enclosed menu provided by the Ladies Guild)

Funeral Home

Preferred Company _____
(Specific arrangements in advance at the funeral home of your choice are encouraged.)

Have Pre-Arrangements Been Made?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Disposition of the Body

_____ Embalm Body (Usually required if unrefrigerated over 24 hours before burial.)

_____ Cremate Body Shortly After Death

_____ Cremate Body After Visitation and/or Service

Burial Wishes

_____ Bury Coffin/Urn in Cemetery

_____ Other: _____

Bury Coffin or Urn

_____ Before Visitation

_____ After Visitation but Before Funeral Service

_____ After Funeral Service but Before Luncheon Reception

_____ After Luncheon Reception

_____ At a Later Date: _____

Grave Marker

I have made arrangements for a grave marker with this company: _____

I would like the following to be included on the grave marker:

Name: _____

Dates: (birth/death dates) _____

Maiden name: _____

Bible Verse: _____

Graphic: _____

Other: _____

Eligible for Military Honors

Yes

No

Names of Pall Bearers (Six Pall Bearers needed only when there is a coffin for burial.)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Honorary Pall Bearers: _____

Cemetery

I have made arrangements for my burial.

Name of Cemetery _____

Location of Cemetery _____

I do not have arrangements for my burial. I suggest the following arrangements:

I have arrangements for a memorial marker with the following company:

(Include Contact Information)

Desired Expressions of Sympathy

Flowers

I desire Memorial Gifts in lieu of Flowers

Memorial Suggestions

_____ St. Mark's Lutheran Church

_____ St. Mark's Memorial Fund

_____ Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

_____ Specific Mission or Ministry: _____

(Ideas include: Evangelism, St. Mark's School, St. Mark's Library, WELS Board for World Missions, WELS)

Other information

Thoughts I would like shared with my family at the time of my funeral:

Favorite Bible Story:

Confirmation Verse:

Baptism Date/ Place:

I have included the information I want in my obituary

_____ Yes, its location is: _____

_____ No, I wish my family to compose this

(A sample Christian obituary is included in this pamphlet)

Important Documents and Advisors

It is important that survivors be able to locate vital records and important documents. Before your death, you should have a current will/living trust and related health care directives which express your wishes on important personal, financial, medical, and charitable issues for your survivors. If you need information regarding estate planning, planned giving, and/or the inclusion of a Christian preamble for your will, please consult your legal or financial advisor.

Location and Date of Will/Living Trust

Location of my Living Will

Attorney/Will Preparer

Power of Attorney/Financial

Power of Attorney for Health Care

Executor of Will/Estate

Guardian (for Minor Children)

Additional Comments
