

# Purpose of the Funeral

Why should a family plan a funeral service? Some cultures skip the ceremonies and bury their dead immediately without any sermons, special music, or eulogies.

What is the common denominator that unites Christians in formally memorializing the life of another? Bennett and Foley explain, “Funerals and memorial services gather the community around the grieving family and friends. There is nothing more consoling to those nearest to the person who has died than to realize how much their loved one was loved by others. Often it even comes as a surprise to the family to discover just how far afield the person’s influence had spread.”<sup>1</sup>

The funeral service, then—

- Gives emotional closure.
- Honors the deceased.
- Encourages the survivors.
- Motivates the faith community.
- Highlights human relationships.
- Recognizes shared gifts.

Observing these principles gives the officiating clergy a blueprint for planning the service—in pastoral calling, sermon preparation, Scripture reading, and preparing the eulogy.

**Funeral services reflect the basic beliefs of the faith community.** For example, Stuart Matlins summarized some of the principles found in a funeral service he attended in a local church:

The Church of the Nazarene affirms that life is eternal, that through faith in Christ one can look forward to life with God after death. Death may be a time of separation from the body, but the soul and new body will be reunited upon the coming of Christ and the final judgment. Funerals have as their purpose: (1) expressing grief and comforting one another in our bereavement, (2) celebrating the life of the deceased, and (3) affirming faith in life with God after death.<sup>2</sup>

**Funeral services allow the pastor and congregation to minister to friends and family members of the deceased.** The care—and prayer—surrounding the church’s participation in a funeral is a time of connection. In one sense, the funeral is a bridge of communication of love and concern and the message of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**The funeral acknowledges God’s creation and care.** A funeral service is a defining mark in the line of life that is ordained by God. Thomas G. Long wrote about the spiritual truths that should be reflected in a Christian funeral. He said the place of disposition of the body “is not simply a grave or a cremation furnace. It’s a place of farewell where we, with thanksgiving and tears, hand the one God has given us back into the trust of God.” He concludes by saying that the Christian funeral is a “proclamation of the gospel: that we are loved by God and that we are travelling toward God.”<sup>3</sup>

Your funeral ministry is an opportunity to be an ambassador of God’s kingdom, to—

- Determine that the funeral service will bring honor to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Remind the survivors of both the certainty of death and the hope of eternal life.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you words that will express God's kindness in difficult situations.
- Be sensitive to opportunities for sharing the promises of God's Word.