**Thinking Through**

**Your Funeral**



***A guide to Lutheran funerals.***

***Common questions answered.***

***Your wishes expressed.***

**Pastor Matt Thiele, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Buderim, Oct 2011**

**Something To Think Deeply About**

One of the greatest gifts you can give those you love is to think through your funeral wishes and prepare a little before you die. Whatever you choose to call it (eg. Funeral or Celebration Of Life) when we are grieving the added pressure of preparing a service can be very hard. It is very helpful and kind to leave some suggestions but it also important to understand that these services are ‘for the living’ – that means that the service is designed not to glorify those who have died, but to give thanks to God and offer the comfort of God’s grace to the living. As you consider your ‘farewell’ it’s important to consider how this service might comfort those who mourn and present God’s grace to them. So as you prepare it’s important not to ask things that your loved ones will find a burden. It’s also important to understand that they may need to make some minor changes to whatever you asked for practical reasons.

The greatest gift you can give those you love is to show them that ‘God is love and Jesus is the proof!’ Please don’t leave that till you die. However, you may have some things you’d like to be communicated through your funeral – especially if you want to witness to your faith and give glory to God!

There are many different ways a funeral can occur. It does not have to be all sad. In fact, it is good to choose joyful hymns or songs and to celebrate the victory of Christ over death on this occasion.

It is common for there to be a great deal of variety and some families have their own little ‘traditions’ which run through their history. We encourage you to consider music that brings you joy, readings that offer hope, and something that will remind those you love of the goodness of God who made you!

1. **Your General Wishes**

The following is designed to help you express the ‘broad wishes’ you have for your funeral. It may be that for some unforseen reasons (financial, distance, or real hardship) your loved ones cannot do everything exactly as you asked. For this reason it is important to give your loved ones permission to change things if they absolutely have to, so that they do not feel burdened or guilty. I encourage you agree to the following statement…

***“I UNDERSTAND THAT DUE TO UNFORSEEN REASONS MY LOVED ONES OR CONGREGATION MAY DO THEIR BEST BUT NOT BE ABLE TO DO EVERYTHING PRECISELY AS I HAVE ASKED HERE. IF THAT SHOULD ARISE I ASK THEM TO BE RESPONSIBLE AND HONOUR MY INTENT AND OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST WITH THEIR ACTIONS!”***

WRITE “YES” AND INITIAL HERE IF YOU CAN AGREE WITH THE ABOVE STATEMENT:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Please circle (or cross out) where appropriate**

**and make clear notes on your wishes…**

DO YOU WISH TO:

DONATE YOUR ORGANS?

**If this is your wish to donate your organs you cannot express it here.**

You need to ensure you have ticked this option on your driver’s license.

You must also express this wish directly to your loved ones and preferably in writing.

Lutherans support organ and tissue donation as it saves lives. In fact, each year our church hosts a beautiful thanksgiving service for Queensland Health where those who have received the gift of organ or tissue donation come to give thanks and share their stories.

HAVE AN ‘ADVANCE HEATH CARE DIRECTIVE’

**You cannot do this on this form but it is an excellent idea!**

There may come a time when you can’t speak or make decisions about your health.

An Advance Health Care Directive is a document that states your wishes about your health care for various medical conditions – for instance if you do not want to be resuscitated in certain conditions. It can be very helpful to your loved ones to have clearly expressed your wishes as sometimes they are confronted with very difficult decision by doctors.

An Advance Health Care Directive comes into effect only if you are unable to make your own decisions.

You should keep it in a safe place, and you should give a copy to your own doctor, to your Enduring Guardian if you have appointed one, to a family member or friend and, if you wish, to your solicitor.

If you make an Advance Health Care Directive you should tell your loved ones and show or tell them what it says so they are not surprised later.

A form is available through the Queensland Justice department.

We have linked to the Justice Department document on our church website.

DO YOU WISH TO BE:

* BURIED?

This is actually a very expensive option where we live. If this is your intention you should make arrangements now rather than leaving an expensive request for your loved ones. The easiest way is to do this through a funeral director.

If so where do you wish to be buried?

* CREMATED?

The Lutheran Church does not oppose cremation. Once some Christians rejected this practice but there is no good Biblical or theological reason to do so.

Sometimes people ask ‘if I’m cremated can God resurrect me?’ My answer is ‘of course he can!’ As Martin Luther once said ‘God has more power in His little finger than all the popes and councils put together!’ Whether we are buried or cremated has nothing to do with the resurrection and new life in Christ.

Cremation is also often very practical and considerate.

If so, what do you suggest might be done with your ashes?

* HAVE YOUR BODY DONATED TO SCIENCE?

The Lutheran Church does not oppose the donation of bodies for medical training.

It is possible to resister as a ‘body donor’ through the University Of Queensland. This means your body will be used in our University Medical schools to aid those training to be health professionals. The utmost respect is given to the bodies of those who donate in our Universities. If this is your wish you will need to contact the University Of Queensland register as a ‘body donor’ and also have this noted in your Advance Health Care Directive.

Any comments regarding your wishes?

WHERE WOULD YOU PREFER YOUR SERVICE TO BE HELD?

WOULD YOU PREFER TO HAVE THE SERVICE:

* ALL AT THE CHURCH (often referred to as ‘no cortege’)
* ALL AT THE PLACE WHERE YOU ARE BURIED (often referred to as a ‘graveside service’)
* ALL AT THE PLACE WHERE YOU ARE CREMATED (in the crematorium chapel or gardens)
* STARTING AT THE CHURCH THEN TO THE GRAVESIDE OR CREMATORIUM (cortege)

DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVOURITE RECORDED MUSIC YOU WOULD LIKE USED IN THE SERVICE?

WHAT HYMNS OR WORSHIP SONGS WOULD YOU SUGGEST?

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE BIBLE VERSES? (OR WHAT BIBLE READING/S WOULD YOU SUGGEST?)

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER SPECIAL WISHES OR COMMENTS IN REGARD TO YOUR SERVICE?

1. **The Funeral Service**

The next section includes the full outline of a Lutheran funeral service. You are welcome to write notes on this service order to indicate what you do and don’t want in your service. You might choose the songs, the psalm, the reading/s, you might indicate who you would like to do certain things. In this service there is some flexibility – for instance we don’t have to sing lots of hymns/songs and one may be performed or a recording played. Please write clearly whatever wishes you do have about your funeral on the order here…

1. **At The Place Of Worship**

**SETTING**

The coffin may be placed in the church before the altar.

Alternately, the service may begin with a procession as the coffin is brought into the church.

The coffin does not necessarily have to be at the service! Some Lutherans prefer to have the burial or cremation before the service rather than afterwards. If it’s a burial they meet at the graveside for the burial first and then the service follows and is a ‘service of thanksgiving’. If this is your family’s tradition it’s important to note it down here.

**Do your family (or you) have any special traditions or wishes regarding the setting?**

**INTRODUCTION**

The pastor may welcome people and speak a few words of introduction and comfort.

**OPTIONAL ENTRANCE PROCESSION**

*The pastor, accompanied by the cross-bearer, may meet the coffin, the pallbearers, and the bereaved at the entrance to the church. The procession forms and enters the church, led by the pastor. The congregation stands and sings an appropriate hymn as the procession moves to the front of the church.*

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

**REMINDER OF BAPTISM**

*A baptism candle is lit and placed on or next to the coffin. Often a family member will place the candle. This candle is a reminder of the new life of Christ which lives in us. The pastor says the following or similar words to explain the candle.* As we come here in our grief to farewell N, St Paul comforts us with these words: Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

**HYMN**

**OBITUARY** (often called ‘The Eulogy’)

*This part is where some of the person’s life story and loves are shared. You may choose to prepare your own – or at least write down some of your history. If you do you might consider attaching it to this document – it would be a great gift to your loved ones. You might even prepare some photos on a powerpoint file, video, or music to share.*

**PRAYER**

*The pastor prays using the following prayer or with other words.* The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray. Heavenly Father, comfort us in our time of mourning, for you are the only source of true comfort, and in your love you long to comfort us. Care for us in all our grief and remind us that you are always near; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**PSALM**

**READING/S**

**HYMN**

**SERMON**

**THE APOSTLES' CREED**

**PRAYERS**

Are there any special prayer requests you might have for this service?

**HOLY COMMUNION?**

It is not common to have Holy Communion at a funeral in the Lutheran Church. If this is done it really should be up to your loved ones to discuss with the pastor and they should be clear about why they want to do this. One very large problem with offering Communion in a funeral is that there may be many non-Christians present who cannot participate and it will exclude them or some may eat and drink when they should not. I generally recommend that you do not have communion at your funeral.

**IF YOUR FUNERAL IS ALL IN THE PLACE OF WORSHIP (NO CORTEGE),**

**THEN SOME OF THE COMMITAL SECTION OF THE SERVICE (PART B) IS INSERTED HERE.**

**OTHERWISE WE THE SERVICE CONTINUES AT THE GRAVESIDE OR CREMATORIUM (PART B).**

**BLESSING**

**RECESSION**

*The pastor and the pallbearers take their places at the coffin.*

*The pastor says:* In the sure hope of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, we take the body of our brother/sister in Christ to its last resting place. Let us go in peace. **In the name of the Lord.**

**A HYMN / MUSIC MAY BE PLAYED AS THE PROCESSION LEAVES**

**B. At The Grave/Crematorium**

**PROCESSION**

*The pastor precedes the coffin to the grave or crematorium.*

*During the procession the pastor may speak one or more of the following verses:*

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God. (Job 19:25,26 NRSV)

Our Lord says: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25,26 NRSV)

Jesus says: Don't be afraid! I am the first, the last, and the living one. I died, but now I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to death and the world of the dead. (Rev 1:17,18 CEV)

**PEACE**

*When all have arrived at the place of burial/cremation, the pastor says:*

The peace of the Lord be with you. **Amen.**

**WORD OF COMFORT**

St Paul says: These bodies will die, but the bodies that are raised will live forever. These ugly and weak bodies will become beautiful and strong. As surely as there are physical bodies, there are spiritual bodies.

The bodies we now have are weak and can die. But they will be changed into bodies that are eternal. Then the Scriptures will come true, 'Death has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?' But thank God for letting our Lord Jesus Christ give us the victory!

*OR*

St Paul says: We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**THE LORD’S PRAYER**

**LOWERING/REMOVAL OF COFFIN**

*The coffin is lowered into the grave or removed for cremation.*

*A hymn may be said or sung.*

*Music may be played at this time.*

**COMMITTAL**

*Either while the coffin is being lowered or removed, or after it has been lowered or removed the pastor says.* Since almighty God, our heavenly Father, in his gracious wisdom has called N from this life, we commit his/her body *to the ground/to the elements/to be cremated/to the deep/to its resting place:* earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Dust we are and to dust we shall return. (But we know that as Christ was the first to rise from the dead, he will raise up our mortal bodies to be like his in glory.) We commend N to the Lord +, trusting in his infinite mercy. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! **Amen.**

**BLESSING**

The Lord give you comfort and peace; and the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit +, be with you always.

**Amen.**

**EARTH OR PETALS (OR NOTHING)**

People may be invited to place petals or earth in the grave. This is entirely optional.

**ANY OTHER COMMENTS / REQUESTS REGARDING YOUR FUNERAL SERVICE?**

**THANKYOU FOR THE GIFT YOU HAVE GIVEN IN THINKING THIS THROUGH. A FEW COPIES OF THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE MADE – ONE FOR YOU – ONE OR MORE FOR YOUR LOVED ONES – AND ONE FOR YOUR CHURCH. IF YOU WOULD LIKE, YOUR CHURCH IS HAPPY TO ALSO KEEP ONE COPY OF THIS DOCUMENT SECURELY AT THEIR OFFICE.**