

## ***How To Conduct A Funeral***

A good funeral requires the sensitivity and comfort only a minister can provide. Families have just lost loved ones, either tragically taken or have suffered through long illnesses. They are searching for comfort. No matter how old a person has lived or how long a family has prepared for the departure of their loved ones, it is still “too sudden” for many family members.

There are times in the minister’s life when they called upon him to comfort a family. These may be during times of disasters, senseless deaths involving crimes, the death of a child, the loss of the main provider in the home, wartime casualties, etc. Family member often are looking for answers or reasons why this has just happened, as well as seeking comfort.

The role of the pastor is vital during these crucial times. A pastor’s role is more than just speaking words of comfort, it is listening and being there when family members need you the most. New pastors often feel uncomfortable and unsure whether their words will bring comfort. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you along the way. The most important thing you can do is to allow them to know you care and are there for them. Before leaving their home, hospital, or funeral home, make sure you have a time of prayer with them.

Listed below are ideas that may be able to help you during this time. Again, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you prepare for this homecoming ceremony.

- Meet with the family. Tell them who you are in case they are not all familiar with you. Let them know that you will be conducting the ceremony.
- If you are not familiar with the person you are conducting the service for, get to know them. Spend time with the family. Allow them to share things about the deceased person. It is good for people to talk. It allows people to grieve and honor that person. Visit with friends of the deceased and ask them for special stories or memories of the deceased, this will help you get a better idea of who the person was and give you materials for your message.
- Personalize your message! This is not a 3 part sermon. Use stories and illustrations that family and friends have shared. Funerals are more about the living and helping them. It is also a time to honor their loved one.
- Look at all the elements that go into a service and see what the family wants to include and not include. These are the elements, other pastors they want

to be involved in the service, special songs, music, poems, or scripture readings, obituary, testimonials, sermon, and benediction.

- Decide on scripture readings that either meant something to the person who died or that you think will bring comfort to the family. In some cases you will want to use both of these types of scriptures.
- Before the service, ask the family if there is anyone who wants to give a testimony or eulogy about the person who has died. Be sure to give that person as much help as he or she wants or needs.
- Choose music that will lift the spirits of those in the congregation. Also be mindful that if there was a special hymn that meant something to the person who died and is appropriate, use it.
- Be mindful in your sermon that this is a time to express what the person meant to his family as well as, how much his family meant to him. Share the stories of the deceased life's at this time.
- Before the actual service, have a special prayer with the family.
- Seating will be conducted by the funeral home. Be sure to ask the congregation to stand when family members are being seated to honor them. You can do this by standing and using your hands to signal for congregation to stand and when to sit down.
- Don't be jealous or insecure when working with other ministers. Get to know them before the service. Be sure you pronounce their name correctly.
- Be sure you pronounce all family names properly. Go over the obituary beforehand and ask family members how to pronounce other family member's names. Make notes to ensure the correctness.
- After the service has concluded, the funeral home directors will either open the casket or take it out to the foyer or cemetery. If there is an open casket, it is customary for the minister to stand and greet the people viewing the deceased for the last time. A minister will be standing at the end of the open casket.
- After the viewing has been completed and the funeral directors have closed the casket, lead those carrying the casket out to the hearse. Sometimes you may be the one to open the door of the hearse. Sometimes the minister will ride in the hearse to the cemetery. Driving your personal car is permitted.

- Again, lead the ones carrying the casket to the burial plot. At the burial plot, stand at the head of the casket if possible. (Be careful of where you step and stand. The ground may be soft.)
- At the cemetery, allow time for everyone to be seated before beginning. Sometimes the funeral director will indicate when it is time to begin. Be mindful of the weather. If there is a tent, get as many people under the tent as possible.
- A short message at the cemetery is customary. If more than one minister conducts the service with you, allow them to give scripture, recite a poem, or perhaps sing a hymn. Provide a short message, such as reading Psalms 23 and sharing additional words of comfort. Most ministers suggest a message of about 5 minutes.
- Be sure to shake hands and give encouraging words with immediate family members. Remain to greet others and be available for family members. Give them your card and ask them to call if they need you.

#### **TIPS:**

- It is customary for the church to provide a meal. Delegate this to someone in charge. Mention this to the family during the process of gathering stories or comforting the family.
- Talk slowly and be sensitive of their loss. People grieve differently. Offer the assurance and comfort through Jesus Christ.
- Check back with family members the days before the funeral as well as after the funeral. Allow them to know you and tell them that the church cares for their feelings and loss.
- Provide materials/books on grieving if needed. Provide counseling or suggest a Christian counselor if needed.