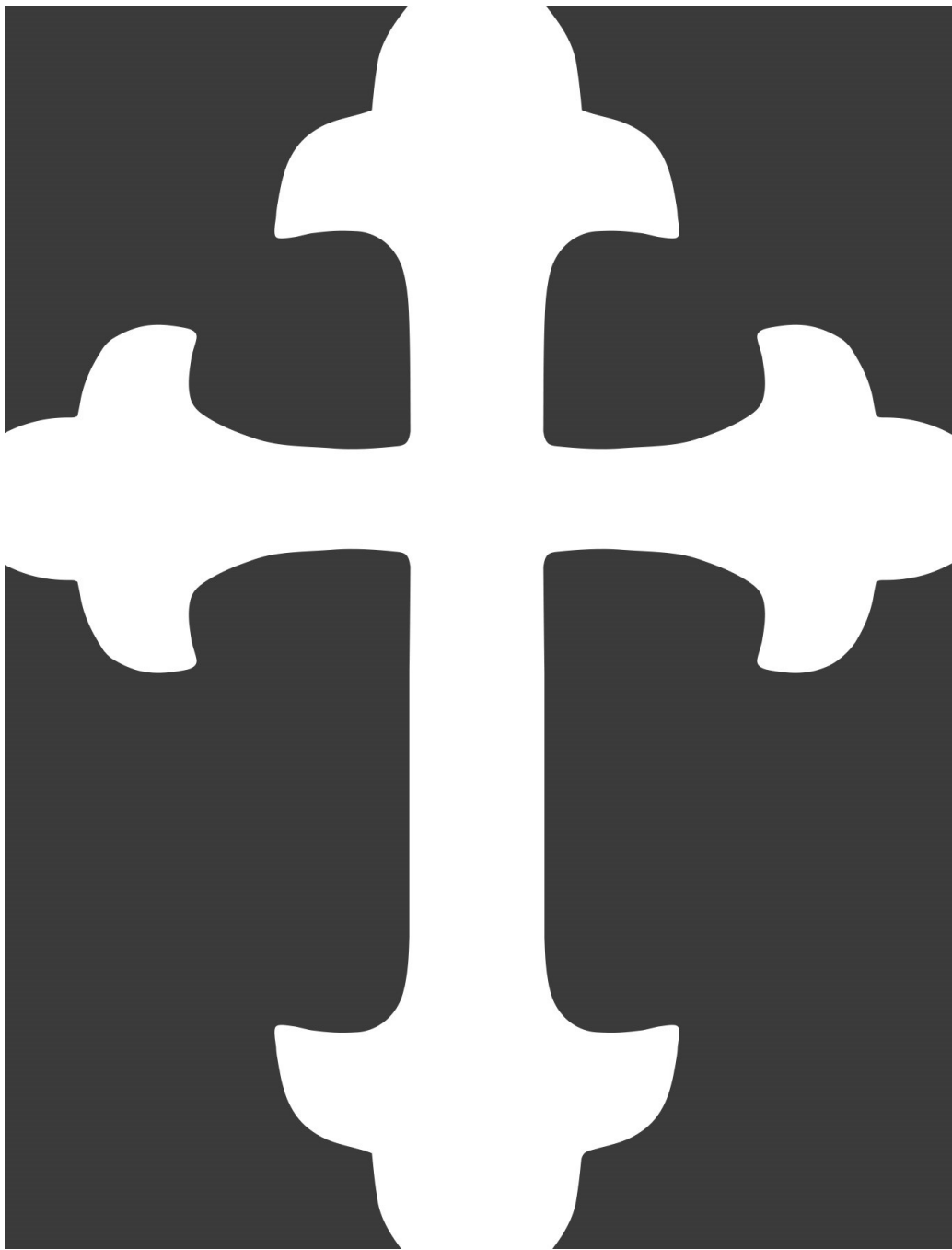


FUNERALS



ST. THOMAS

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Funerals at St. Thomas

This booklet has been prepared for you by St. Thomas Church to answer the most frequently asked questions about Christian burial. The Church wants to help Christians preparing for their own deaths, and friends and family facing the challenge of burying someone they love. Please know that our clergy and staff are friendly resources who are here to help you in any way they can.

Dying is the process of returning to the earth from which we came, and of turning toward God from whom we came. Death is the sacramental moment of our returning. At burial, the Christian community gathers to celebrate its faith.

The burial is an Easter liturgy. It finds all its meaning in the Resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, Christians, too, shall be raised. Christian burial reflects joy in the certainty that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Romans 8:38]. We offer prayers for the dead, asking God’s help in their transition from life on earth to life in heaven.

Alongside our Resurrection hope, our human grief remains. The very love we have for each other in Christ brings deep sorrow when we are parted by death. Jesus himself wept at the grave of his friend. So while we rejoice that the one we love has entered into the nearer presence of our Lord, we who continue in this life grieve our loss. Therefore, our liturgy also asks God to comfort those who mourn.

The *Book of Common Prayer* notes that Christians are normally buried from their parish church. This implies that either their bodies or their cremated remains will be present for the burial liturgy, and then committed to a permanent place of rest. Our physical bodies, Scripture tells us, are temples of the Holy Spirit, visible signs of our spiritual presence in the world. It is fitting that they be honored in Christian burial.

In Anticipation of Death

Although our society routinely avoids speaking about death, the Church does not. Over the centuries we have gathered scriptures, songs, and prayers that enfold the pain and trauma of separation and loss within a larger vision. The Church is not afraid to speak of death because we are a community of faith, hope, and love.

It is prudent to begin thinking about your own funeral well beforehand. Thoughtful foresight lets the liturgy express your Christian faith authentically, while helping family and friends to know your personal wishes. The parish clergy are pleased to meet with you to review the options available for prayers, hymns, and Scripture readings appropriate for burial.

It is also prudent to discuss with your doctor, and put into writing, the types of medical treatment you want in case of debilitating illness.

At the Time of Death

Before making any arrangements for the body, please confirm with the clergy what services will be needed from a mortician. Often these are fewer than expected.

People's Memorial Association in Seattle (206-325-0489) is a nonprofit organization that provides simple, affordable services. More elaborate arrangements can be made using the funeral homes listed in the telephone directory or on the internet.

The parish office will prepare a bulletin with the order of service, the names of pall bearers, readers, ushers, and others assisting with the service. A second bulletin from the mortuary is not needed. The parish will also arrange for musicians when requested by the family to do so.

The parish clergy, organist, and staff are here to help you with all aspects of planning and celebrating Christian burial. Please call on us whenever the need arises.

About the Funeral

The church or chapel is the appropriate place for funerals. It is customary for the remains to be present for the service, either in an urn (for ashes) or a coffin.

Flowers are symbols of resurrection and are always appropriate at funerals. However, because urns and caskets are covered with a cloth called a pall, which symbolizes our equality before God in death (and recalls the white garment of baptism), floral casket sprays are not used. A family arrangement may be placed at the urn or on a stand near the altar. Additional floral displays are unnecessary, but if they are delivered to the church, they may be placed on the shelves in the narthex (entry hall). Flowers from the narthex or the stand in the church may be taken to the cemetery or the reception. Flowers are also appropriate at the reception, but many families prefer to recommend charities, including St. Thomas, that well-wishers may want to support instead of sending flowers.

The family usually gathers in the parish Conference Room before the service, although some prefer to be seated in the front pews as they arrive. At the appointed time, the procession forms in the narthex, led by the crucifer. The family is appropriately included in the procession.

You will find the form for the Burial of the Dead in the *Book of Common Prayer* on pages 468–507. It is appropriate for family members to participate in the service by reading lessons or prayers. Music in the service will be sacred in character. Secular music is never appropriate.

The Eucharist is an appropriate part of the service, making the funeral similar to Sunday services at St. Thomas. All baptized persons are welcome to receive the bread and wine at this special time, an occasion of solidarity and solace for all who grieve. Sharing Communion among those who mourn is itself an occasion for comfort and hope, and reminds us again of the Heavenly Banquet that surpasses all limits of time and space. In the Eucharist all Christians, the living and the dead together, join in celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus.

At the conclusion of the service, it is customary for the family to follow the crucifer and clergy out in procession. When the Committal takes place in the St. Thomas columbarium, the family goes to the columbarium for the Committal, while the guests go to the Great Hall for the reception. If the burial is in a local cemetery, the family and guests follow the funeral coach in procession there.

Remembrances

Remembrances or eulogies are not customary in the Episcopal Church. The focus of Christian burial is properly on Christ's victory over the powers of darkness and death. It is an Easter service. Because those present already know the one who has died, review of years past is not necessary. If it is desired to share such remembrances, they will best take place at a reception following the service.

You may also invite everyone in the family and close friends and colleagues to write whatever they would like about the loved one. These remembrances can be included in the service bulletin or collected in a separate booklet with a history of the loved one's life with pictures if desired. In this way, people feel included and have an opportunity to say what they would like to say. Attendees are able to read these remembrances during the pre-service time, and they usually take them home to read at leisure. Plus, family and friends have these remembrances as a wonderful keepsake and comfort.

A Word About Cremation

Cremation, an ancient practice anthropologists have discovered in many ages and places past, is gaining popularity in our day. St. Thomas has a columbarium for the convenience of members of the parish and community who may wish to use it for loved ones or themselves. Call the parish office for more information about purchasing a niche in a columbarium at St. Thomas.

Accordingly, we treat the deceased body reverently, not simply out of respect for the departed person, but out of reverent awe in the presence of God's handiwork. Whether we burn or bury the body, it passes from our sight, but it can never pass from God's sight.

Receptions in the Great Hall

We are pleased to offer the Great Hall for family and friends to gather following the burial liturgy. The family may bring prepared foods to the church, or we will provide the names of a caterers who have experience providing reception services at St. Thomas. The parish has tables and chairs, dishes, and flatware available for use. The parish staff will be pleased to answer any questions about the preparation of a reception.

Guidelines for Florists

Flowers are symbols of resurrection so they are always appropriate at Church funerals.

The parish flower guild is responsible for the main floral display in the church. It is placed in front of the pulpit, and remains there following the service.

The family may place an arrangement at the urn or on a stand near the altar. Additional floral displays are unnecessary, but if they are delivered to the church, they may be placed on the shelves in the narthex (entry hall).

Fees and Donations

The following fees/donations are expected if St. Thomas facilities or staff are used for a funeral or reception. All fees for services and facilities should be paid at the parish office within five days of the service, if possible.

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| Church or Chapel | No charge to St. Thomas members (non-members \$600) |
| Clergy | Free-will donation by check payable directly to the officiating clergy |

The following donations/fees are to be made by check, payable to St. Thomas:

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|------------|---------------------------|
| Great Hall | \$350 |
| Organist | \$250 (non-members \$300) |
| Flowers | \$200 |

Planning for Death: A Checklist

- Keep your will current, with copies on file at your attorney's office, in your safe deposit box, and at the church.
- Designate the charitable organizations to which friends and family may donate in memory of your life and work. It is always appropriate to include your parish church.
- Select a funeral home and a place for burial. The St. Thomas staff will be pleased to discuss the parish columbarium niches and other choices with you.
- Arrange with your doctor for a Living Will. Discuss it with your family; leave copies with your doctor, in your attorney's office, in your safe deposit box, and at the church.
- Meet with the parish clergy to plan your funeral liturgy ahead of time.
- Review this booklet and the arrangements you have made with trusted friends and family.

Pastoral Care for Families

We recognize that this is a season of grief for families and loved ones. Along with the details of planning a funeral, our clergy are here to provide pastoral care for the family of those who have died. We hope to walk with you, not only through the planning, but of finding the hope of new life in the midst of loss and grief. Our clergy are available, whether or not you will be holding a funeral at St. Thomas, and would be delighted to be present in this difficult season.

To schedule time with one of our clergy, please call the church office at 425-454-9541.

Suggested Readings for the Service

Old Testament Readings

Isaiah 25:6–9 [He will swallow up death forever]

Isaiah 61:1–3 [To comfort those who mourn]

Lamentations 3:22–26, 31–33 [The Lord is good to those who wait for him]

Wisdom 3:1–5, 9 [The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God]

Job 19:21–27a [I know that my Redeemer lives]

New Testament Readings

Romans 8:14–19, 34–35, 37–39 [The glory that shall be revealed]

1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 35–38, 42–44, 53–58 [The imperishable body]

2 Corinthians 4:16–5:9 [Things that are unseen are eternal]

1 John 3:1–2 [We shall be like him]

Revelation 7:9–17 [God will wipe away every tear]

Revelation 21:2–7 [Behold, I make all things new]

Gospel Readings

John 5:24–27 [He who believes has everlasting life]

John 6:37–40 [All the Father gives me will come to me]

John 10:11–16 [I am the good shepherd]

John 11:21–27 [I am the resurrection and the life]

John 14:1–6 [In my Father's house are many rooms]



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