

**2 Timothy 4:7-8 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."**



**A Planning Guide to prepare for your funeral  
and celebration of eternal life in Christ.**

## Introduction

As followers of Jesus we have the privilege of facing all kinds of situations, even ones that might be difficult to talk about, in some people's mind. This pamphlet is designed to help people prayerfully consider, plan for, and talk about their own death and funeral. Would anyone want to talk about that? St. Paul certainly did! His anticipation of death did not focus on the end of life but the entrance to life eternal. 2 Tim 4: 7 - 8 is noted on the front cover.

It is with that same spirit that we ( St. Matthew pastors and elders) have prepared this pamphlet for people. We hope this guide will help you prepare for the inevitable glorious day when we celebrate our victory in Christ, when God's promise of eternal life is fulfilled. The steps outlined on these pages will help ensure that your preparation is completed long before it is needed, freeing your loved ones from the burden of having to make many decisions while they are grieving your loss.

This guide will lead you through many questions and decisions that your loved ones might otherwise face at your death. Your responses will be useful no matter when that information is needed or where the actual funeral or memorial service is conducted. The information you provide after reviewing this brochure will lighten your family's task of wondering how best to honor God for the blessings He provided through your life of witness and service. The information you provide will also provide a message of hope and encouragement to your family and friends.

Pastor Robert Appold

St. Matthew Lutheran Church  
616-942-9091 Office  
616-813-0420. Mobile  
rappold@stmatthewgr.com

## **Preparing for Your Funeral**

Type of Service Desired

Traditional funeral \_\_\_\_ Memorial service \_\_\_\_ Traditional burial \_\_\_\_ Cremation

## **Facility Handling Arrangements -**

### **Funerals Conducted at St. Matthew have most often used either of the following:**

O'Brien Gerst Funeral Home

3980 Cascade Rd SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

(616) 949-7350

Metcalf & Jonkhoff Funeral Services

4291 Cascade Rd SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

(616) 940-7333

## **A Christian Funeral & Burial - the Basics**

We regard a funeral service as one of worship. As one pastor said, "We count success in Christian Funerals." We celebrate the promises given to us, and the faithfully departed, in our baptism- the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Therefore, our funeral service expresses Christian confidence, trust, and hope in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

To ensure a proper funeral/memorial service:

- Whenever possible, the funeral or memorial worship service of a baptized member should be conducted at the church.
- Your Pastor will want to be aware of any death and desire to meet with the dying person before they are called home. .
- Finalizing any arrangements would be done in consultation with the pastor, since proper time is needed to prepare for the service by the Pastor, any musicians , and the church's secretary.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- "What can I do to prepare for the day of my own Christian funeral?"

Continue to trust in Jesus Christ as your only way to heaven. Share your faith with others. Certainly you will want to discuss with your family how you would like your belongings distributed: Have your attorney write a Christian will for you. Pre-plan funeral arrangements with a local funeral director and cemetery association. Maintain your life insurance and other financial matters. With your Pastor you can complete and send to the church office a copy of the Personal Information and Service Information pages of this pamphlet. Make sure that your next of kin or caregiver has access and is aware of any written directions or important information.

- Remember to ensure any gifts to your church or ministry need to be specified.

Many people find that including gifts from their estate to be a way they can further the work the Gospel. If that is an option you would like to explore you can read more in the Leaving Your Legacy section at the end of this pamphlet

- "How can a pastor assist the bereaved family?"

Contact your pastor as soon as possible. In addition to officiating at the funeral, he will first meet and counsel with the bereaved and is willing to accompany the family to the funeral home to help them in making the funeral arrangements. He is well experienced and an expert in this kind of service.

- "Should the funeral be at the church or at the funeral home?"

Because a Christian funeral is also a worship service, God's House seems to be the most appropriate place for a funeral. Due to the convenience (and the extra charge for using the funeral chapel at some funeral homes), the "option" of having the service at the church may not even be presented to many families. Furthermore, funeral chapels are purposely devoid of an altar or Christian symbols that offend non-Christians. Therefore, in place of such a generic environment, we strongly encourage you to utilize the church building as a closing statement of faith by those who have "fallen asleep in Jesus." We will convey this information and our position to any mortuary upon your request.

- "What is a memorial service?"

A memorial service does not have the casket or remains present at the service. The interment takes place before the service or at another time. Memorial services have become very popular for Christians, and can simplify the arrangements.

- "What about viewing? Should the casket be open or closed?"

If you wish to give family and friends the opportunity for viewing with the casket open, this can done for a period of time before the funeral service begins. Viewing helps some people to accept the reality of death and that their loved one is at peace. However, before the service begins at a funeral service at St Matthew, the casket is always closed, so that our thoughts will not be centered on a temporal, lifeless corpse, but rather on the message of victory we share in an eternal, living Savior. This begins the healing process already during the funeral, allowing the comfort of God's Word to give peace to a grieving family.

- "What is a funeral pall?"

A funeral pall is a large white shroud, usually on which is embroidered a symbol of the resurrection. In place of a floral spray, it is draped over the closed casket during the funeral service at church as a beautiful symbol of the triumph over death of our resurrected Savior and that the believer's sins have been covered through baptism into death. Just as our resurrected Lord passed through His shroud, so also our resurrection is assured. The use of the pall is encouraged.

- "Is cremation acceptable for Christians?"

The Scriptures do not command or recommend any particular funeral practice. Entombment simply was the general procedure. The aversion to cremation by some Christians comes from the fact that the Old Testament forbade the practice because of its use by pagan peoples; the Jewish Mishna also forbade it and the unbelieving Romans burned bodies of Christians in a futile attempt to prevent the resurrection! Some people believe that cremation is a way to deny publicly the resurrection. However, if God can resurrect the bodies of martyrs burned at the stake or eaten by lions or decomposed to dust after centuries in the grave, He should have no trouble at all with the cremains. Furthermore, direct cremation (no viewing or embalming) may be considered by some Christians to be good stewardship, in that it is far less expensive than other procedures. A Christian has freedom here to use their God given common sense on how to best glorify God with this decision.

- "What should I do with the ashes?"

As with cremation, Scripture gives us little instruction about a specific practice regarding the burial of ashes. They may be disbursed in God's creation, or placed in and buried in an urn. In either case, cremains can be placed with a short burial service that includes Holy Scripture and prayer. If you would like some assistance on how to do this, your pastor can give you some ideas and advice.

- "What about eulogies or a family member speech?"

Your pastor takes care to get to learn much more about the family member who is deceased and personalize the service for your family as they sit down with you prior to the service. They do their absolute best to represent the deceased, typically during an extended description that begins the sermon

When set within the context of a funeral or memorial service a eulogy is a highly emotional moment, one that may be difficult for a speaker who is close to the deceased. Families will also want to remember the time commitment of their guest and avoid a service that extends too long. We have found the funeral dinner instead of the funeral service itself, is an excellent time to encourage families to choose to share a life reflection. It allows worshippers to focus on God's promises, allows the time for remembrances for family members and those who know the deceased the best.

- "My family member was a member of the military. Can the pastors do a military funeral and burial?"

Absolutely. We are happy to work together with you and the funeral home to see that the ceremony honors the service of your loved one to our country. A flag presentation, the playing of taps and other options are available with the help of a local organization which facilitates the military arrangements for service men and women. In the case of a funeral, a funeral pall will be used in place of a flag, as our eternity identity in Christ supersedes our temporal, earthly vocations.

# Personal Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Date of Baptism: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Location if known.

Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ (Hospital) (City & State)

Place of Baptism: \_\_\_\_\_ (Church) (City & State)

Date of Confirmation: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Place of Confirmation: \_\_\_\_\_ (Church) (City & State)

Confirmation Verse: \_\_\_\_\_ Favorite Bible Verses:

\_\_\_\_\_ Favorite Hymns:

\_\_\_\_\_

Special Words of Encouragement from the Deceased to the Family or remembrances of expressions of faith in the home (feel free to add more in an attached paper: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Family (Parents & Siblings): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Places Lived (with approximate dates): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Employment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Hobbies/Interests: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Education: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual Life/Faith/. Important Faith development moments :

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Names of All Surviving Family Members & Relationship (Circle those here for services):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Death: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Place of Death: \_\_\_\_\_ (Location) (City & State)

Name of Family Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Address of Contact:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix A - Leaving Your Legacy

A legacy is something from the past that is left for future generations. As a Christian, you may wonder what legacy you might leave for your family, your church, and other organizations about which you feel passionate. Here are three ways in which you can leave a lasting legacy.

## Add a Christian Preamble to Your Will

A Christian preamble is an opportunity to proclaim the gift of Christian faith as you give your last words to the world within your estate documents. A preamble provides hope and comfort to your heirs and shares the gift of faith as a witness to others. It is a permanent statement of your faith and its importance to your family and others who read your will. You may even request that your preamble be read at your funeral or memorial service.

Example of a Christian preamble:

In the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit Amen

I want my loved ones to know that I place full confidence and trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who promised: *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*

– (John 11:25-26)

I have created a will [and other documents] to provide for the financial well-being of you, my loved ones, [and in addition have provided a gift to the ministries I care about]. I want you to realize that my will not only provides material blessings but also is a reflection of spiritual blessings that are actually the more important of the two. Accordingly, I have prepared this last will and testament as a witness to share my faith in Christ.

## Write a Family Blessing or Remembrance

You may want to develop a written statement to your family that tells how you have been blessed by them and the wonderful relationships you have experienced with them. This can be a separate letter to be shared with your family during your lifetime, or at your death, or it may be included in your will. If you like, you can write your individual blessing to each family member. It will be a wonderful legacy and your family will be so blessed by your loving words left to each of them.

Example of an opening statement for a family blessing:

Our God promised us, "I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing." Genesis 12:2

God blessed Abraham; his descendants would fill the earth and all nations would be blessed through him. Because of God's faithfulness to keep His promises, St. Paul, in Galatians 3:29, calls Christians the offspring of Abraham. Abraham passed down the blessings he received to his son Isaac, Isaac passed them to Jacob, and so on through lineage to the One who became the real blessing, Jesus Christ our Savior. Christians today pass blessings to their descendants – a desire placed in them by the Holy Spirit.

Remove Watermark Now



I am eternally thankful to the Lord for my blessings The blessing I received from my father and mother, who introduced me to my Savior, Jesus Christ, shared their love with me, and prayed for me, has been of great comfort and encouragement as I journeyed through life

Now I want you, my children, to know that I pass on that blessing and appreciation for you and your life I pray that God will grant you His grace and every blessing each day as you face the challenges and opportunities of everyday life Just as I pray that I have been a blessing to you, I encourage you to be a blessing in your life relationships I'm not concerned about how I will be remembered or whether I will be remembered at all What I care about and pray about is that my loved ones will remain in their baptismal faith in their Savior Jesus

*"If we live, we are the Lord's. If we die, we are the Lord's. So whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." Rom. 14:8*

## **Leave a Financial Legacy for Your Church and/or Other Organizations**

There are many examples in the Bible of passing blessings to church and other ministries by making gifts that can build the Kingdom:

### **Psalm 24:1**

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it!

### **2 Cor. 9:7, 11**

God loves a cheerful giver You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way!

### **1 Chron. 29:14-16** (King David speaking to the church)

Who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you, O Lord? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace As for all this abundance that we have ... it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you

In addition to your church, these same concepts apply to other organizations that have blessed you during your lifetime and may be considered as a part of your legacy Such legacy gifts can be made through your last will and testament or by naming the organization(s) as beneficiary of other financial instruments, e g qualified plans such as IRA or 401(k), life insurance policies, bank accounts, etc

St Matthew's goal is to encourage you and all Christians to leave a legacy as described on these two pages. St. Matthew has established an Endowment Fund to help receive legacy gifts to the church you love and want to remember even after your death

How to Maximize your gift:

Bill Burmeister, is a Michigan District Gift Planning Counselor whose work is to share more about leaving a legacy. He does not sell anything, his services are funded 100% by the MI District Church Extension Fund. Bill can help you explore a variety of possibilities for fulfilling your legacy goals while making a significant gift to ministry at the same time. There is no cost or obligation to you and all conversations are kept confidential. For more information contact Bill at 800-242-3944 or [bill.burmeister@mi-cef.org](mailto:bill.burmeister@mi-cef.org).

# Appendix B - Music and Scripture

## Lutheran Hymns (from Lutheran Service Book Hymnal)

Amazing Grace (744)  
Be Still, My Soul (752)  
Behold a Host, Arrayed in White (676) Children of the  
Heavenly Father (725)  
Eternal Father, Strong to Save (717)  
For All the Saints (677)  
For Me to Live Is Jesus (742)  
God Moves in a Mysterious Way (765 ) Great Is Thy  
Faithfulness (809)  
Have No Fear, Little Flock (735)  
How Great Thou Art (801)  
I Am Jesus' Little Lamb (740)  
I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus (729)  
I Leave All Things to God's Direction (719) I'm But a Stranger  
Here (748)  
In the Very Midst of Life (755)  
Jerusalem, My Happy Home (673)  
Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense (741) Jesus, Lead Thou On  
(718)  
Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me (715)

Lord of All Hopefulness (738)  
Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me (722)  
Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart (708)  
O God, Our Help in Ages Past (733)  
Oh, How Blest Are They (679)  
Oh, What Their Joy (675)  
Precious Lord, Take My Hand (739)  
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me (761)  
Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us (711)  
Sing with All the Saints in Glory (671)  
The King of Love My Shepherd Is (709)  
The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want (710)  
The Will of God Is Always Best (758)  
Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise (680)  
This Body in the Grave We Lay (759)  
We Sing for All the Unsung Saints (678)  
What God Ordains Is Always Good (760 )  
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (425)  
When Peace, Like a River (763)

In addition to traditional hymns, many songs are very worshipful and appropriate for funerals and remembrance services:

Amazing Grace/My Chains are Gone  
Because He Lives  
Blessed Be Your Name  
How Deep the Father's Love for Us  
I Can Only Imagine  
I Will Rise

[Remove Watermark Now](#)

In Christ Alone  
Jesus Draw Me Ever Nearer Nearer My God to Thee Untitled  
Hymn  
You Hold Me Now  
10,000 Reasons

# Appendix C - Suggested Scripture Readings

This list suggests some scripture readings that are appropriate for a funeral or remembrance service

## Old Testament Readings

Job 19:1, 21-27 - I know that my Redeemer lives

Isaiah 25:6-9 - The Lord God will destroy death forever

Isaiah 61:1-3 - To bestow on them a crown of beauty

Lamentations 3:23-33 - It is good to wait in silence for the

Lord God to save Daniel 12:1-3 - Of those who lie sleeping in the dust of the earth many will awake

## New Testament Readings

Matthew 5:1-12a - Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven

Matthew 11:25-30 - Come to me...and I will give you rest

Matthew 25:31-46 - Come, you who are blessed by my Father

Mark 16:1-8 - He has risen He is not here He is going ahead of you

Luke 7:11-17 - Young man, I say to you arise

Luke 23:33, 39-43 - Today you will be with me in paradise

Luke 23:44-46, 50, 52-53, 24:1-6a - Father, I put my life in your hands

Luke 24:13-35 - Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory? John 3:16-21 - God so loved the world

John 5:24-29 (or 24-27) - Whoever hears my word and believes, has passed from death to life John 6:37-40 - All who believe in the Son will have eternal life and I will raise them again on the last day

John 6:51-59 - All who eat this bread will live forever; and I will raise them up on the last day John 10:11-16 - I am the Good Shepherd

John 10:27-29 - No one can snatch them out of my hand

John 11:17-27 (or 21-27) - I am the resurrection and the life

John 12:23-28 - If a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it yields a rich harvest

John 14:1-6 - There are many rooms in my Father's house

John 17:24-26 - Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am

John 19:17-18, 25-39 - Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit

Acts 10:34-43 - God has appointed Jesus to judge everyone, alive and dead

Romans 5:5-11 - Having been justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's anger through him

Romans 5:17-21 - When sin increased, there grace abounded all the more

Romans 6:3-9 - "We have been baptized into Christ and will be united with him "

Romans 8:14-23 - We groan while we wait for the redemption of our bodies

Romans 8:31-39 - Nothing can separate us from the love of God

Romans 14:7-12 - Whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 (or 1-26) - All people will be brought to life in Christ

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 (or 35-57) - Death is swallowed up in victory

2 Corinthians 4:14- 5:1 - What is seen is transitory; what is unseen is eternal

2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10 - We have an everlasting home in heaven

Philippians 3:20-21 - Jesus will transfigure these lowly bodies of ours to be like his glorious body 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - We shall stay with the Lord forever

1 Timothy 2:8-13 - If we have died with him, we shall live with him

1 John 3:14-16 - We have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers and sisters

Revelation 7:9-12 (or 9-17) - The great multitude in white robes gathered before the throne

Revelation 14:13 - Happy are those who die in the Lord

Revelation 20:11-21:1 - The dead have been judged according to their works