

*A Guide for  
Memorial and Funeral  
Services*

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

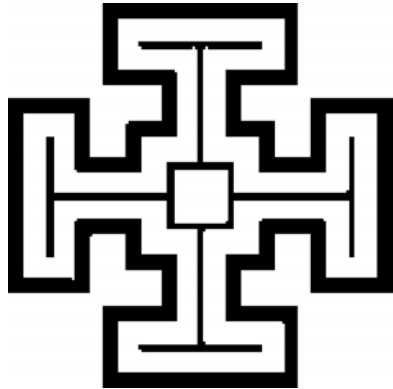
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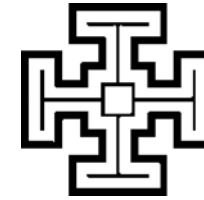
[www.fpcgastonia.org](http://www.fpcgastonia.org)

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*A labyrinth is an archetype, a divine imprint, found in all religious traditions around the world. The labyrinth has only one path so there are no tricks to it and no dead ends. The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. It touches our sorrows and releases our joys. Likewise, the cross above has no beginning or end reminding us that our eternal hope lies in the redeeming grace of Christ Jesus.*



The resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith and shapes Christian's attitudes and responses to the event of death... In the face of death Christians affirm with tears and joy the hope of the gospel.

Christians do not bear bereavement in isolation but are sustained by the power of the Spirit and the community of faith. The church offers a ministry of love and hope to all who grieve.

– Book of Order, Directory for Worship

Just as the church embraces us in our baptism and throughout our Christian life, so it should embrace us in our death and in our hope of resurrection to eternal life. The purpose of this booklet is to assist members of Gastonia's First Presbyterian Church in the realistic consideration of this eventuality and the decisions that are required at the death of a loved one.

Because it is difficult under emotional stress to plan wisely, the Session should encourage members to discuss and plan in advance the arrangements which will be necessary at the time of death, including those decisions about the Christian options of burial, cremation, or donation for medical purposes. These plans should provide for arrangements which are simple, which bear witness to the resurrection hope, and in which the Christian community is central.

– Book of Order, Directory for Worship

By prior consideration and planning, the family of the deceased can be relieved of some difficult decisions, and the intentions of the deceased for an appropriate service of worship can be maintained.

### ***Ministerial Staff***

Upon the death of one of our members, a minister of First Presbyterian Church should be notified as soon as possible. This is best accomplished by contacting the church office. Our ministers also earnestly desire to know of those who need comfort and counsel as they face death. By being involved early in situations of death or impending death, the minister can help immensely with the necessary funeral arrangements, disposition of the body, and service arrangements, as well as caring for the spiritual needs of those involved. A minister of First Presbyterian Church will preside at the service. Another minister may assist in the service at the invitation of the presiding minister.

### ***Types of Services***

All services conducted by ministers of First Presbyterian Church are services of worship for the community of faith. While the form of services may differ, each is a Service of Witness to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- ***Memorial Service***

The Memorial Service is a service where the body is not present. Interment of the remains in a Service of Committal has either preceded the Memorial Service or will take place at a later time.

- ***Funeral Service***

The Funeral Service is a Service where the body is present in either a casket or an urn. The Funeral Service is concluded with a Service of Committal at the burial site.

- ***Graveside Service***

The Graveside Service is a Service that takes place at the burial site. The Service of Committal is a part of the Graveside Service.

### ***What We Believe About Death***

The very center of the Gospel focuses upon the victory over death by God in Jesus Christ. As His followers, we are convinced that we share in that victory over the grave. We affirm that at death the believer goes to the presence of God who is an eternal home. Nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ. So death is not the end, rather it is the beginning of fuller service which will be completed in the resurrection of the body. This hope is never based upon a person's worth, but only upon the graciousness of God.

Therefore, in the Presbyterian tradition, a funeral is a Worship Service. Certainly, it is a therapy for our sense of loss and grief, but primarily it is a Service of Worship to God wherein we as God's people witness to our faith in the communion of the saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, in which also the assurance of God's salvation and love in Christ are especially comforting to the bereaved. We gather here not so much to mourn our dead as to confess our faith in a living Savior, not so much to exhibit our grief but to recall our profound gladness and solemn joy in Christ our living Lord.

### ***Other Fraternal, Civic, or Military Rites***

The Service shall be complete in itself, and any fraternal, civic, or military rites should be conducted separately.

– Book of Order, Directory for Worship

The Service of Worship is an act of the Christian community in which the wider community is welcome. If other rites take place, these rites shall be conducted apart from the Service and place of worship.

### ***Costs and Fees***

There are no charges or fees for use of the First Presbyterian Church or for the services of the presiding minister and organist. The only costs to the family will be for the flowers they provide and for additional instrumentalists and soloists they may request.

### ***The Columbarium Memorial Garden***

First Presbyterian Church has a beautiful Columbarium and Memorial Garden located on the west end of the Sanctuary. Use of this facility is available to church members and their immediate family (i.e. father, mother, husband, wife, and children) by arrangement with the business administrator in the church office.

### ***Service Location***

The Service on the occasion of death ordinarily should be held in the usual place of worship in order to join this service to the community's continuing life and witness to the resurrection. The Service shall be under the direction of the pastor. – Book of Order, Directory for Worship

The Sanctuary or Chapel are appropriate places for a Memorial or Funeral Service. Here is where we worship every Sunday. Here is where we baptize our children, celebrate marriage, gather at the Lord's Table, remember the love and grace of God. Here we are surrounded by the symbols of our Christian faith. In this place we have tangible reminders of the "great cloud of witnesses" that surround us and the community of faith that supports us with compassion and love.

### ***Visitation***

The Parlor provides a warm and familiar place for visitation with family and friends. Members are encouraged to use this facility for visitation as a part of their arrangements following the Memorial or Funeral Service. On an occasion when the local funeral home facilities may not be of adequate size, the Sanctuary may be used for viewing the day prior to the Service.

### ***The Service of Witness to the Resurrection***

Memorial, Funeral and Graveside Services are acts of worship among the Christian community. The purpose of such Services of Worship are to glorify God, to affirm our belief in the resurrection to life everlasting, and to comfort the bereaved. Although gratitude and honor are to be expressed to God for the life and witness of the deceased, the focus of worship is upon God; therefore, prolonged and undue attention upon the deceased is discouraged.

### ***The Order of Worship***

The Service begins with scriptural sentences. It is appropriate for worshipers to sing hymns, psalms, spirituals, or spiritual songs which affirm God's power over death, a belief in the resurrection to life everlasting, and the assurance of the communion of the saints. Scripture shall be read; a sermon or other exposition of the Word may be proclaimed; an affirmation of faith may be made by the people. Aspects of the life of the one who has died may be recalled. Prayers shall be offered, giving thanks to God... The Service ends by commending the one who has died to the care of the eternal God and sending the people forth with a benediction.

– Book of Order, Directory for Worship

### ***Scriptures***

The Scriptures are a rich source to which Christians and Jews alike have turned for comfort and assurance in times of grief. The presiding minister will guide the selection of appropriate scripture passages and would welcome suggestions of those with particular meaning to the family of the deceased.

### ***Hymns***

Hymns should be chosen which affirm the goodness and grace of God, and which give comfort and support to those who grieve. The presiding minister and organist will guide the selection of appropriate hymns.

### ***Service Music***

The First Presbyterian Church organist will provide suitable sacred music and is available for consultation with the family concerning these musical selections. The appropriateness of musical selection will be determined by the Worship and Music Ministry. Instrumentalists or vocalists may also be employed, but must be approved and contracted by the Worship and Music Ministry. The family is expected to pay the cost of any musicians other than the church organist.

### ***The Pall***

First Presbyterian Church provides a purple pall for every Funeral Service. A pall is a large cloth which covers the casket during the Service. It represents the covering of the Christian by the righteousness of Christ, and alludes to the baptismal waters of death and new life in Jesus. Since righteousness is an unmerited gift from God and all people stand equal in the eyes of God, the outer appearance of the casket and its cost or beauty is of no consequence to the Christian community. By use of the pall, the focus of the Service may remain on the goodness and grace of God.

Where appropriate, the American flag may be used in lieu of the pall. If the family chooses to use a flower pall, it will be removed when the casket enters. The pall or flag will then cover the casket during the Service. Following the benediction, as the casket is taken from the church, the flower pall may again be placed upon the casket.

### ***Cremation Urn***

In the case of cremation, the urn containing the ashes is usually only present at the time of committal, following or preceding the Memorial Service. (See Funeral Service.)

### ***Flowers***

In keeping with the simplicity and understanding of the Christian faith to avoid ostentation, flowers are limited to one arrangement on the Chancel Table. This will encourage worshipers to focus their attention on the promises of Scripture and the grace of God. Typically, the family of the deceased will furnish the arrangement of flowers for the Service.