

Guidelines for Memorial Services

issued by the College of Bishops at the request of the Faith and Order Board

A Memorial Service is not a Funeral, nor is it a substitute for a Funeral.

Where possible, the body of a deceased Christian is brought to the church for a Funeral, there to be committed to reverend disposal in an act of worship in which the Gospel is proclaimed, and hope in the resurrection affirmed: As well as being theologically appropriate, the experience of the Church is that funerals acknowledge the reality and finality of death, and provide a context in which the complex and often conflicting emotions of the mourners can be acknowledged before God: grief, thanksgiving, relief, regret, resentment, doubt, and the Christian faith affirmed: Customarily, the closer family and other loved ones receive support from a wider circle of friends, colleagues, and other acquaintances, while clergy and others have opportunity to provide pastoral care and counsel in the name of the Church.

When the body has, for any reason, not been recovered, the Funeral office should be used, with the words of prayers and the rituals adapted as appropriate to the circumstances.

There are circumstances in which it is not possible for the family to gather, or in which a private funeral is expedient: A Memorial Service may be requested as a more public gathering at a more opportune time: It is important that the distinction between the two occasions be understood.

Memorial Services are often requested if the family wishes the Funeral to be private, or if the death has taken place at a time when it is not opportune for the family to gather, or when the deceased has been away from home, and funeral rites have taken place elsewhere.

The “lockdown” imposed in response to the coronavirus pandemic meant that families were unable to gather for funerals, and to share their grief together, and that public acts of worship severely restricted when not prohibited: Should such circumstances could recur, it may be pastorally necessary that the Memorial Service reflect, but not replicate, aspects of the Funeral Service: the deceased has already been committed to God’s care, and this is not repeated, but the assurances and the comfort offered then may need to be reaffirmed in ways that would not in normal circumstances be necessary at a subsequent public commemoration. A Memorial Service is primarily an act of Christian worship, and its components must be consistent with this: The emphasis is on God, even though the life of a particular human being is being celebrated, and thanksgiving offered for who that person was, and what he/she did and meant to people: The service should be essentially and recognisably the same, irrespective of the wealth and status of the person and his/her family, but might reflect particular interests or a particular role the person played in the community, e:g: through representation of voluntary organisations and their symbols.

It would be appropriate that the Paschal Candle be placed in a prominent position and lit.

When units of the armed forces and other (legal) uniformed organisations, and veterans' associations, are represented, flags and standards may be carried in procession and housed in a convenient and appropriate position, but not draped on the Altar.

The principal components of a Memorial Service might be:

A *Bidding* in which the officiant welcomes the congregation, introduces the liturgy, and sets the tone for the service by locating the lingering grief, thanksgiving, and celebration within the context of an act of Christian worship in which the faith of the Church is expressed: Model words might be drafted, but there would need to be some flexibility to accommodate a range of circumstances: This should, in any event, be delivered with gravity, and be quite distinct from any informal greetings, or notices.

Scripture Readings: at least one, and usually two: Appropriate passages from the Bible may be supplemented, but not substituted, with recitation of poetry or of prose from other sources: Such additional readings need not be overtly Christian, but should not be incompatible with the Gospel or offensive to Christian values: Hymns based on psalms are not a substitute for readings from Scripture.

Sermon: proclamation of the Christian faith in a way appropriate to the occasion.

Address: a member of the family, a friend, or representative of an organisation with which the deceased was associated may speak about his/her life and contribution to the community: If appropriate, two, or at most, three people may speak in succession: This is in addition to, not a substitute for, the Sermon.

Artistic Performances: members of the family, or friends, may recite a poem or a passage of prose, or perform a piece of music at appropriate points during the service: The words of these need not be overtly Christian, but should not be incompatible with the Gospel or offensive to Christian sensibilities.

Prayers: These might reflect stages of grieving which could not be given public expression at the Funeral, but should not repeat the Committal: Intercession might be offered for the continued comfort of the family if this is felt to be pastorally appropriate: Thanksgiving for the departed might be accompanied by intercessions for organisations with which s/he was associated, and possibly include prayers of those organisations: Texts might be offered, but many clergy and readers will prefer to compose their own, some spontaneously: The Lord's Prayer should conclude this section of the service.

Blessing: that of Easter, provided also for All Souls, would be appropriate.

Hymns: these may include favourites of the deceased and the family, and hymns meaningful to associations with which s/he had been involved, but should always include unequivocal expressions of the praise of God and the Christian hope.

Daily Prayer (Commendation) is available for a service based on Morning or Evening Prayer: A Service of the Word is also available, for a more flexible, but structured, liturgy, but serves primarily as a basis for regular congregational worship, particularly on Sundays: A “hymn sandwich” order, including the components identified above, may prove more suitable on most occasions, and more accessible to a congregation largely unfamiliar with worship of any kind, and particularly not in the Anglican/Episcopal tradition.

A celebration of the Eucharist may be requested: The authorised rites of 1929, 1970, and 1982 (rev. 2022), with appropriate Proper Preface, should be used: The Collect and readings of All Souls would be appropriate, and a passage from the Gospel must always be read: Any extra-canonical readings, whether poetry or prose, should be at least consistent with Christian faith, and should be presented either before the commencement of the liturgy or after the Sermon: Any Address should be delivered at the start of the service, before the commencement of the Eucharistic liturgy.