



St James' Church, Weybridge

Funeral Planning Session



Introduction

'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' (John 11.25-26)

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, 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 8.38,39)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness. (Lamentations 3.22,23)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5.4)

Q.s: Why are funerals important? Who are they for? What are they about?

Church Funerals

At St James', we believe that a church funeral offers a sacred space and time to honour those we love, to find spiritual comfort and the support of a community, and to say a meaningful farewell rooted in the Christian faith. It brings together prayer, ritual, shared presence and personal reflection, so that a life can be both mourned and celebrated. Church funerals comfort us, strengthen the bonds of community, and give us a way of marking life and faith that has endured across generations. Many families have long ties to their church, and returning to it at a time of loss can be a source of continuity for young and old alike.

At St James', we also want our church to be one that welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ. As members of the Inclusive Church network, we hold that everyone is valued and every life is worth celebrating, whatever their background, beliefs, identity or story. All who mourn are welcome here, whether or not they have a faith of their own. Our clergy are here to guide and reassure, to walk alongside those who navigate their grief.

Spiritual Significance

A church funeral is deeply rooted in spirituality, offering a setting where religious rituals, prayers, hymns, and readings can be performed to reflect the faith and values of the deceased. These rituals provide comfort and a sense of closure, speaking of our Christian hope in an afterlife and the continuity of life beyond death, which can be profoundly reassuring for grieving families, friends, colleagues and acquaintances.

Community and Support

Church funerals bring together family, friends, and members of the congregation, so that no one grieves alone. This gathering allows people to share memories, offer emotional support, and strengthen social bonds, which can be vital for our wellbeing.

Emotional and Psychological Benefits

Funerals, especially those held in a place of worship, help people to process loss and begin to grieve. They provide a structured and compassionate opportunity to say goodbye, to reflect on a life, and to give thanks for the person's contribution to the lives of others. This can be healing for both immediate and extended family. You do not need to have been a regular churchgoer, or to have been baptised, for a Church of England funeral to be arranged. We provide a dignified and meaningful farewell for anyone who has died, and for all those who loved them.

Tradition & Liturgy

For many, a church funeral honours familial, cultural, and religious traditions. It connects the deceased to a larger legacy of faith and community, offering a sense of continuity and stability amidst grief and loss.

The ceremony is usually personalised with two hymns, readings/poetry, and a eulogy, reflecting the life and character of the deceased while maintaining the solemnity of the occasion. Every service in church includes a Bible Reading and the Lord's Prayer.

Usual Service Structure:

Music upon Entry
Scripture sentence
Welcome & Introduction
(Placing of Bible & Cross upon the Coffin)
Collect
Hymn
Eulogy / Reflection
(Poem)
Bible Reading
(Music for Reflection)
Words of Comfort
Prayers
The Lord's Prayer
Hymn
Commendation & Farewell
(Committal)
Blessing
Closing Music



A Funeral Service (Coffin present) or Memorial Service (Ashes can be present) can include a Eucharist, which is often called a requiem.

Burial or Cremation?

In the Bible, burial is by far the most common pattern we encounter - Abraham laid Sarah to rest with great care (Genesis 23), Jacob and Joseph each asked to be buried in the land of their ancestors, and after the crucifixion Jesus' body was wrapped and laid in a tomb (John 19.38-42). Yet, the words "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3.19) can also reflect our belief that as we made from the earth, choosing to cremated, and being laid to rest in the earth as dust, is a poignant way to mark that cyclical journey. Though not directly appearing

within the Bible, scripture does not forbid cremation, and the Church has long accepted it. Ultimately, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, the promise of resurrection is God's gift, and God's power is not limited by how a body is laid to rest. Usually, this part of the funeral service (called "The Committal") usually takes place either at the graveside or at the crematorium. If you choose cremation, the ashes can then be buried at a later date, or kept with the family.

Sometimes, people choose not to attend the cremation. This is often the case when ashes will be returned to church for burial later. In these circumstances, all the prayers take place in church at the funeral. A special prayer of committal happens at the burial of ashes.

Practical Choices: Shaping your service

A funeral is an opportunity for others to say goodbye in a way that reflects your life, faith and values. Some people already know what they want, while others find it easier to start with a few ideas. You might ask yourself: *What music do I love? What words would I want to have read? What stories, photos, songs, etc. would make people smile, as well as cry?*

Every service includes a Bible reading and the Lord's Prayer. Within that shape, much is open to you.

Hymns

Most services include two hymns. Many choose hymns that were sung at previously important events (funerals, weddings or christenings, or at school), or may well be hymns that you simply love. Some popular choices:

- Abide with Me
- The Lord's My Shepherd
- Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
- How Great Thou Art
- Amazing Grace
- Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer
- Be Thou My Vision
- Dear Lord and Father of Mankind
- Lord of All Hopefulness
- Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven
- Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
- Morning Has Broken
- The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended
- Lord of the dance



Bible Readings

You may choose one or two readings. They can be read by a family member or friend, or by the clergy. A few that many find comforting:

- Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd")
- Psalm 121 ("I lift up my eyes to the hills")

- Psalm 139 (God's presence everywhere)
- Isaiah 40.28-31 (Our strength renewed)
- Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 ("For everything there is a season")
- John 14.1-6 ("Do not let your hearts be troubled")
- Romans 8.31-39 (nothing can separate us from God's love)
- 1 Corinthians 13 (the greatest of these is love)
- Revelation 21.1-7 (a new heaven and a new earth)
- Matthew 5.1-12 (the Beatitudes)

Poems and Other Readings

A poem, or a passage from a favourite book/film, can be very appropriate. Some well-known choices:

- "Remember" by Christina Rossetti
- "Crossing the Bar" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- "Death Is Nothing at All" by Henry Scott Holland
- "Fear No More the Heat o' the Sun" by William Shakespeare
- "Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep" (often attributed to Mary Elizabeth Frye)
- "On Death" by Kahlil Gibran
- "Sea Fever" by John Masefield
- An Irish blessing, such as "May the road rise to meet you"

Music

Music can mark the beginning of the service, a moment of quiet reflection, and the close of the service. It can be played live or, where possible, pre-recorded. Ideas that people often choose:

Classical and Choral

- Pachelbel's Canon
- Elgar's "Nimrod" (*Enigma Variations*)
- Fauré's "Pie Jesu" or "In Paradisum"
- Mozart's "Ave Verum Corpus"
- Handel's "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth"
- Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*

Well-loved popular songs

- "What a Wonderful World"
- "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"
- "You'll Never Walk Alone"
- "Time to Say Goodbye"
- "Wind Beneath My Wings"
- "Bring Me Sunshine"



For more information and guidance: <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals>