

FUNERAL CUSTOMARY

A GUIDE FOR THE BEREAVED
CONCERNING BURIAL RITES
AT SAINT GEORGE'S CHURCH

JANUARY 2004

SAINT GEORGE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
15 WILLOW ROAD AT WHITE BLUFF
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

A PRAYER IN GRIEF

Almighty God, my heart is sad. What I had hoped and prayed would not happen has come to pass, and I am beside myself with grief. The sun rises and I am not filled with its light. Night comes and the darkness closes in. The one I loved is gone and something of me is gone too.

The places remain that we knew so well and who can I tell? Who has ever known me so well, understood my silences and read my glances like a book? Where shall I turn? I turn to pray but am too wrapped up in myself. I do not want to be bitter, but oh, how this loss stings, and the tears come, and the hours weigh me down like great boulders in deep water.

O thou, who in Christ Jesus art able to deliver the righteous into peace, flood over the burning sorrow of my soul. Aid me to trust thee as I take the next step, as I eat the next meal alone, if need be, as I go through the activities of the day.

Thy Word bespeaks Presence. Comfort me, my God, as only thou canst. Enfold me, just now, close to thy side.

Through the conqueror of Sorrow, Christ Jesus. **Amen**

E. Lee Phillips

Funeral Customary For Saint George's Episcopal Church

The Liturgy for the dead is an Easter liturgy. It finds all its meaning in the Resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we, too shall be raised.... This, however, does not make human grief unchristian. 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 one we love has entered into the nearer presence of our Lord, we sorrow in sympathy with those who mourn.

(The Book of Common Prayer)

Preface

The death of a loved one, whether suddenly and unexpectedly, after a long term illness, or having lived a natural life span is a traumatic time in the lives of those left behind. While still grieving, families and loved ones are called on to make decisions with little time to prepare. This customary is designed to assist those who wish to have their loved ones buried out of Saint George's Episcopal Church, and establishes guidelines and policies designed to make it easier for family and friends to prepare for the funeral and interment of their loved one.

Prior planning

It is always advisable to make plans for your own death while still in good health and while able to make rational decisions, not simply about funeral arrangements, but about the myriad details that must be dealt with upon the death of any individual. Couples should make time to discuss frankly what will need to be addressed upon each others' demise. Single persons should have the same discussions with a family member or a trusted friend or advisor.

In any case, every individual should have a current and valid will. Superstitions surrounding preparation of a will are just that – superstitions. Good Christian practice and stewardship dictates that we make appropriate plans for the disposal of our earthly affairs in a timely manner.

Saint George's can make available a planning guide that assists individuals and families in organizing important documents and recording important information prior to the time of death. There are additional resources from a variety of sources.

Who may be buried from Saint George's Church?

A good and decent burial is a service every human being should be afforded, regardless of their station in life, their belief or unbelief, or the circumstances of their death. It is and will be the policy of the rector of Saint George's that the parish church and ordained ministers will be available to all in need of this ministry without exception.

Guidelines for parishioners and family members of parishioners

The death of a member of Saint George's parish should be reported to the rector, or in his absence, the Senior Warden at the earliest possible time. If someone is near death, family members should contact the rector or Senior Warden to allow the last rites of the Church to be administered.

Subsequent to a death, and prior to meeting with the funeral home, surviving family members and/or those responsible for making the funeral arrangements should contact the rector so that he may be present at that meeting. This is especially important if no prior planning or contact has been made with a funeral home. Your priest will help guide you toward making appropriate and reasonable decisions regarding the funeral home services.

If there is a financial need, it should be made known to the rector prior to meeting with a funeral home.

Selection of a time for the service should be based on the needs of the family, the expectation or lack thereof of out-of-town mourners, and the availability of the Church.

This should be done in consultation with the rector of Saint George's prior to establishing a day and time with the funeral home.

As advised by the *Book of Common Prayer*, and with few exceptions, Baptized Christians are properly buried from the church. At Saint George's the normative service is a Mass of Christian Burial which includes the Burial Office and the Holy Eucharist, followed by a Committal at graveside. Use of funeral home chapels is highly discouraged.

At the Service

Families may choose Rite I (traditional language) or Rite II (contemporary language) from the Book of Common Prayer as they desire.

The coffin or urn (see cremation below) may be already in place in the Church or may be a part of the opening procession. A coffin is always closed in the church and is covered with a pall, or in the case of a veteran of the Armed Forces, the American Flag. An urn is covered with a smaller pall.

With few exceptions, altar flowers are the only flowers to be used during the service. Floral displays on the coffin are removed as the coffin enters the church and replaced after the service. All other floral displays should be taken directly to the cemetery by the funeral home staff.

Displays of pictures of the deceased and other memorabilia are most suited to the wake or visitation at the funeral home prior to the funeral. An appropriate photograph of the deceased may be placed on a small table at the entrance of the church if desired.

Eulogies are not customary in the liturgies of the Episcopal Church. The presiding priest will preach a short homily, as part of the liturgy. Family and/or friends are encouraged to participate in the service by choosing and reading the lessons or leading the prayers for the dead.

The family is especially encouraged to choose 1-3 hymns for the liturgy to be sung by the congregation. A solo anthem may be performed if desired. All music must be sacred in nature. The rector or the organist/choirmaster can help in these selections

The organist/choirmaster of Saint George's, if available, is the organist for all burial services at Saint George's.

All Baptized Christians, who are communicants in good standing in their own denominations, are invited to receive communion during the service.

At the Graveside/Columbarium

The committal service is brief. Family and friends may choose for this to be a private service or may open the service to all.

The rector, working with the funeral home, will help families to make arrangements for committals away from Savannah, to include arranging for a priest to be available for the graveside service.

Military honors are always a welcome part of the Committal Service. Extra-liturgical ceremonies, conducted by fraternal organizations, may be held subsequent to the church's Committal Service.

Cremation

The Episcopal Church, as do most other Christian denominations, recognizes cremation as an appropriate manner of burying the dead. The Church does not endorse it over a regular burial or vice versa. It is the family's choice to make, in consultation with their priest or other minister. Burial of the cremated remains in a columbarium or cemetery is to be preferred. Scattering ashes, in whatever setting, has little theological basis, and is discouraged.

Fees

There are no fees whatsoever for burial from Saint George's Church.

*“All we go down to the dust;
yet even at the grave we make our song
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia*