



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

302 SUMMIT STREET | WINONA, MISSISSIPPI | 662.283.2487

PHILOSOPHY AND POLICY OF A CHRISTIAN FUNERAL

Greetings in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The whole community of believers at First Presbyterian Church grieves and mourns with you at your loss. Death, even for Christians, is a terribly hard time for those of us who remain. We, who have tasted the first fruits of the resurrection and know of the glory that will be revealed in us at the return of Christ, still have trouble coping with and wrapping our minds around the death of those we love. For the Christian, there is comfort in death knowing that Christ is the Great Shepherd of His Sheep who will not lose any of his own, but in death brings them to His own bosom to await the Day of Resurrection.

Please know that the elders of the church and the congregation are praying for you in this time. Do not hesitate to let us know if there is any way in which we can be of assistance to you in this difficult time of grief and sadness. In such times as these, it is often customary to have a funeral or memorial worship service to remember and give thanks for the life of the deceased. While it is not necessary to have a funeral service at a local church, the Session of FPCW welcomes such services of worship and thanksgiving and has adopted the following philosophy and policy statement to guide the planning and preparation of the worship service for those who choose to utilize the House of God.

I. Preliminary Principles

A. Purpose: A funeral or memorial service is to glorify the Living and True God and for the consolation of the living. These objectives dictate what will take place in the service.

B. The Promise of Resurrection in Christ

The Christian funeral/memorial service is a time for grief and comfort in light of the sure hope of the resurrection of the righteous in Christ. Because Christians hold dear the truth of a New Body and a New Creation for those who are in Christ, a Christian funeral will look very different from a funeral in other contexts and with different underlying principles. A funeral service does not make a declaration about the eternal status of the deceased, but seeks to proclaim the truths of the gospel of Christ and call all men to obey the gospel while there is yet time.

C. A Funeral/Memorial Service is a Service of Worship

The Christian funeral or memorial service is a worship service in which God's people witness to their faith in the hope of the gospel, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, and in which assurance of God's love and salvation in Christ is ministered, especially to the Christian bereaved. While it is common in our day to have a "celebration of life" in lieu of a worship service, if the service is held in the House of God, it must be approached as a service of divine worship with the focus on our Great God and Father who redeems sinners through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may indeed be fitting to celebrate the life of the deceased at another time and place.

II. Logistical Matters

A. Ministerial Consultation

Many families choose to hire a funeral director to organize and go over the arrangements for various viewings, visitations, and services in addition to the funeral itself. Please note that the funeral home director is not responsible for scheduling or approving what and when events will take place at the church; this is the responsibility of the pastor and Session. It is the family's responsibility to meet with the minister to plan and schedule the funeral and/or graveside services if you desire to use the pastoral staff or facilities of FPCW. It is helpful to have this

meeting with the pastor before meeting with the funeral director to write the obituary to ensure there are no conflicts, complications, or other issues.

B. Family & Friends Luncheon

The WIC typically provides a luncheon for the family, pallbearers, and out of town guests either before or after the funeral/memorial service. They hope that this will be an opportunity for the grieving family to be comforted and enjoy fellowship as well as receive and enjoy Christian hospitality. Please provide us with contact information so that the WIC president can organize this when it is most convenient for you.

C. Guest Minister

From time to time, families or the deceased may desire to have a minister other than or in addition to the pastor of FPCW come to preach the funeral/memorial service, and the Session welcomes this with certain caveats. If this is the case, the family must make a formal request to have a guest minister approved and invited by the Session. Typically, only ministers from churches that have a fraternal relationship with the PCA (e.g. NAPARC churches) or other like-minded denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention will be welcomed.

D. Eulogies

The word *eulogy* comes from the Greek meaning "good word" or "praise" and is derived from a pagan Greek practice and as such it is not fitting for a Christian worship service the primary aim of which is to glorify, praise, and give thanks to the Living and True God. If the family desires to have the deceased praised or eulogized, it should be done at another time and place other than the worship service. It may, however, be permissible for a close friend or family member to offer *brief* and *concise* words of remembrance for the person prior to the start of the worship service.

E. Visitation

The church facilities are available for a period of visitation. If the visitation on the church grounds includes a viewing, the casket must be closed during the funeral service since the viewing of remains is not part of a Christian worship service.

F. Special Affiliation(s)

It may be the case that the deceased or family of the deceased has maintained affiliations with worthy organizations and social groups in addition to the church (e.g. military, civic organizations, special interest groups) who will wish to honor the deceased. However, since these rites are secular and not part of a Christian worship service (in which we all come as poor, miserable sinners), such organizations should pay tribute at another time and place.

G. Music

As with any worship service, music and singing praises to God are key components. The organist and pastor will assist you in selecting hymns and music for the worship service. Any music, songs, or hymns that are to be used during the worship must be distinctively Christian and accurately convey the truths of the Scripture that are especially dear during a time of grief. As a worship service, it is not appropriate to include secular or merely sentimental music.

III. Fees and Costs

A. Church Facilities

Member in Good Standing: No Fee

Non-Member: Any non-member desiring to use FPC Winona facilities may make a request to the session. If the request is approved, a fee of \$500 per three hours (or portion thereof) of building use as well as a \$200 cleaning fee. Additionally, a \$1000 deposit (due 48 hours in advance) is required to reserve the space; this deposit will be returned within two business days after the service. The Session reserves the right to refuse use of the facilities at its pleasure.

B. Organist

A fee of at least \$100 paid directly to the organist is customary (as recommended by the *American Guild of Organists*). If the church organist is unavailable, it is the family's responsibility to secure an organist for the worship service. A list of approved and recommended organists is available from the church office. The family's chosen funeral director may also be of help in this regard.

C. Pastor

The pastor does not charge a fee for a funeral worship service.

IV. Helpful Scriptures in this Time

- A. Psalm 1:** *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*
- B. Psalm 23:** *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*
- C. Psalm 25:** *Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land. The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.*
- D. Psalm 34:** *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! ...Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*
- E. John 14:** *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*
- F. Romans 8:** *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. God's Everlasting Love What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or*

distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure 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.

- G. I Corinthians 15:** *...I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ...*
- H. II Corinthians 5:** *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened – not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*
- I. I Thessalonians 4:** *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*
- J. I Peter 1:** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

REQUEST FOR SESSION: GUEST MINISTER INVITATION

If you would like to have an outside minister come and preach or otherwise participate in the funeral/memorial service, please complete this form and return it to the pastor or clerk of session as soon as possible.

Name of Guest Minister _____

Church Affiliation/Denomination _____

Guest Minister Contact Information:

Phone _____

Email _____

I understand that Christ the only King and Head of the Church has given the Session oversight of and responsibility for all the teaching and preaching at First Presbyterian Church. As such, the decision whether to invite another minister to the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church is theirs alone. The Session will make every effort to accommodate the wishes of the bereaved family and/or the deceased, however there may indeed be cases in which the honor of Christ, the purity of the church, and the truth of the gospel will necessitate that some requests be denied. If that is the case, the family is of course free to find another venue for funeral and/or memorial service.

Signed,
