

ST. JOHN-HILL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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FUNERAL GUIDELINES

According to the *Book of Worship* of the United Church of Christ, “in the Christian community, death is a corporate experience that touches the life of the entire family of faith. When a death occurs, the immediate family is encouraged to notify the church as soon as possible and to share fully in planning a service. They also may assist in leading the service.

“The service recognizes both the pain and sorrow of the separation that accompanies death and the hope and joy of the promises of God to those who die and are raised in Jesus Christ. The service celebrates the life of the deceased, gives thanks for that person’s life, and commends that life to God. It offers consolation to the bereaved by acknowledging their grief and anger or guilt. It provides the Christian community and others an opportunity to support the bereaved with their presence. Its purpose is to affirm once more the powerful, steadfast love of God from which people cannot be separated, even by death.”

“The service is an act of corporate worship: God’s word is read and proclaimed, hymns may be sung, prayers offered, and the sacrament of Holy Communion shared by those who desire it. The service should be at an hour convenient for the immediate family and the community of faith. If possible, the service most appropriately is held in the place where the congregation regularly gathers for worship. If it is held in another place, it is important that it remain a corporate act of the church’s worship.”

PROCEDURE

The basic guidelines presented are to be used for either a funeral service or a memorial service (held following a committal, a cremation, or scientific donation of the body).

1. When a member of the congregation is near death, please notify the pastor so that pastoral care can be provided to both the family and to the individual.
2. The death of a member of the congregation should be reported to the pastor as soon as possible. The hospital staff will not do this. It must be the responsibility of family or friends. At the same time the family should notify the funeral director.
3. The pastor will meet with the family of the deceased and will assist in planning the date, time, place, and order of worship. The Pastor should be consulted before setting a firm date, in order to insure that there are no scheduling conflicts. Under normal circumstances the pastor of the church is expected to officiate at funerals held in the church.
4. Church members are always encouraged to have their funerals take place in the Church, where we have been gathered, nourished, forgiven, comforted, and strengthened by God throughout our lives. It is here that we are surrounded by comforting symbols of Christ’s resurrection and presence.
5. Appropriate hymns and scripture lessons will be selected by the pastor and family together. These should reflect the themes of confidence and hope, assurance in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and trust in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for our comforting and strengthening.
6. Our hope lies not in our goodness, but rather in God’s grace. Therefore the funeral sermon will proclaim the Gospel, commemorating the deceased while at the same time pointing the mourners toward God, who through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, promises us all eternal life.
7. Christians often hold membership in praiseworthy organizations other than the church. It is most

appropriate for memorial rituals of those groups to be held apart from the funeral to avoid compromising this service's integrity. Often such fraternal services are held in the funeral home on the evening before the funeral.

8. The presence of the coffin may help the bereaved and the congregation to confront and deal with the reality of death. The coffin is closed throughout the service. A white pall or another appropriate covering may be placed over the coffin symbolizing the resurrection. Prior to the service the coffin may stand open in the narthex during the public visitation.

9. All music for the funeral service should reflect the Christian understanding of death and resurrection. The church's organist should be contacted as soon as possible.

10. Special readings, poems, letters, etc., should be planned in cooperation with the pastor.

11. A family member may consult with the church secretary about the bulletin to be used in the funeral.

12. Fees for the organist, for the sexton, and for the pastor should be in accordance with the local custom of area pastors and funeral directors. ????

13. If desired, a fellowship meal following the funeral and interment may be held at the church. Arrangements may be made by contacting a representative of the Women's Guild.

14. Cremation, donation of organs for transplant, and donation of the body for medical research are all acceptable practices for Christians.

Portions of the above guidelines have been adapted from *Of Resurrection and Life*, by Philip H. Pfatteicher and S. Anita Stauffer, and from *The Book of Worship* of the United Church of Christ, Office for Church Life and Leadership, New York, 1986.

Revised by Consistory June 20, 2006