

# **“GET YOUR AFFAIRS IN ORDER”**

*A Guide for Planning a Funeral:  
Yours or a Loved One's*

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“I'd suggest that you get your affairs in order.”

Whether they come from your doctor or a friend or your pastor, we all know what those words mean. While you can still do so, you need to make the necessary arrangements for the time when you will not be able to make decisions or act on your own. It might be that barring a miracle, your death is imminent. Or it may mean that an illness may leave you incapable of making decisions or signing your name. If you are to have a say in how you would like to see things handled regarding your physical and spiritual care while you are alive as well as after you are gone, 'I'd recommend that you get your affairs in order.'

Most of us are born optimists when it comes to thinking about our life and death. We think about what we will do in our “old age.” We know that death is inevitable. But we rarely think intentionally about our own death unless we are forced to do so. Not many think about getting their affairs in order until we absolutely have to, or worse, after it's too late to do so.

Over the years, I've visited and spoken with lots of people who cannot face the facts of life. We are all born to die. *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...” (Romans 5:12)* We see death happening all around us. The media makes sure of that. And I'm sure that we all know that we will one day die. But to face the facts and prepare for our own death is more than we want to deal with. And so, all too often, it is left to others to 'get our affairs in order' because we lacked the concern or the courage to do so.

This places a very difficult and unfair burden on others who, depending on their relationship to us, may be filled with many emotions. I've seen brothers and sisters who had always gotten along just fine, become divided by the process of trying to settle the affairs of mom and dad, who left no instructions and made no preparations for the inevitable day. I've seen funeral services conducted that, I'm quite certain, were not conducted as the deceased would have wished.

A proper sense of urgency comes not only from our concern for loved ones, but also from the guidance of God's Word. Jesus spent a considerable amount of time telling His followers that the end of our life can come suddenly, *“at a time when it is least expected.”* The end that our Lord refers to here is His Second Coming when He will draw this world to a close and inaugurate the *“new heavens and new earth.”*

None of the sorts of plans and preparations that we will be talking about in this pamphlet will matter when the Last Day comes. When our Lord comes again in the fullness of His glory, with His holy angels accompanying Him, we will all, in an instant, become beneficiaries of all of the plans that God has made for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Because He 'put our affairs in order' through the cross of Christ, we will *'inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'* (Matthew 25:34)

Of course, for all who are still alive in the body on “The Last Day,” all funeral arrangements and 'last wills and testaments' will become obsolete. *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4).* Our earthly estate will be 'dissolved.' *“The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” (2 Peter 3:10)*

The 'final day' will come when it will. *“The day or the hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” (Matthew 24:36)* For the Christian, this means that there is always going to be a peculiar tension in our daily life. On the one hand, we do not want to become so wrapped up and attached to the things of this world that we lose sight of the inevitable end of the things of this world.

At the same time, we do not want to be irresponsible stewards. In faith, we acknowledge that God has blessed us with whatever measure of possessions and wealth that we have and He has called us to be faithful stewards of those gifts. Faithful stewards will want to be sure that they have made the proper arrangements for their earthly estate so that it is put to a good and godly use if they should die before the Lord's second coming.

Of all people, Christians should not deny the truth that they will one day die or ignore the possibility that they may become unexpectedly incapacitated. Our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world with the self-awareness that He was going to die and that His time would be cut short. *“And [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31)*

Jesus made all of the preparations for His death beforehand so that there would be no confusion among His brothers and sisters as to His will. The Last Supper in the Upper Room in Jerusalem was His Last Will and Testament. *“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said 'Take, eat, this is my body.' And He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant...” (Matthew 26:26-28)*

The New Testament word for “covenant” is ‘*diathaykay*’. This is the word that was used to indicate the legal document on which a person sets out his will for the distribution of his estate after he dies. He designates what he is giving and to whom it should go. In the Upper Room, Jesus set down His will, stating that all who eat and drink of Supper are receiving their share in His estate, which is nothing less than the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains how this Last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ is established for His loved ones. *“Where a will (‘diathaykay’) is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.”* (Hebrews 9:16-17). But Christ has died and by His death His will is sealed and unchangeable.

The fact that our Lord faced His death with complete courage and put His affairs perfectly in order beforehand should assure us that it is proper for us to do the same.

Ultimately, it is what Jesus has accomplished by His death and resurrection that gives us the courage and desire to plan for our death without hesitation or fear. *“If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 5:17)

St. Paul assures every believer that we may look death in the face without fear and with boldness and confidence because of the complete victory that our Lord, Jesus Christ has won over our death. *“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.”* (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

So, in the comfort and confidence that comes with the gift of faith in Christ, and the courtesy and love to those who will deeply appreciate our preparations and decisions in these matters, and for the sake of bearing a good witness to the hope that is in us even in our death, we want to “put our affairs in order.”

## **Your Funeral Service**

Throughout your life you may have many opportunities to bear witness to your faith in Jesus Christ. With many of those opportunities, you may have made the good confession of faith. But chances are, with some, your witness was lacking and disappointing. Maybe you wish that you had had the chance to think about it ahead of time. At your funeral service however, you will have the undivided attention of your friends and all those who care about you and whom you love.

The funeral service is a wonderful opportunity to make a bold witness of faith in Jesus Christ before others just as He will confess us before His Father. *“Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:32) You, of course, will not be there to do the speaking. But with the proper pre-planning, your funeral service can become a personal testimony to the life and salvation that Jesus Christ offers to all through faith alone. Let's begin with the “place” for your funeral service.

## The Church Service

The Church where you are a member is the ideal location for your funeral service. The Sanctuary where you gathered with your brothers and sisters in Christ and received the gifts of grace provides the best opportunity for you to bear witness to your hope in Christ to all who attend the service.

The significance of having your casket or urn located at the baptismal font makes a strong statement. In your baptism, you died with Christ and were raised with Him. (*Romans 6:3-4*). In Holy Baptism, you died while you were still alive and you were raised from the dead before you were buried in the ground. Luther connected baptism and death like this, 'The sooner a person dies after baptism, the sooner his baptism is completed.' (*The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism.*) You make a strong statement about the Christian faith simply by having your casket or urn placed at the baptismal font.

A funeral service conducted in the church is a worship service complete with singing, hearing God's Word, preaching and praying. Here, everyone present has the opportunity to participate in the worship service through singing and responsive readings and listening. With careful forethought, you may request scripture texts and hymns that are especially meaningful to you.

The primary aim of the funeral service at the church is to testify to the life and salvation that Jesus Christ has won for us by His death on the cross. Through Scripture readings, sermon, and hymns, comforting assurance is offered to all who mourn; the end of all the suffering, pain and tears, and the immediate resurrection of the soul to the perfect peace and joy of heaven for all who die in faith is proclaimed in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The 'funeral service' addresses the immediate resurrection of the soul of the believer to the eternal life in heaven. The 'committal service' addresses the peaceful sleep of the body in the grave until the Last Day when the body will be reunited to the soul in heaven.

If the burial will take place immediately after the funeral service, the pastor will lead the coffin or urn from the church to the hearse and lead the procession to the grave site. He is the called under-shepherd who leads the lambs of God under his care through this life and into the arms of the Good Shepherd.

Very often, family members and friends will want to speak publicly in memory of the departed. The most appropriate opportunity for this is after the 'committal service' is concluded.

Another benefit of arranging to have your funeral at the church is the opportunity for everyone to spend time together after the service in the Fellowship Hall. A time for family and friends to gather together over some food is a wonderful time of mutual consolation and support for everyone. A table with some favorite pictures and mementos that you have chosen to share is priceless. If the committal service takes place immediately after the funeral service, the reception may take place at a designated time later in the day.

Some things to consider as you plan for your funeral at church are:

- ^ Scripture texts
- ^ Hymns
- ^ Pictures and mementos

There is a file in the church office that is labeled “Funeral Plans” in which your funeral preparations will be kept. They can be changed at any time.

### **The Funeral Home Service**

A funeral service held at a funeral home also affords the opportunity for a strong testimony to Christ. There is usually no opportunity for hymns, although there is no reason that hymns may not be included if proper arrangements have been made ahead of time. The funeral service at the funeral home consists of scripture readings, a sermon and prayers. Depending on the setting, the altar cross from church may be brought to the funeral home to add the helpful symbolism that draws the hearts and minds of those present to the hope that we have because of Christ and Him crucified.

Some things to consider as you plan for your funeral at a funeral home are:

- ^ Scripture texts
- ^ Pictures and mementos

### **The Graveside Service**

The graveside also provides an opportunity for a thoughtful and faithful funeral service to take place. The limitations include a dependency on good weather and the seating arrangements for those who cannot stand for very long. (*Not to mention the possibility of black flies stealing the attention!*).

### **Body Burial vs. Cremation Burial**

Ever since my teaching assignments to Thailand and Cambodia, I have thought a lot about the way that Christians in this country treat the body after death. Thailand and Cambodia are both predominately Buddhist countries with a heavy dose of Hinduism mixed in. The result is a philosophy of life and death that is focused entirely on the soul or spirit. The belief is that when a person dies, his soul either reaches Nirvana or is reincarnated into another body for another lifetime. Bodies are considered to be nothing more than a container for the soul. When the container no longer holds the soul, it is disposed of like an empty box. At death, the body is burned and the ashes are tossed.

The Holy Scriptures however, clearly present human life as the union of body and spirit. *“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2:7)* When Adam sinned, he brought death upon himself and all mankind to follow. Death is the separation of what God has joined together, body and soul. The victory of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the complete restoration of life – the complete and inseparable reunion of body and soul.

In both the Old and the New Testaments, strong statements of faith and hope for the life and salvation that God has promised center on the resurrection of the body.

Job says *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. (Job 19:25-26)*

The prophet Isaiah proclaims, *“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” (Isaiah 26:19).*

The prophet Ezekiel looks out over a valley of skeletons and hears the Lord speak, *“Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 37:5-6)*

St. Paul addresses the question of the resurrection of the body in great detail. *“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” This is how it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 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. (1 Corinthians 15:35, 42-44, 51-52).*

This hope and comfort of the complete restoration of life that is heard throughout the Scriptures is based on the incarnation of the Son of God. The Son of God took on a human body in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He did not come into this world as a 'spirit being.' Nor did He die on the cross in spirit only. Nor did He rise from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in spirit only. His death was a bodily death and His resurrection was a bodily resurrection.

From earliest times, the Christian Church has confessed, “I believe in the resurrection of the body...” as its statement of faith in the will of God for our physical body. (3<sup>rd</sup> Article of the Apostles Creed).



I was deeply impressed with the Christian congregations in Thailand and Cambodia that are purchasing plots of ground for church cemeteries when they are able to do so. In this way they are making a strong witness to the Christian gospel that Christ has redeemed both body and soul by His cross and resurrection.

Some wonderful hymns that faithfully proclaim the promise of the ‘resurrection of the body’ on the Last Day include:

**“This Joyful Eastertide” #482 (Lutheran Service Book)**

*Stanza 3* – “My flesh in hope shall rest, And for a season slumber.  
Till trump from east to west, Shall wake the dead in number:  
Had Christ, who once was slain, Not burst His three-day prison,  
Our faith had been in vain: But now has Christ arisen, arisen, arisen;  
But now has Christ arisen!”

**“Lord, Thee I Love With All My Heart” #708 (LSB)**

*Stanza 3* - “Lord, let at last Thy angels come,  
To Abr’ham’s bosom bear me home, that I may die unfearing;  
And in its narrow chamber keep, my body safe in peaceful sleep, until Thy reappearing.  
And then from death awaken me, that these mine eyes with joy may see,  
O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my font of grace.  
Lord Jesus Christ, My prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise Thee without end.”

**“Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense” #741 (LSB)**

*Stanza 5* – “Glorified, I shall anew, with this flesh then be enshrouded;  
In this body I shall view God, my Lord, with eyes unclouded;  
In this flesh I then shall see, Jesus Christ eternally.”

**“This Body in the Grave We Lay” #759 (LSB)**

*Stanza 1* – “This body in the grave we lay, there to await that solemn day,  
When God Himself shall bid it rise, to mount triumphant to the skies.”

*Stanza 2* – “And so to earth we now entrust, what came from dust and turns to dust.  
And from the dust shall rise that day, in glorious triumph o’er the decay.”

## Cremation

I once asked a local funeral director about the frequency of cremations compared to traditional burials in his practice. He said that it was evenly split between the two. There was a time when cremations were rare in this country. In some countries, cremations are the norm because of space, and longstanding customs and traditions.

There is no clear word from the Scriptures that commands or forbids the cremation of the body at death. Where the Scriptures do not issue a clear command, the Christian is free to act according to his conscience. Yet, the Christian conscience is informed by the Holy Scriptures and not our own feelings or current trends or longstanding customs and traditions. The following thoughts are meant to be helpful when deciding between burial and cremation. (*I am using the word 'burial' to mean the burial of the body in a casket in the ground.*)

Cremation burials can be less expensive than a body burial. An urn for the ashes is less expensive than a casket. You may even supply your own urn to the funeral home. Cremation allows much more flexibility in scheduling the funeral and committal services which can take place weeks or even months after death. When 'direct cremation' is used, there is no opportunity for a 'viewing.' If a viewing is desired, the body will have to be embalmed and a casket purchased or rented which cancels out much of the cost advantages of cremation. The opportunity for a time of visitation and mutual consolation can still be effectively carried out with the urn containing the cremated remains in the room.

If cremation is preferred, proper respect for the body which Christ has redeemed with His precious blood must be shown. A proper burial is essential. The practice of 'scattering' the ashes on favorite places or the storage of the urn at home gives a poor witness to the sanctity of the body and the expectation of eventual restoration of the body. Needless to say, more recent trends such as making jewelry of the ashes are also in poor taste. 'Alkaline Hydrolysis' (*a process using strong alkaline solutions that reduce human remains to a chemical slurry*) and 'Promession' (*a method for disposing of human remains by freeze drying and pulverizing the remains*) give a confusing testimony of Christian reverence for the body as well. (*Be aware that some medical research facilities will use 'alkaline hydrolysis' to dispose of donated bodies.*)

The concern for a proper burial is not a question of whether Christ can raise the ashes from wherever they are scattered or stored. The hope of the resurrection of the body is as valid for those for whom no remains can be found as for those whose remains are precisely marked by a stone. It is a matter of giving proper respect and Christian witness to the body that belongs to God by virtue of His creation and redemption that compels us to insist on a proper burial.

The proper burial of the cremated remains may be done in several ways.

- △ A cemetery plot in a public or private cemetery may be purchased.
- △ It is also legal to bury on private property. The following State of Maine regulations apply: "*Under 13 M.R.S. § 1142 when a person appropriates for a family burying ground a piece of land containing not more than 1/4 of an acre, causes a description of it to be*

*recorded in the registry of deeds of the same county or by the clerk of the town where it is situated and substantially marks the bounds of the burying ground or encloses it with a fence, it is exempt from attachment and execution. As long as a family burying ground meets these criteria, they are allowed with no further licensing or registration requirements (absent local ordinances)."*

- ▲ A 'niche' may be purchased at a 'columbarium.' A columbarium is a structure that holds cremated remains in an urn that is placed in a 'niche.' Niches may hold single or multiple urns. A columbarium may be outdoors or part of an indoor mausoleum.

## **Body Burial**

When our Lord died, considerate men and women wanted to see that His body received proper and reverent treatment. *"After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there."* (John 19:38-42)

By giving His body a proper burial they gave a public witness to their love and admiration of Jesus. For Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel of the Jews, this was a very dangerous thing to do. It surely cost him his position on the counsel which hated Jesus and was responsible for His death.

Likewise, when the women went to the tomb where they had seen His body laid to anoint Him with spices, they bore witness to their love and respect for Jesus. *"When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him."* (Mark 16:1)

Significantly, St. Paul says that through Holy Baptism we are connected to Christ not by being united to His cross, but to His burial. Paul writes to the Romans, *"[We] were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6:4) Again, to the Colossians Paul writes, *"Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."* (Colossians 2:12)

Our desire for the faithful treatment of the body at death raises the need to consider two closely related issues: autopsy and organ donation.

- ▲ Autopsies are usually requested by physicians and hospitals when significant information might be obtained about the cause of death through a postmortem examination. It may be

that medical science can learn something that will benefit others. Where there is no benefit from an autopsy, it should be refused. If there is a strong reason that an autopsy would be helpful to others, it may be considered.

- ⤴ If you wish to donate specific organs for transplant, you will need to register your desire with the Federal Government. ([www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov)) By completing the information on this website, you will receive a special 'organ donor' designation on your driver's license. If it is your intention to donate specific organs for transplant, family members should be made aware of this ahead of time.
- ⤴ If you wish to donate your body to a medical school, you will have to make those arrangements ahead of time as well. There are a number of organizations to choose from which you may find online. You will want to clearly specify the respectful burial of your body after its usefulness has been completed.

## [Making Funeral Arrangements](#)

Whether you choose a body burial or cremation burial, the first step in making your funeral arrangements is to contact your pastor. He will help you think through difficult decisions with scriptural guidance. If you desire, he will be willing to accompany you on your visit with a funeral director to make advance arrangements.

## [A Funeral Director](#)

A reputable funeral director will guide you through the practical decisions that need to be made for your funeral. They include:

- ⤴ Choice of body burial or cremation burial.
- ⤴ Choice of cemetery, mausoleum or other place of burial.
- ⤴ Choice of casket or urn.
- ⤴ Choice of visitation / viewing arrangements.
- ⤴ Choice of funeral service arrangements.
- ⤴ Choice of placement of obituary. (You should consider writing your own.)
- ⤴ Choice of prepaying funeral expenses or simply keeping your wishes on file.

A federal law called the "Funeral Rule" requires funeral homes to give you an itemized price-list of all of the products and services which they provide, including the price of the caskets. It is not wrong to 'shop around.' Here is an idea of what to expect:

- ⤴ Service fee for the funeral director and staff. This fee includes funeral planning, transporting the body from the place of death, keeping the body until burial, securing the necessary permits and copies of death certificates, coordinating arrangements with the cemetery for graveside service and burial (the cemetery will charge an 'opening' and 'closing' fee through the funeral director), writing and placing the obituary in the

newspaper. There may be other services which are optional which will be in addition to the basic fee such as a viewing at the funeral home and / or a funeral service at the funeral home or church.

▲ Fee for various products and services.

Embalming:

Embalming preserves the body so that it is suitable for viewing. If you plan to have a viewing longer than a day or two after death, embalming will be necessary. Embalming is not required if there is to be no viewing.

Burial vault or Grave liner:

A burial vault or grave liner is placed in the ground before burial to prevent the ground from caving in as the casket deteriorates over time. A 'grave liner' covers only the top and sides of the casket. A 'burial vault' surrounds the entire casket. Maine State law does not require that vaults or liners must be used. However, cemeteries may require one or the other to prevent the ground from sinking at the grave site. Funeral directors will have options to choose from and they must show you the price for each. It is also possible to purchase a vault or liner from a third-party.

Casket:

The casket is usually the most expensive single item you will purchase for your funeral. They can be made from wood, metal, fiberboard, plastic or fiberglass. Caskets will not preserve the body forever. The choice of casket depends entirely on personal preference and budget. It is also possible to purchase a casket from a third-party, and funeral homes are required to use them without charging a special fee. Also, for the do-it-yourselfer, you may build your own casket.

Cremation:

If you desire to have a viewing before cremation, you should ask the funeral director about renting a casket rather than purchasing one. The purchase of a finished casket for cremation is not necessary in any state. The funeral director must offer you an inexpensive wood box or alternative container that is cremated with the body.

Cemetery Site:

The funeral director will have a list of local cemeteries and their price. There is a fee for the plot itself as well as an 'opening' and 'closing' fee. Perpetual care on a cemetery plot is sometimes included. If not, many cemeteries offer a separate 'endowment care fee' for maintenance and grounds keeping.

All veterans are entitled to a free burial in a national veteran's cemetery and a grave marker. There is no charge for opening or closing the grave, vault or grave liner or maintenance. For more information, see ([www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)) or call 1-800-827-1000.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, a 'traditional' funeral with casket and vault will cost about \$7,000. Flowers, obituary notices, transportation exceptions, cemetery plot and stone, may raise the price to as much as \$10,000. (*"Funerals: A Consumer Guide."* Federal Trade Commission. 2018).

The average price for a viewing and cremation is \$3,500 not including flowers, notices, cemetery, grave marker. A 'direct cremation' without a viewing is \$1000 on average.

One effective way of handling funeral expenses is to buy a life insurance policy just for this purpose. For example, a \$10,000 life insurance policy will cover all funeral expenses at your death. You may specify that any remaining proceeds go to the charity of your choice in your name.

These are many of the decisions that will have to be made for your funeral, whether you make them or someone else. When these decisions are left for a spouse or children or other relative to make after your death, strong emotions may interfere with wise decision making. It is not uncommon for loved ones to mistakenly connect the amount that they are willing to spend on your funeral arrangements with the sincerity of their love for you. You can relieve them of much of this needless anxiety by making your funeral arrangements before you die.

## Obituary

An obituary may be printed in your choice of newspapers. It is also appropriate that it should be printed and/or read at the funeral service. Several options are provided here. Each should be adapted as called for.

### Example 1

Full name was given life by his/her Creator and was born on date, the child of name of father and mother. On date, he/she received the gift of holy Baptism and became a child of God. On date, he/she publicly confessed his/her faith in the Triune God and was confirmed and received the precious gift of the Lord's life-giving body and blood. On date, he/she received the gift of a beloved spouse, name of spouse. He/she was blessed with the gift of children (a child), names of children. God blessed name's life with many special people as he/she served God in his/her vocations at home, church, work, and in the community. Finally, on date God blessed name with a holy death and took him/her home to rest in the arms of Jesus to await the resurrection of the dead.

### Example 2

Full name, son/daughter of name of father and mother, was born in place of birth, on date of birth. He/she was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit on date. He/she confessed his/her baptismal faith in the rite of Confirmation on date and was admitted to the altar to receive the medicine of immortality, Christ's life-giving body and blood. Name was joined together in holy matrimony to name of spouse on date. On date, name, at the age of \_\_\_\_\_ years, fell asleep in Jesus. He/she is survived by names of children/relatives. He/she is predeceased by \_\_\_\_\_.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

### Example 3

Full name, was born in year of birth, to name of father and mother. He/she was reborn as a child of God in the waters of Holy Baptism on date of baptism. On date, he/she was confirmed in the Christian faith and was fed the life-giving body and blood of Jesus. He / she was united in holy marriage to name of spouse on date and blessed with \_\_\_\_\_ years of married life together. God also bless them with the gift of children (a child); names of children. On date of death, God called name home to heaven. He/she is survived by names of children / relatives. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

## [A Last Will and Testament](#)

Although not associated directly with the witness to your faith that you will make through your funeral service, careful consideration should also be given to having a valid "Last Will and Testament." This can be done in several ways. The internet offers several sites from which the necessary forms and instructions can be downloaded and completed. Or you may meet with a local attorney who will walk you through the process. Your Will should carefully specify the distribution of your remaining assets and possessions to family members, relatives, friends and charitable organizations and be reviewed and updated periodically.

## [A Living Will](#)

A 'Living Will' or 'Advance Directive' is a document that will clearly state your desires regarding the medical treatment that you would like to receive or decline to receive at the end of life in the case that you are not able to communicate your desires. Once again, by planning ahead, you are sure to receive the medical care that you want and relieve caregivers of decision-making burdens. Appointing someone to be your "Power of Attorney for Health Care" is an important decision to make and should be discussed ahead of time with the person you would like to appoint.

It should be pointed out that each State has its own laws regarding what can and cannot be included in a 'Living Will.' The appropriate forms and instructions can be found on-line, from a local hospital, or you may meet with an attorney. It is important that these documents are given to your primary care physician and the local hospital that you use.

## Conclusion

In 1527, during of time of severe plague and many deaths, Martin Luther responded to frequent requests for his counsel and direction from pastor Johannes Hess of Breslau. A small portion of Luther's reply is so pertinent to this pamphlet that I could not resist including it.

“Because this letter will go out in print for people to read, I regard it useful to add some brief instructions on how one should care and provide for the soul in time of death. We have done this orally from the pulpit, and still do so every day in fulfilment of the ministry to which we have been called as pastors.

First, one must admonish the people to attend church and listen to the sermon so that they learn through God's word how to live and how to die. It must be noted that those who are so uncouth and wicked as to despise God's word while they are in good health should be left unattended when they are sick unless they demonstrate their remorse and repentance with great earnestness, tears, and lamentation. A person who wants to live like a heathen or a dog and does not publicly repent should not expect us to administer the sacrament to him or have us count him a Christian. Let him die as he has lived because we shall not throw pearls before swine nor give to dogs what is holy [Matt. 7:6]. Sad to say, there are many churlish, hardened ruffians who do not care for their souls when they live or when they die. They simply lie down and die like unthinking hulks.

Second, everyone should prepare in time and get ready for death by going to confession and taking the sacrament once every week or fortnight. He should become reconciled with his neighbor and make his will so that if the Lord knocks and he departs before a pastor or chaplain can arrive, he has provided for his soul, has left nothing undone, and has committed himself to God. When there are many fatalities and only two or three pastors on duty, it is impossible to visit everyone, to give instruction, and to teach each one what a Christian ought to know in the anguish of death. Those who have been careless and negligent in these matters must account for themselves. That is their own fault. After all, we cannot set up a private pulpit and altar daily at their bedside simply because they have despised the public pulpit and altar to which God has summoned and called them.

Third, if someone wants the chaplain or pastor to come, let the sick person send word in time to call him and let him do so early enough while he is still in his right mind before the illness overwhelms the patient. The reason I say this is that some are so negligent that they make no request and send no message until the soul is perched for flight on the tip of their tongues and they are no longer rational or able to speak. Then we are told, “Dear Sir, say the very best you can to him,” etc. But earlier, when the illness first began, they wanted no visit from the pastor, but would say, “Oh, there's no need. I hope he'll get better.” What should a diligent pastor do with such people who neglect both body and soul? They live and die like beasts in the field. They want us to teach them the gospel at the last minute and administer the sacrament to them as they were accustomed to it under the papacy when nobody asked whether they believed or understood the gospel but just stuffed the sacrament down their throats as if into a bread bag.” (*Luther's Works. vol. 43:134*)



The 'worksheet' that follows is not a complete list of all of the subjects that can be considered for your instructions at your death. Please use it as a helpful place to begin.

## “Getting My Affairs In Order”

It is my sincere desire that my funeral will be a clear testimony of my Christian faith to the glory of God. In light of the Scripture's promise of the life and salvation that is mine through faith in Jesus Christ, I have no fear of death nor do I dread it. I know that my soul will be with the Lord in the instant that I die. I am equally assured that my body will be reunited to my soul at the Lord's coming again. Therefore, I have made the following arrangements for the care of my body and funeral service in accordance with my Christian faith.

1. Burial:

- My body shall be placed in a casket and buried in the ground.
- My body shall be cremated, the ashes placed in an urn and buried in the ground or placed in a niche.
- A burial plot has been purchased at the following cemetery: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

2. Funeral Service:

A. Visitation and Viewing

- A time for visitation and viewing before the funeral service at the following location: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- I do not want a time for visitation and viewing before the funeral service.

B. Funeral Service

- A funeral service shall be held at the church where I have been a member.
- A funeral service shall be held at the funeral home.
- A funeral service shall be held at the graveside.

3. Funeral Home:

A. Prearrangement

- I have made my arrangements known to the following funeral home: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- I have paid for all of the funeral costs in advance.
- I have a life insurance policy for the purpose of paying for my funeral expenses.  
Name of life insurance company: \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount of the policy: \_\_\_\_\_. Location of the policy: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Preferences

- My choice of burial clothes is: \_\_\_\_\_
- In lieu of flowers, please consider a memorial gift in my name to my church or: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

C. Obituary

- I have written my own obituary. Location: \_\_\_\_\_
- In writing my obituary, here are some names, dates and memories that I would like included:

4. Funeral Service:

- My funeral service shall be held at my church: \_\_\_\_\_  
# \_\_\_\_\_.
- My funeral service shall be held at the funeral home: \_\_\_\_\_  
# \_\_\_\_\_.
- Scripture readings that I would like to have in my service include:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Hymns that I would like to have in my service include:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Legal Issues:

- I have a legally executed "Last Will and Testament."  
Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Attorney: \_\_\_\_\_
- A list of my accounts, insurance policies, and related issues is located: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

- I have a legally executed "Living Will."  
Location: \_\_\_\_\_

- I have appointed a "Power of Attorney for Medical Affairs."  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Copies to be made for file in church office and family members)*



