

## Etiquette for a Church of England Funeral – Lastingpost.com

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### Introduction

The Church of England is part of the world-wide Anglican Communion, which has over 80 million members in more than 160 countries around the world.

In England almost half the population regard themselves as belonging to the Church of England, and the Church of England estimates that it conducts 80% of the funeral services in the UK.

### Life and Death

Anglicans trace their Christian roots back to the early Church, and their faith is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, as interpreted by the Apostles, and as set down in Holy Scriptures and in particular the New Testament.

Christians believe, as do Muslims, that after death the soul lives on, and that the soul of a believer will join the company of the faithful with God in Heaven. For this they have Christ's promise "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (St John 3:10).

For a Christian therefore a funeral is an important occasion. It marks the close of a human life, and it provides the opportunity for the family and friends to express their grief, to give thanks for the life which has completed its journey on earth, and to commend the soul of the departed into God's keeping.

### The Funeral Service

The funeral service of the Church of England can take many forms, according to circumstances and the wishes of the deceased and their family. It can for example be short and simple with only a few members of the family present, or a solemn occasion with music, hymns and a packed church. It may take place in a parish church or a crematorium chapel or in a cathedral. It may use the traditional language of the service in the Book of Common Prayer or the modern version in Common Worship. It may include a celebration of Holy Communion or even a Requiem Mass.

### On the Day of the Funeral

On the day of the funeral, the family and other close mourners traditionally gather at the deceased's house and then follow the hearse carrying the coffin to place where the funeral service is going to be held.

The other mourners usually meet at the church or other place where the service is going to be held and the coffin is taken from the funeral home straight there.

## **Entry of the Coffin**

The coffin is usually brought into the church by pall bearers, who may be friends or relatives of the deceased. Alternatively the funeral director provides them. The congregation sits in place awaiting the arrival of the coffin. The first pews will have been reserved for the family who will sit in front of the congregation.

Traditionally the minister meets the coffin at the door of the church or crematorium, or at the graveyard gate, and leads the procession, saying some reassuring words from the Bible, such as those in the Book of Common Prayer: "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die".

## **The Service**

The minister will welcome the congregation and introduce the service and say a prayer. There may then be a hymn and a tribute to the deceased (sometimes called the Eulogy) which may be given by the minister or by a member of the deceased's family or a close friend. This will be followed by a prayer, readings and sermon, another hymn and prayers, and possibly one more hymn.

If there is a celebration of Holy Communion this will usually take place after the prayers.

## **Commendation and Farewell**

The minister stands by the coffin and, if appropriate, the mourners may gather round too. After a short silence the minister will say the prayer of commendation, in which the deceased is entrusted to the love and mercy of God.

## **Burial and Committal**

If the deceased is to be buried, the coffin is carried out of the church at the end of the funeral service. The family follow before everyone else.

The coffin is taken to the grave where the rite of committal takes place at the graveside. The mourners gather round the open grave into which the coffin is lowered as the minister says, in the words of the Book of Common Prayer or in an alternative version: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother/sister here departed, we therefore commit his/her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ".

Handfuls of earth will then be scattered on the coffin by the deceased's close family. The service ends with the dismissal which will consist of a blessing.

## **Cremation**

If the funeral service takes place at a crematorium then the coffin will usually disappear behind a curtain during the committal. The service will then end with the dismissal.

## **Reception after the Funeral**

The funeral is usually followed by a reception at the family's house, or at some other location, where food and drink is served.

## **Memorial Service (or Service of Thanksgiving)**

A church service may be held at a later date to give thanks and celebrate the life of the deceased person. Quite often families arrange a small private funeral and then invite the extended family and friends to a memorial service held a few weeks or months later.

## **Sending Flowers or a Charitable Donation**

Wreathes and floral tributes can be sent to the funeral home or to the family's house. The funeral director brings these in the hearse with the coffin. As an alternative, a display of flowers or a planter can be sent to the family's home as an expression of sympathy and comfort.

The deceased may, however, have asked for charitable donations to be made in lieu of flowers and in which case they will usually have specified a charity or good cause. The announcement of death made in a local or national newspaper is usually the place where the choice of the deceased and their family is made known.

## **Modest Attire**

Those attending a Church of England funeral are no longer expected to wear black although formal clothing in subdued colours is usually expected.

**Sources:** Church of England website- funeral page, "what it means to be an Anglican" and "key facts about the Church of England"  
The Anglican Communion website  
Diocese of Birmingham- funeral page  
" Blackburn "" Durham "  
" London "  
" Portsmouth "

## **END**

Last updated: 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2009