

## **ARCHBISHOP'S PASTORAL GUIDELINES**

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### **Funeral Services**

#### **Introduction**

Ministry in bereavement should always be approached as a privilege, especially with those who have had little or no previous contact with the Church. Through our ministry to people in a time of loss we have an unparalleled opportunity to share in their lives, as well as to bear witness to a gospel of hope to many who would not otherwise hear the Christian message. Country clergy will know that their credibility in the community hinges very much upon the conduct of this ministry.

We must make ourselves available for this ministry and be willing to invest time. Good relationships with an undertaker will minimise arrangements that are inconvenient. However, there will be times when a funeral needs to be taken on a designated day off.

No matter what the circumstances, the following ministry should be offered.

- Human remains should be disposed of reverently.
- Family and friends need to be comforted.
- The life of the deceased should be honoured, where possible celebrated. In some circumstances unfinished business needs to be addressed in the lives of those who remain.
- The story of God in Jesus should be proclaimed, not primarily that people be converted at that time, but that they may be gifted with God's grace.

#### **The Service**

It is good for people to speak in honour of the loved one, but you should take responsibility for the length and balance of the service. The resources in APBA are valuable. For instance, the placing of symbols, as provided for in APBA, enables the grieving family to give tangible within the service expression to their grieving and love.

Families will often seek the inclusion of RSL or Masonic rites. It is appropriate for the RSL rite to be used, especially at the graveside. However, it is best to keep this as a distinct rite as far as possible, with the clergy person saying the final prayer and blessing.

Some clergy have strong feelings about the Masonic service. However, if in your ministry with the bereaved it becomes clear that this rite is important for the family, then grace should prevail. However, once again it should be held as a distinct rite, preferably at the graveside.

#### **Pastoral care**

The pastoral care of a family following bereavement is a great privilege and opportunity. The involvement of lay members of the parish during the weeks and months after a funeral is to be encouraged. The marking of birthdays and anniversaries is important.

#### **Committal of ashes**

Human remains should be returned to the ground. It accords with the principle of "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" for the remains of the departed to be returned to the earth rather than permanently set apart in niches within a columbarium wall. The following

guidelines may be of assistance to parishes who desire to develop such Memorial Lawns or Gardens:

- The setting apart of a Memorial Lawn or Garden is in each case to be approved by the Archbishop.
- The land so used should not be encumbered by debt or mortgage.
- Care is to be taken that the Memorial Lawn or Garden be placed in a position where there is no likelihood of future buildings being erected.
- The area concerned must be so placed, and if necessary so protected by a surrounding low wall or fence, that it is clearly set apart from passing pedestrian traffic.
- There is to be a plaque or some other means of indicating the purpose of the Lawn or Garden. It would also be appropriate for a large cross or crucifix to be erected in the midst of the Lawn or Garden.
- The names of the departed whose ashes are interred in the Memorial Lawn or Garden are to be permanently recorded, preferably in a durable Memorial Book kept in the Church.
- A parish should keep in mind its obligation to maintain the garden in appropriate order for a long period. This may need to be reflected in the level of donation suggested for the interment.