

CHURCHLEADERS
PASTORAL POCKET GUIDES

FUNERALS

FUNERALS
CHURCHLEADERS
PASTORAL POCKET GUIDES

Copyright © 2022 Outreach, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior written permission.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission.

All rights reserved worldwide.

First Edition: Year 2022

Funerals (ChurchLeaders Pastoral Pocket Guides) / Outreach, Inc.

Paperback ISBN: : 978-1-958585-89-4

eBook ISBN: 978-1-958585-88-7

CHURCHLEADERS
P R E S S

Colorado Springs

CHURCHLEADERS
PASTORAL POCKET GUIDES

FUNERALS

Written by
Mikal Keefer

General Editor
Matt Lockhart

CHURCHLEADERS
P R E S S

Colorado Springs

Contents

ChurchLeaders Pastoral Pocket Guides Introduction 5

Getting Started

1. Welcome to the Funerals Pocket Guide 7

The Basics

2. The Basics Aren't So Basic Anymore 9

3. Do This Now 13

4. Before the Funeral 20

5. During the Viewing 32

6. During the Funeral 34

7. After the Funeral 41

Helpful Tools

8. Scriptures That Comfort and Encourage 44

9. Sample Sermons 52

10. Prayers to Share 67

11. Self-Care 70

12. Pro Tips 73

About the Contributors 78

ChurchLeaders Pastoral Pocket Guides Introduction

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

(1 Peter 5:2-3)

The work of a shepherd is never done. One minute you're preparing a sermon and the next you're making an emergency hospital visit or planning an unexpected funeral.

When called to your common and recurring ministerial duties (such as hospital visits, weddings, baptisms, and funerals, to name a few) where do you turn for practical advice or just a couple fresh ideas?

You could spend hours online, scrolling through dozens of sites, or pull that thick, old minister's manual off your shelf. Now you can turn to these new **Pastoral Pocket Guides**, designed especially for busy pastors like you. They're quick reads, each book laser-focused on a specific area of ministry. Packed with practical

guidance, tips, and tools, they'll help make taking care of your flock a little easier.

Thank you for being a willing shepherd. May God bless and guide you in your ministry!

—**Matthew Lockhart**, General Editor

1 WELCOME TO THE FUNERALS POCKET GUIDE

A youth group member carelessly changes lanes while driving home from a date. An elderly congregant finally succumbs to cancer. That new baby you welcomed into your church just last month becomes the victim of sudden infant death syndrome.

Within hours, your phone rings and a sad, trembling voice asks: “Will you officiate the funeral?”

“Sure,” you say. “Of course.”

Then you hang up the phone and do...what?

What comes next?

With this book in hand, you’ll know. It’s packed with practical advice from pastors who’ve answered hundreds of those calls. They walk you through how to lead grieving families through the funeral process. They tell you what to do...and not do. What to say... and not say.

And they help you minister effectively in a time when emotions are raw, doubts loom large, and you may find yourself grieving too.

Make no mistake about it—while funerals may not be your favorite ministry activity, few ministry moments have a greater impact.

That's because the death of a loved one shakes us to the core. People standing next to the casket or urn of a loved one are seldom more open to the comfort Christ can offer. And they're seldom in greater need of help as they struggle to make sense of their loss.

Those in grief need you...and your Savior.

As a pastor or church leader, you'll carry the hope of Christ into rooms where hope has all but flickered and died. You'll speak words of life in the very presence of death. You'll offer a gentle touch, a reassuring word, a steady reminder of God's presence and truth.

Leading funerals is a privilege, honor, and part of your calling as you serve your church and community.

But it's also emotionally and spiritually draining. Especially if you're officiating the funeral of a friend, long-time church member, child, or non-believer, you may find yourself conflicted or exhausted.

The wise counsel in this book equips you to bring comfort and share God's truth with hurting hearts, including your own.

2 THE BASICS AREN'T SO BASIC ANYMORE

Not so long ago, you knew what to expect at a funeral.

A body was prepared and put on display at a funeral home or church building. Black-clad mourners gathered for music, a sermon, scripture reading, and a slow procession to the graveside of the dearly departed. Then it was back to the church basement for a meal.

Well, that was then and this is now.

Things have changed in the funeral industry, and people like you—church leaders who officiate funerals—are being impacted by those changes.

Cremation has taken the lead

According to the National Funeral Directors Association, as of 2020, an estimated 56 percent of funerals involved cremation rather than casketed burial.¹ That means the timing of a funeral—often a week or less after a death—has been extended almost indefinitely.

1 <https://www.rochesterfirst.com/news/funeral-homes-adjust-as-more-americans-choose-cremations-over-burials>

No longer are most families constrained by a tight timeline. They can wait for weeks to schedule a funeral or memorial service. The impact of grief remains, but the stress of pulling together a funeral in a few days has abated.

Which is both good...and bad.

Good in that having time to make decisions and gather more family members together can be healing. And bad in that funeral or memorial services are often an emotional “before and after” event.

Before the funeral, the death of a loved one feels fresh and current. But after the funeral, after mourners disperse and life falls back into a steady rhythm, the work of healing usually begins in earnest. Delaying the funeral may delay the healing.

New options are emerging

Some approaches to dealing with a body are actually *shortening* the amount of time families have to plan a funeral.

A growing trend is “green funerals,” which involve placing an unembalmed body into a biodegradable container and burying it directly in the ground.² For several reasons, this requires a funeral sooner rather than later.

2 <https://www.lhlic.com/consumer-resources/green-burial>

Also necessitating fast action are “home funerals,” where families prepare bodies for burial. Though relatively rare, this cost-saving option is growing in popularity. If you’re asked to officiate these sorts of funerals, you’ll need to be ready in 24 to 48 hours.

Funerals have gotten...creative

As cremation has become popular, more funerals are taking place in unconventional locations. The cremains (ashes) of an avid hiker are carried to a favorite overlook and tossed into the wind. Or scattered throughout a park, at the beach, anywhere it’s legal, and occasionally where it’s not.

Cremains are mixed with tattoo ink and become custom tattoos honoring the deceased, loaded into live ammunition so a 21-shotgun salute can literally send the deceased out with a bang, or pressed into a vinyl album of the deceased’s favorite music.

Courtesy of Elysium Space, a portion of cremains can be launched into earth’s orbit, where they’ll circle the planet for two years and then re-enter the atmosphere as a shooting star.

But no matter how odd the venue or distracting the theatrics, the basics remain: Someone has died, people are mourning, and you’re present to share the hope that’s in Jesus.

So don't be thrown when someone asks you to officiate a funeral at a roller rink, pub, or halfway up a mountain. Simply adapt the tips you'll find in this book and roll with it.