



# St. John the Evangelist Church Hazelwood

## Funerals

### Introduction

*I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way!'*

Minnie Louise Haskins, *God Knows*

The funeral of a loved one acknowledges the closing of a human life on earth. A funeral service is an opportunity for family and friends to gather in a parish church or crematorium to express their grief, give thanks to God and celebrate the completed journey of an earthly life, and to commend the soul of the departed into God's eternal keeping.

A funeral service conducted by a Church of England minister can be very short and quiet with only a few members of a family present, or an occasion of great solemnity with music, hymns, a eulogy (sometimes offered by one of the mourners), the inclusion of favourite readings, and a full church. Whatever the pattern of service, the words and actions all speak of a loving God and the preciousness to him of every human being.

### The Choices You and Your Family Have

The person who has died may have left a paragraph in their Will describing the sort of funeral arrangements they hoped for. Naturally, the family will want to keep to such arrangements as far as possible.

Not everyone knows that they have the right to a funeral in their parish church, even if they and the deceased person have not been church-goers. The Parish Church is the spiritual 'home' of everyone who lives within the parish of Hazelwood (including the communities of Farnah Green, Blackbrook, Cowers lane, Shottle and Shottlegate) and we welcome a funeral service for your loved one.

Parish clergy regard the taking of funerals as an important part of their work. Before a funeral the family will be visited by a minister, to offer comfort to those who are facing loss, to find out what service they want to use and to help them to arrange it. If the priest did not know the deceased person, then it would help to provide some details, especially if there is to be an address within the service.

The Funeral Director plays a very important part in the co-ordinating of the funeral arrangements and will want to know if the funeral is to be in the parish church or if the parish clergy are to take the service in the crematorium. They will advise you on the fees for a funeral service in church, at a cemetery, or crematorium.

Whether the service will be 'small' or 'large' in numbers attending, Hazelwood Parish Church seeks to provide whatever you may require.

With regard to music, it is possible to have:

- an organist with music and hymns of your choice, or
- an organist with music and no hymns

It is becoming more common for the whole service to take part in the church, but it is possible for the main part of the service to take place in the church (i.e. the readings, address, prayers and commendation), and then to either go to the Cemetery or Crematorium for the short service of Committal.

The Committal is sometimes a private occasion when the family wish to have the opportunity of saying their own personal goodbye to their loved one.

The Parish Churchyard is still open for burials of residents in the parish.

**The Crematorium** - It is possible to have the funeral service at the Crematorium only, conducted by one of the parish clergy.

**The Cemetery** - Although rare nowadays, a funeral service can be conducted entirely at the graveside.

## The Funeral Service



The service begins with the priest or other minister reading aloud such reassuring sentences from the scriptures as: *'I am the resurrection and the life,' says the Lord; Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'*

Early in the service there may be a eulogy or appreciation remembering the life and work of the deceased. This may be given by a family member or somebody who knew the deceased well, but as funerals are emotional services, it is recommended that this is left to the minister. Please discuss this with the minister officiating.

There is a Bible reading and the subsequent prayers affirm the great Christian beliefs about life beyond death, which hopefully will be a comfort and strength to those gathered. It is possible to include within the service other non-biblical readings or poems.

The prayer of Commendation recalls the promise of the resurrection and entrusts the deceased person to the love and mercy of God, asking for comfort and strength for those who mourn.

## The Committal

The Committal is a particularly solemn moment of the funeral service. It takes place either at the graveside or, in the case of a cremation, in the crematorium chapel, or in church before the hearse leaves for the crematorium.

In the cemetery or churchyard, the family will gather round the open grave into which the coffin is lowered and they will hear the words: 'We now commit his/her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Handfuls of earth are then scattered on the coffin by the funeral director.

In a crematorium, the words of committal may be accompanied by the closing of a curtain to hide the coffin from view, or in some crematoria the coffin is moved slowly out of sight.

The committal can be a very emotional moment. Many who are suffering grief find that, even in their sadness, the words of prayer can lift them towards the experience of Christian rejoicing in the knowledge of life beyond death.

The offering of prayer and the trust that the person is in God's safe hands can begin the process of healing the grief of loss.

## Thanksgiving and Memorial Services

It is possible for you to have a private Funeral Service with Committal before gathering for a Thanksgiving or Memorial Service after this at the Parish Church, on the same day or on another occasion. The parish clergy are happy to discuss your Order of Service for this.

## **The Christian View of Death**

A funeral service will reflect the personality of the one who has died and the circumstances of their death. Feelings of grief, gratitude, joy and sadness often intermingle. Sometimes, a sense of tragedy is uppermost, especially when it is a young person who has died. When it is the end of a long and fruitful life, the feelings of thanksgiving can be strongest.

Funeral services always raise profound questions about the meaning of life and death. Jesus himself believed in a life-giving God: 'the God of the living, not of the dead.' Christians believe that Christ's resurrection at Easter is the triumph of good over evil and of life over death and has made eternal life available to us.

What happens after we die remains a mystery. Some Anglicans believe in Christ's continuing power beyond death to cleanse us of our sins and bring us into the closer presence of God. That is why those of the more Catholic tradition pray for those who are dead. What Heaven is like, no one can exactly say, but the Bible affirms that in God's kingdom we shall delight in the presence and love of God and of the whole company of heaven. Whatever is wonderful about life here on earth is only a glimpse of the glory of the life that is to come. The comfort we need in order to find the strength to come to terms with death and bereavement can be found in the promises of Jesus Christ, in the hope of the Resurrection and in the belief that our departed loved ones are safe in the hands of God.

In the days before and after the funeral there may not be much of an opportunity to reflect on these things, but the parish clergy will be glad to offer help in thinking through how you have been affected personally by the death of your loved one.

## **Some Prayers and Readings Which You May Find Helpful**

It is hoped that later on this year Hazelwood Parish Church will be able to be open during daylight hours (from 9.00am until 5.00pm) and you will be welcome to visit and find in the oasis of quiet and reflection, the presence of God. The name of your loved one will be remembered during the parish services before and after the funeral service. You are very welcome to join in the parish services.

On the Sunday nearest to All Souls' Day (2 November) a service of Thanksgiving and Commemoration for the Departed is held in one of the churches in this benefice and this can be an opportunity for you to attend and to light a candle during the service to remember your loved ones. You, and your family, will receive a personal invitation to attend the first service after the funeral.

### **Prayers of commendation**

*God of mercy,  
into whose hands your Son Jesus Christ  
commended his spirit at his last hour,  
into your same hands  
we now commend your servant N  
that death may be for him/her the gate to life  
and to eternal fellowship with you;  
this we ask in the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen.  
N, go forth upon your journey from this world,  
in the name of God the Father almighty, who created you;  
in the name of Jesus Christ, who suffered death for you;  
in the name of the Holy Spirit, who strengthens you;  
in communion with the blessed saints,  
and aided by angels and archangels,  
and all the armies of the heavenly host.  
May your portion this day be in peace,  
and your dwelling the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen.*

### **Prayers for those who mourn**

*Gracious God,  
surround us and all who mourn this day  
with your continuing compassion.  
Do not let grief overwhelm your children,  
or turn them against you.  
When grief seems never-ending,*

*take them one step at a time  
along your road of death and resurrection  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen  
Merciful Father,  
hear our prayers and comfort us;  
renew our trust in your Son,  
whom you raised from the dead;  
strengthen our faith  
that [N and] all who have died in the love of Christ  
will share in his resurrection;  
who lives and reigns with you,  
now and for ever. Amen.*

*Heavenly Father,  
you have not made us for darkness and death,  
but for life with you for ever.  
Without you we have nothing to hope for;  
with you we have nothing to fear.  
Speak to us now your words of eternal life.  
Lift us from anxiety and guilt  
to the light and peace of your presence,  
and set the glory of your love before us;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### **Some readings**

#### **John 14.1-6**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'

#### **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.  
He shall refresh my soul and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; you have anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be full.  
Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

#### **Footprints**

One night I had a dream.  
I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.  
Across the sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand:  
one belonged to me, and the other to the Lord.  
When the last scene of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that many times along the path of life,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
I also noticed that it happened  
at the very lowest and saddest times in my life.  
This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it:  
'Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,  
you would walk with me all the way.  
But I have noticed that

during the most troublesome times in my life,  
there is only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why in times when I needed you most,  
you would leave me.'

The Lord replied:

'My precious, precious child,  
I love you and I would never leave you.  
During your times of trial and suffering,  
when you see only one set of footprints,  
it was then that I carried you.'

*Anonymous*

When I am dead, my dearest,  
Sing no sad songs for me;  
Plant thou no roses at my head,  
Nor shady cypress tree:  
Be the green grass above me  
With showers and dewdrops wet;  
And if thou wilt, remember,  
And if thou wilt, forget.  
I shall not see the shadows,  
I shall not feel the rain;  
I shall not hear the nightingale  
Sing on, as if in pain:  
And dreaming through the twilight  
That doth not rise nor set,  
Haply I may remember,  
And haply may forget.

*Christina Rossetti, Song*

What is dying? I am standing on the sea shore. A ship sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her until at last she fades on the horizon, and someone at my side says, 'She is gone' Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all. She is just as large in the masts, hull and spars as she was when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination. The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her. And just at the moment when someone at my side says, 'she is gone' there are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up the glad shout, 'there she comes' - that is dying.

*Bishop Brent*

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

*May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back,  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
May the rains fall softly upon your fields,  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the hollow of his hand.  
+ May the souls of the departed,  
through the mercy of God,  
rest in peace, and may they rise in glory. Amen.*

