



A PRAYER BOOK FUNERAL?

Notes for those concerned

Many traditional Anglicans wish to have their funeral services conducted according to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and fear that their wishes will be ignored by clergy or simply forgotten in the stress and haste that follows a death. This leaflet has been commissioned by the Prayer Book Society to provide helpful guidance.

To the Minister

You have been asked to conduct a funeral according to the Book of Common Prayer. In addition to the information overleaf, be assured that both the service for the Burial of the Dead (1662) and the 1928 version republished as Series 1 in *Common Worship: Pastoral Services* (2nd ed. 2005) are authorised for public use, and so may be used for any occasion for which a 'Prayer Book Funeral' has been requested. All the texts you need are included in the *Pastoral Services* volume, pp43off, including those for a Child, pp447ff.

As a colleague, and on behalf of the Prayer Book Society, I would ask that you take seriously such a request from a bereaved family, or parishioner planning their own funeral, to have a service based in familiar and comforting language and expressing their traditional faith. It is possible, as the notes intend to show, to readily adapt the Prayer Book forms to a crematorium service or to include hymns and non-Scriptural readings, whilst keeping the central texts and spirit of the rite.

I hope you may also find two distinct advantages in the Prayer Book service. It in fact requires less

'liturgical awareness' in the congregation than the *Common Worship* rite, and it does not say very much about the faith or character of the deceased – you may well feel more honest thereby, and perhaps with time use the old service more often.

If you are planning your own Funeral

You may be worried that the Prayer Book will fail to be used at your funeral, in spite of your own affection for it. This should not be so – all Prayer Book services, not only the commonly used Mattins, Evensong and Holy Communion, remain legal: although as I explain overleaf, it is necessary to adapt the Burial service when anything other than the churchyard interment Cranmer envisaged will happen. Many resources for other situations were provided in the 1928 Prayer Book, and remain authorised (as Series 1) by resolution of General Synod.

My main advice is twofold: first, however difficult it may feel, tell your family your wishes, especially if you fear they may not appreciate or understand them, and give them a copy of this leaflet. You may well find that the discussion is helpful to all your feelings. Second, discuss it with your parish priest, and even if you find him or her unsympathetic to the Prayer Book, they ought to respond to a personal request, and be willing to take note of your wishes (including any particular prayers, music or readings you would like), and respect these.

To bereaved Relations

Your situation is the most difficult, for you are faced with the need to make quick and firm decisions in a state of high emotions: all those with whom you deal should be models of sensitivity and generosity; unfortunately, this will not be invariably the case. Especially if you have never had to arrange a funeral before, the process can leave one feeling powerless when in fact you ought to be able to seek the funeral you believe is most appropriate for your loved one.

If you know that he or she was a Christian who worshipped by choice according to the Book of Common Prayer, or if your family as a whole has a strong adherence to the Prayer Book, it is entirely right to suggest that it be used for the funeral.

It will be best to state your desire for a Prayer Book service as soon as the undertaker opens discussion of service arrangements, and they will then be likely to pass this information immediately to the minister at first contact (unless you have already spoken to him or her yourself, it is unlikely that they will have heard of the death). The undertaker will probably clarify that the form of the service is the responsibility of the minister, but you may at least have put down a marker at an early stage.

You may expect the minister to arrange to meet you, probably at home, to offer consolation, to hear about the life of the deceased and to discuss arrangements. He or she will usually be expecting a choice of hymns, and may discuss readings; this is your opportunity to state your preference for the Prayer Book, and I hope that this will meet with acceptance. Do not accept 'it's not allowed any more' or equivalent – this is simply not true. Not only is the 1662 service, like all the Prayer Book, permanently legalised by Act of Parliament, the 1928 additions and variations (which are helpful for modern circumstances, include provision for children, and are in sympathetic language) were reissued as Series 1, remain authorised by General Synod and are published in *Common Worship*. So it is all there, although some rearrangement (as shown overleaf) is necessary for a crematorium service, and you may have to trust the minister to work this out, and how to fit in your choice of hymns, readings and other contributions.

The best thing, of course, would be to give him or her a copy of this leaflet, with the explanations offered overleaf, as guidance. Then you should be assured that your loved one will be committed to their Maker with the dignity and seriousness the Prayer Book offers, and which remains our most appropriate response to the unchanging end which awaits us all.

The Arrangement of Funeral Services

The problem faced by a minister asked for a Prayer Book Funeral is that the 1662 order was designed typically for a burial in the churchyard, not entering the church, and the 1928 order for a church service followed by burial, whereas most services now take place in the crematorium. The following is based on the arrangement of the Series 1 (i.e. 1928) order in *Common Worship: Pastoral Services*, which incorporates the whole 1662 rite.

These orders have nothing corresponding to the CW 'Commendation' before the Committal – this reflects the Reformation doctrine that it is wrong (and futile) to treat the rite as affecting the status before God of the already dead person. If the minister holds this position sincerely he or she will also omit the prayer 'for all those whom we love but see no longer'. If a ceremony of Commendation is required, I suggest that either the 1928 prayer for the dying 'Go forth from this world, O Christian soul' or the Nunc Dimittis be read over the coffin. Collect, Epistle & Gospel are also provided in *Pastoral Services* for those who wish to celebrate a memorial Communion.

To provide an explicable order, I have used the following code-titles for parts of the service:

- The Sentences – P430
- The Psalm – PP431–435
- The Lesson – PP436–438
- The Prayers – PP439–441
- The First Anthem – P442 (*Man that is born of woman or Like us a father pitieth*)
- The Committal – P443 (*Forasmuch as it hath pleased*)
- The Second Anthem – P443 (*I heard a voice from heaven*)
- The Ascription – P443 (*Now unto the King*)

These texts are available at

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/worship/liturgy/1928/texts/burialdead.html>

There is a Merbecke version of the Sentences and Anthems, which may be published in response to future demand.

A Sample Order for Church Service and Committal

(optional elements are in brackets)

In Church

Psalms read walking to church

84 is appropriate, or some of the Penitential Pss (pp453–460).

The Sentences

(Informal Introduction)

(Hymn)

(Tribute, Poem, etc.)

a Psalm, as appointed

a Lesson, as appointed

(Address)

(Hymn)

The Prayers

(Hymn)

Exit to grave or hearse, reading Psalms as before. 121 is appropriate for leaving church, 90 or 139 for a long walk, 23 or 130 for a short one.

At the Crematorium or Graveside

Psalms as before

The coffin is placed on the catafalque or placed for burial

The First Anthem

The curtain is closed or coffin lowered

The Committal

The Second Anthem

(The Ascription, or a Blessing)

a Lesson, as appointed

(Address)

(Hymn)

The Prayers

(Hymn)

The minister moves to stand by the catafalque

The First Anthem

The curtain is closed

The Committal

The Second Anthem

(the Ascription, or a blessing)

* * *

It may be said in addition that the whole spirit of the Prayer Book service is one of simplicity and humility before our Redeemer and Judge – those who ask for it will probably not want sentimental remembrances or optimistic assertions about their goodness, but rather to have their mortal remains committed to destruction, confident that as sinners they are redeemed by grace, and shall thus rise to glory on the Last Day.

Rev'd Neil Patterson 2009

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A Sample Order for the Crematorium

at the hearse – some Psalm verses

into the chapel – The Sentences

(Informal Introduction)

(Hymn)

(Tribute, Poem, etc.)

a Psalm, as appointed