

Help from Trusted Preachers
for Tragic Times

THE
HARDEST SERMONS
YOU'LL EVER HAVE TO
PREACH

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The Hardest Sermons You'll Ever Have to Preach
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Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chapell, Bryan.

The hardest sermons you'll ever have to preach : help from trusted preachers for tragic times / [compiled by] Bryan Chapell.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-310-331216 (softcover)

1. Suffering—Religious aspects—Christianity—Sermons. 2. Consolation—Sermons. 3. Sermons, American. I. Chapell, Bryan.

BV4909.H364 2011

252'.56—dc22

2011001500

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Cover design: Jeff Gifford

Interior design: Ben Fetterley & Matthew Van Zomeren

Printed in the United States of America

Appendixes

HELPS
FOR
HANDLING
TRAGEDIES

Appendix One

TEXTS FOR TRAGEDIES*

Helpful Texts for National or Community Disaster

Genesis 50:20 “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good . . .”

Psalm 27 “I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.”

Psalm 42 “Put your hope in God . . .”

Psalm 46 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Psalm 62 “Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”

Psalm 90 “LORD, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.”

Psalm 91 “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

Psalm 118 “The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

Psalm 121 “My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.”

Isaiah 41:10 “Do not fear, for I am with you . . . I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 43:1 “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”

Isaiah 61 “They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.”

Lamentations 3:22–26, 31–32 “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail . . . For no one is cast off by the LORD forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.”

* These text excerpts are meant to guide pastors to the passages where the subject is addressed more fully.

Luke 13:1–5 Those who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them were not more guilty than anyone else in Jerusalem.

John 11:17–44 The raising of Lazarus from the dead. “Jesus wept.”

Romans 8:28–39 In all things God works for the good of those who love him; and nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Helpful Texts after the Loss of a Child

2 Samuel 12:18–23 David after the loss of his son: “I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

Psalms 8:2 “Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies.”

Psalms 139:13–16 “You knit me together in my mother’s womb.”

Psalms 145:1–13 “One generation commends your works to another . . . Your dominion endures through all generations.”

Isaiah 49:15–16 “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast . . . ? I will not forget you!”

Jeremiah 1:5–8 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.”

Matthew 18:1–5, 10 “Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Mark 10:13–16 (see parallels Matthew 19:13–15; Luke 18:15–17) “Let the little children come to me, . . . for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

Luke 1:41–50 “. . . the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”

1 Corinthians 7:14 By a parent’s faith children “are holy.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 “We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them . . . And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

James 4:14 “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

Helpful Texts for Funerals

Job 19:23–27 “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.”

Psalms 23 “The LORD is my shepherd.”

Psalms 46 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Psalm 62:5–8 “My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.”

Psalm 90 “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures ... Teach us to number our days ...”

Psalm 91 “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

Psalm 116:15 “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants.”

Psalm 126:5 “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.”

Psalm 139 “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me ...,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you.”

Daniel 12:1–3 “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake ...”

Isaiah 55:6–13 “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace ...”

Isaiah 61:1–3 “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me ... to bestow on them ... the oil of joy instead of mourning.”

John 5:21–29 “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life ...”

John 11:17–27 “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me ... will never die.”

John 14:1–7, 27 “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you ... Peace I leave with you ...”

John 20:1–11 Jesus’ resurrection.

Romans 8:37–39 Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 14:7–9 “Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 35–38, 42–44a, 51–58 Our resurrection described: “We will all be changed ... ‘Where, O death, is your sting?’”

2 Corinthians 4:14–5:8 “We have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands ...”

2 Corinthians 5:8 “... away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

Philippians 1:21, 23 “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain ... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”

Philippians 3:20–21 “The Lord Jesus Christ ... will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 “The dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive ...”

2 Timothy 2:8–13 “If we died with him, we will also live with him ...”

1 John 3:1–3 “We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him . . .”

Revelation 19:1–8 The wedding supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 20:4–6, 11–15 “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them . . .”

Revelation 21:1–7 A new heaven and a new earth: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death . . .”

Revelation 22:1–5 “The Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”

Helpful Texts after Suicide

Genesis 1:26 “Let us make mankind in our image . . .”

1 Kings 15:14 “Although he did not remove the high places, Asa’s heart was fully committed to the LORD . . .”

Psalms 8 “You have made them [human beings] a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.”

Psalms 88 “Darkness is my closest friend.”

Psalms 103:8–17 “He does not treat us as our sins deserve . . . He remembers that we are dust.”

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Luke 23:39–43 To the thief on the cross: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

John 6:35–40 “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”

John 10:27–29 “My sheep listen to my voice . . .; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

Ephesians 2:5–7, 8–9 “By grace you have been saved, through faith— . . . it is the gift of God—not by works . . .”

Hebrews 10:14 “He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

Appendix Two

HELPS FOR CONDUCTING FUNERALS

I. Resources That Will Help You Know What to Do

Be sure to have on your bookshelf your denomination's book of worship or a standard minister's service manual. Every minister should possess a manual that includes service and text suggestions and standard formats for weddings, funerals, baptisms, building dedications, missionary commissionings, and so forth. These resources are available from church sources and several reliable publishers.

Blackwood, Andrew. *The Funeral*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972 (the classic text on this subject).

Blair, Robert. *The Funeral and Wedding Handbook*, 2nd ed. Lima, Ohio: CSS, 2002.

Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005 (esp. appendix 7: "Funeral Messages").

Engle, Paul, ed. *Baker's Funeral Handbook: Resources for Pastors*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.

Fowler, Gene. *Caring through the Funeral: A Pastor's Guide*. St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2004.

Lloyd, Dan S. *Leading Today's Funerals: A Pastoral Guide for Improving Bereavement Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.

Malphurs, Aubrey and Keith Willhite, eds. *A Contemporary Handbook for Weddings and Funerals and Other Occasions*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003.

II. What to Do upon News of a Death

A. Drop everything and go to the family immediately.

Almost nothing takes precedence over this. Of course, there are exceptions. No one expects you to forgo the Sunday sermon because you got the news five minutes before the worship service, but virtually all other meetings and appointments should be postponed in order to go to the family. Recognize that everyone who knows the situation will be uncomfortable participating with the minister in any meeting or activity knowing there is a grieving family in need of pastoral care.

The family may be:

- at the deceased's home if the person died there and the spouse or other immediate family members reside in the home. Even if the others do not live in the deceased home, loved ones may have gathered there, especially if the funeral director has not yet arrived to pick up the body.
- at the hospital if the person died there with family members present.
- at the nursing home if the person died there and family members are present.
- at the home of another family member if the home of the deceased is not where most of the family members live or gather.
- at other locations if the loss is due to accident, crime, or military service. In such situations, family members may be called to the city morgue, police station, funeral director's office, pastor's office, friend's home, transportation center (to receive a messenger or the transported remains), and so forth.

B. Help notify family if necessary.

If the death is the result of accident, crime, or military service, the pastor may be asked to help notify the family. Accompany appropriate authorities to the family residence at whatever time of day or night the notification must occur. Ordinarily you should not telephone such news but tell the family members directly. In order to give appropriate pastoral care, you want to be present when the news is given.

C. Offer counsel regarding disposition of the body if needed and requested.

If the death is that of an elderly or long-ill person in a hospital or nursing home, family members will probably already have indicated where the body should be taken in the event of death. If the death is unexpected, one of the family's first decisions may be which funeral home to use. If you are aware of a reputable place, you may offer this information *if asked*. Be aware that in many communities, families may have previous relationships with particular funeral homes and will not appreciate being steered toward others by the pastor.

D. Offer to help with notifications and arrangements if appropriate.

If any immediate family members are elderly, ill, or overcome with grief, the pastor may offer to help with some matters that require immediate attention.

- Help make notification calls (relatives, friends, organizations, and so forth). Often the pastor can help organize this process with gathered family members or friends so that weary or distraught next of kin do not have to think about or handle all the necessary notifications.
- Accompany family members to the funeral home to make arrangements (usually done within the first half day after the death of a loved one). Arrangements at the funeral home will be handled by the funeral director or other staff members. Despite cultural stereotypes of the funeral industry being full of callous and crooked persons, most funeral professionals are reputable and empathetic. They cannot stay in business without a good reputation in the community.

The family's interaction with the funeral home usually begins with a call to pick up the body of the deceased. After the body has been collected and a time set for the family to come to the funeral home to make arrangements, the next contact with the funeral home will be in the director's office. There the director will ask more questions than most people expect with regard to funeral service preferences and participants, media notifications, legal and government requirements,

pension and Social Security notifications, military background, organization memberships, type and place of interment, style and cost of casket or urn, cemetery/mausoleum and marker preferences, and so forth. Typical arrangements made with the funeral home include such duties or decisions as:

- completion of forms detailing individual and family histories, medical and government requirements, pension plan notifications, and so forth.
- time and place of visitation (a set time for members of the community to come to visit with the family at the funeral home, church, or other setting to express sympathy prior to the formal service) and funeral (the formal service honoring the deceased prior to burial or other interment). Note that many funerals are in funeral homes these days, in part because employers often allow only close relatives time off for funerals. As a result, more persons tend to go to the visitation with the family during nonwork hours than to the actual funeral—which for an elderly person is often attended mostly by immediate family members and retirees. Believers may prefer that a funeral service honoring God’s eternal care of his saints be held in a church, and pastors should accommodate this desire.
- manner and place of interment (for example, burial versus cremation, cemetery versus mausoleum, local versus out of town).
- service nature and sequence (for example, funeral service, memorial service, graveside service, public or family members only). Ordinarily there is a public funeral service (honoring the deceased), followed by a public graveside service (committing the body to the grave at the cemetery or mausoleum). However, there are many variations. For example, if the deceased was well-known and a cemetery could not accommodate a large crowd, then the family may prefer a private burial service prior to a public memorial service.
- service participants (for example, pall bearers, minister(s), musician(s), eulogizers, family members for family seating, military dignitaries, company or organization representatives, and so forth).
- service particulars (Scripture to be read or preached; what, if

any, eulogies — and by whom; music — content, style, and by whom; open or closed casket; placement of casket; placement of flowers or pictures; presence of recognitions or honors; and so forth).

- choice of cemetery, casket, vault type, plot location and size, mausoleum, niche, urn, and so forth.
- choices of clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, glasses, and so forth for the deceased.
- presence of flowers and envelopes for memorial gifts.
- military rites, fraternal organization participation, and so forth.

All of the above decisions can touch on *very* sensitive issues. Family disputes, resource limitations, and past indiscretions are but a few of the possible disclosures that may surface during the information gathering that must occur during funeral planning. Families and funeral directors may or may not want the minister navigating or even hearing about these issues.

Throughout the whole process, offer help where appropriate. Don't be offended if your presence is not desired. Exit gracefully. Try to help people not be taken advantage of in a vulnerable time (for example, reminding an elderly spouse with limited resources that the cost of the casket is not a measure of respect for the deceased), but do not impose your wishes on a family. The pastor should not take responsibility for any of these decisions. The decisions remain the family's — and everyone must know this. When out-of-town relatives question a funeral choice, no one in town should be able to respond, "Well, the pastor made us do it." The pastor is expected neither to know all the answers nor to choose for the family. The pastor's task is only to be available to help the family make these arrangements *if the family wants pastoral assistance*. Most often, all that is really desired is the pastor's silent supportive presence.

III. What to Do at the Visitation (sometimes called the laying out, the viewing, or the wake)

The visitation usually occurs the evening and/or afternoon before the funeral when the people of the community come to the funeral home to offer sympathy to the family. Typically the body of the

deceased is “laid out for viewing,” meaning that, if there has not been a disfiguring illness or disease, the casket is open in a parlor setting, and the immediate family members gather near it to receive those who come to pay their respects.

In most communities more persons will come to the visitation than to the funeral (unless the funeral is that of a young person or a person of some reputation), because the visitation can be attended briefly and during nonworking hours.

At the visitation, the responsibilities of the pastor include:

- arriving at the funeral home several minutes before the family arrives. The pastor has the responsibility to greet the family and help them prepare for the difficult hours of the grieving process. Not only must the family handle grief, but older members of the family may also find the physical strain of greeting the community exhausting. The pastor may well advise younger members to provide seating and space for older family members or a grieving spouse.
- greeting the family members as they arrive. Until all immediate family members have arrived, the funeral director will typically direct the family members to a waiting room where the deceased cannot be observed. When all have arrived, leading in a prayer for comfort and strength is appropriate.
- guiding the family members into the room where the deceased is laid out. This will be the immediate family’s first sight of their loved one in a casket. Though there are difficult services and duties ahead for the family, this may well be the most difficult moment of the entire death and burial process. This is the most likely moment for family members to come emotionally unglued (though it happens much more frequently with unchurched families than with those who know the gospel well). The experienced pastor will often take the arm of the grieving spouse or nearest kin when the family members enter the room as an expression of both pastoral and physical support.
- staying with the family at least through the time that the first sympathizers arrive to express their condolences to the family. During the minutes before visitors arrive, the pastor should be available for support, prayer, and words of encouragement.

In these awkward moments, ministers do not need to carry the conversation, discourage tears, or fill the silence. The best pastoral care may simply be a silent, supportive presence as the family expresses its grief in its way. It is usually not helpful for the pastor to mouth clichés the family will hear many times over the next several hours (for example, “He is in a better place now”; “The Lord must have needed her more than we did”; “Didn’t they do a good job?” —meaning the morticians have made the body look natural). Once visitors begin to arrive, the pastor may choose to leave or tend to other duties after assuring the family of continued availability. No one expects the pastor to stay for the entire evening unless there are complications or relationships that need additional attention.

This time of gathering and conversation may also provide the pastor opportunities to ask if there are any special items or thoughts the family would like to have included in the funeral service. By the time of the visitation, most out-of-town family members will have arrived, and they can consult with local family members about special requests or desires for the funeral service (for example, grandchildren participating in the eulogy, a daughter singing, a favorite Scripture being read).

Tactfully inquire if the family is planning anything special or unusual for the funeral (e.g., military rites, Masonic rites, unusual music, multiple eulogies, words from clergy of another faith). Families sometimes have ideas of what would be appropriate for a funeral that may be problematic for a pastor. For example, Masonic rites requested for funerals in certain parts of North America could be an example of such a surprise. Despite its charitable endeavors, Free Masonry has anti-Christian roots that many Masons and the general public are not aware of. The pastor’s request to separate these rites from the “Christian service” (having the Masonic rites performed either after the minister says the funeral benediction or before the public arrives for the funeral) is usually honored without argument.

It is important for the pastor to guide family members in healthy directions, but remember that decisions are ultimately theirs, unless the church or the pastor is being asked to endorse what is clearly non-biblical. On those rare occasions, the pastor may have to inform family members that they will need to find someone else to do the service.

Such indications typically sever the relationship of the pastor with the family, so the spiritual consequences must be carefully weighed.

Try to avoid saying things that are not true in attempts to comfort. Do not assure a grieving family that a profligate is “in heaven now” if there is no Christian basis for doing so. It is much better to sympathize with a family’s pain than to give spiritual assurances that you are not sure are true. For example, you can provide quality care in good conscience by simply telling family members that you are “sorry for their loss” and that you “grieve for their pain.” Sympathize rather than say something you think may be untrue.

IV. What to Do on the Day of the Funeral

Do not be at all hesitant or ashamed to ask church members, senior clergy in the community, and, most especially, the funeral director what you need to do. Community and regional expectations vary greatly and it is not unprofessional to ask for advice when you are new in a church. The funeral director will not mind being asked (and, in fact, wants you to ask questions), since he or she is much more concerned than you are that things “go well.” The livelihood of the director depends on the funeral being well run. No one will be concerned if you honestly acknowledge you are new to this community or this task and would like to ask some questions about how things are done.

Arrive at the place of the funeral prior to the family. At this time, it is often wise to see if flowers, clothing, casket, memorial arrangements, and so forth are as the family requested.

Greet the family as they arrive. Gather with them in a preparation room (if available) and pray, prior to entering the room where the funeral will be performed.

Lead the family into the room with the coffin or urn. (Note: Many of the following instructions assume a casket. Adjustments can easily be made for an urn or memorial service—where no casket or urn is present.) In some communities the family will not enter the room where the funeral occurs until after the casket has been rolled (or carried) into the room. If this is the case, those in the room will stand as the casket enters the room and the family will follow the casket, being led by the minister.

If the casket is already in the room where the funeral will be per-

formed, then the minister typically takes the family into the room prior to the arrival of those attending the service. The family will greet those arriving for the funeral, until a few minutes prior to the service. Then, the funeral director will gather the family and usher them to an adjoining room to wait until the service begins.

In common—but not required—practice, the minister then goes to the adjoining room (or other secluded space), once attendees begin to arrive in order to collect thoughts for the message, make final arrangements with other service participants (e.g., other participating pastors or family members), and await the family who will be ushered out of the service room prior to the beginning of the funeral service.

Most of the time, it is helpful to pray with the family prior to the service. The most appropriate time will be after members have been led out of the service room by the funeral director prior to the beginning of the funeral service. Once the family has left the room, the casket is closed for the last time (closing the casket with the family present can be emotionally traumatic). The minister typically receives the family as the funeral director brings members into the adjoining room in order to offer a prayer, short Scripture reading, or word of encouragement to prepare the family for the difficult minutes ahead. (Note: On occasion, families will not want the casket closed during the funeral services. Pastors tend to discourage open caskets during the funeral itself, since looking at the deceased during the service can be very difficult for family and friends. Still, the family's wishes should be observed if the members cannot be readily dissuaded.) When the service is ready to begin, the funeral director will take the family into the service room and lead members to family seating at the front of the room.

Wait in the adjoining room until the funeral director indicates that it is time for the funeral service to begin. (Note: If the family is distraught, the minister may choose to enter with the family in order to support members who are most troubled.) Then the pastor usually enters and sits at the front of the room until the conclusion of the prelude—which is the pastor's cue to begin the service.

Conduct Scripture readings and prayers according to the format and sequence suggested in your minister's service manual, book of common worship, or denomination's directory for worship. For more information about the order and content of a funeral service, consult the resources at the beginning of this appendix.

Preach a message based on the final Scripture reading. Typically the minister ties a theme of the scriptural passage to significant features of the deceased's life or personality in order to make the promises of eternal life in Christ Jesus clear and comforting. Because of the emotional strain on the family, the message is usually brief. Experienced pastors will speak directly to the family about the comforts of the gospel—in essence, pastoring the family while allowing the rest of the congregation to “overhear” the comforts of the gospel. (Note: For the form and content of a funeral message, see Bryan Chapell, *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], appendix 7.)

If the deceased is not known as a believer, the preacher should neither “preach the person into heaven” or “damn the person to hell.” We look on the outward appearance; only God knows the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The time-honored practice of experienced and Bible-believing pastors is “preach the person's facts and then the Lord's gospel.” Say what is appropriate about the person's life and then remind everyone of the eternal promises the Lord makes to those who believe in him—without saying (or denying) that those promises apply to the deceased.

At the conclusion of the message, sit near the pulpit and wait for the funeral director to dismiss the congregation. Depending on the community, the funeral director may do one of the following:

- Dismiss the congregation row by row to go out a rear door.
- Dismiss the congregation row by row through a front door so that they pass by the casket and express sympathy to the family a final time.
- Take the family out first, then remove the casket before any of the congregation is dismissed.
- Invite the pall bearers or funeral assistants forward to remove the casket or urn. The pall bearers or assistants are followed by the family and then the congregation.
- Carry out other procedures that vary by region and tradition.

Walk in front of the casket or urn as it is taken from the room to the hearse and/or place of interment (i.e., the cemetery, mausoleum, etc.). If the casket or urn will be transported to a cemetery or mausoleum, lead the pall bearers or funeral assistants to the hearse. Then step aside

as the casket or urn is placed inside. Regardless of the order of the family's and congregation's dismissal, the pastor's traditional task and place is to precede the casket or urn (four or five paces, if walking; or, in the funeral director's car ahead of the hearse, if driving) wherever it moves until it is placed in its final and permanent location (cemetery or mausoleum). As our society becomes less concerned for (and aware of) such traditions, these ministerial courtesies are not as important and should not take precedence over the care of families. For instance, it may be much more important for a pastor to ride with an elderly, grieving widow behind the hearse on the way to the cemetery, rather than ride in the car with the funeral director that is traditionally ahead of the hearse.

V. What to Do at the Graveside (also called a Gravesite or Committal Service)

Precede the casket or urn to the place of interment. When the funeral procession arrives at its destination, the pastor goes to the rear of the hearse. When the casket or urn is removed by pall bearers or funeral assistants, the minister again precedes the deceased's remains to the grave, crypt, or niche. In many regions, the congregation that has followed in cars will not advance beyond the hearse until the pall bearers have removed the casket and the family is advancing behind it to the grave site. In a cemetery setting, the grave is typically covered by an awning or tent with seating arranged for immediate family and with onlookers expected to stand outside the covering.

Once the casket has been placed over or beside the grave, stand at the head of the casket (usually the west side, since Christian cemeteries are traditionally laid out east to west—supposedly allowing the deceased to face in the direction of Christ's anticipated return). Often the design of a casket makes it quite difficult to determine which end is the head, so ministers commonly ask the funeral director where to stand.

Wait for the funeral director to indicate that you should begin the graveside service. The director will not signal you to start until *all* have gathered at the graveside, even if this seems to take a long time.

Conduct the committal service (i.e., a graveside service after a funeral service) as outlined in your minister's service manual or book

of common worship. The committal service is usually brief. It involves words of committal—“Here we commit the body of our loved one and friend to the grave; the spirit has already gone to the Lord who gave it,” a short Scripture reading, a prayer, and a benediction. If there is only a graveside service (i.e., no funeral) then a brief message may be given after the words of committal—but before the body is lowered into the ground, if that is part of the local tradition.

After the benediction, step forward and personally express your sympathy to the family, shaking the hands of all the immediate family. In most communities, no one considers the service over (and the funeral director will not dismiss those who have gathered at the grave) until the minister has shaken the hands of immediate family and stepped away from the graveside.

If there are military rites they will usually occur during the committal service. These usually involve taps, folding and giving of the flag, a gun salute, perhaps a short address by active or retired military personnel, or even a “missing man formation” fly-by. Taps and gun salutes are often quite shattering to a family. The pastor will want to draw very close to family members to offer a comforting touch or even physical support during these moments. Ministers, who do not know what military personnel will say or what the actions of an honor guard may be, usually choose to conclude the Christian service with a benediction before the military rites.

VI. What to Do after the Funeral

In many communities there will be a meal prepared at the church or the family home for relatives and friends. The pastor is usually expected to attend and pray for the family at the beginning of the meal.

In future days and weeks, the attention showered on the family at the time of death will quickly fade. The minister will need to take special care to continue pastoral support.