



FUNERALS DURING COVID-19

First Evangelical Lutheran Church
Rush City, MN

(Adopted by the Church Council on April 8, 2020)

We're In this Together

There is perhaps no time in the Christian life when the ministry of the church and the consolation of the gospel is more needed than at the time of death. First Lutheran Church strives to balance the needs of grieving families with their safety, the safety of the public, and the health of those who lead and assist the funeral. As always, there is no cookie-cutter plan that will accommodate each of our unique loved ones. As we observe local, state and government guidelines during this pandemic, we will work individually *with each family* to meet their needs as best we can. Even in this health crisis, our desire is to comfort each family with the proclamation of God's victory over death in Jesus Christ and to give thanks for the person who has died. With cooperation and understanding we can arrange services that meet immediate needs and still fall within the guidelines.

Options Available

Depending upon *each family's specific wishes* we have a variety of options available:

- **We have the ability to delay a public funeral until a later date.** The same guidelines that apply for Sunday worship also apply to funerals. While this is heartbreaking to admit, the spread of disease and the risk to vulnerable populations are not mitigated by the reason for the gathering. This risk is likely greater at funerals because of the age of those who may be attending, the increased spread of bodily fluids through the shedding of tears and blowing of the nose, and instinctual physical expressions of love such as hugs.
- **Online viewing of a private funeral service.** At this time, restrictions limit the number of persons who can gather, essentially requiring that funerals be private and family only, or by invitation only. With the family's permission, we will record any private service. Recorded services can be viewed online by invitation only, or made public on our church's Facebook page or website.
- **Outdoor burial services.** Even without a funeral service, we are still able to conduct outdoor burial services at cemeteries. If a "shelter in place" order is in effect, these services will also need to be private. As restrictions ease and with proper social distancing, these services could accommodate additional family and friends.
- **A second, public memorial service at a later date.** It is important to note that a memorial service is an equally honorable and faithful service of leave-taking as a funeral. Even without the body or cremated remains, the same prayers and order of service are employed and the community both celebrates the life and mourns the loss of the deceased. A memorial service should not be thought of in any way as "less than" a funeral service.

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- **All Saints Remembrance.** This year in particular, our congregation is considering an extended All Saints Sunday (November 1) or a special service that afternoon to collectively remember those whose funerals had to be held privately or delayed because of the public health crisis.
- **Utilizing the Services of a Funeral Home.** Many funeral homes allow for family members to view and spend time with their loved one privately. Online video tributes are popular and will serve an even more important purpose during this time. Help with sending flowers or collecting cards is a service usually offered by funeral homes.

Planning the Funeral

Funeral arrangements and pre-planning meetings can be conducted over the phone, online video conferencing (with platforms such as Zoom or FaceTime), or by email. In person meetings can be scheduled upon the family's discretion, though it's important that families adhere to the guidelines set by medical experts to reduce the risk of getting sick and spreading the virus to others.

Our Loved Ones Are in God's Hands

At the time of death, at the funeral service and at other occasions in the church's life, such as All Saints Day, our tradition gives thanks to God for a person's life, asks God to comfort those who mourn with the hope of the resurrection, and commends the person who has died into God's eternal care. These prayers, while naming the dead, are for the living. They are a way for us to release the person we love into God's everlasting arms. We do not believe that our prayers, or the funeral service itself, are needed to assist a person's passage into their heavenly rest. We trust that at the moment of death, God receives those who have died and welcomes them home. Our prayers for the faithful departed are a way for us to mark this holy transition and assure ourselves of this promise. While we can be understandably sad and disappointed not to gather as a community after a death has occurred, we do not need to be afraid that a postponed funeral or memorial service in any way hampers the joy and release from suffering that the person who has died is experiencing in God's presence.

In Grief, God's Promises Never Change

In times of uncertainty we ask for patience and compassion for all. Grief does not "pause" but in working towards a healthy community we must all accommodate change. Please trust that we will take every possible and responsible step to support you during this difficult time. Each Sunday we profess our faith in "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." *One thing that can never be canceled is our baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection and our hope of eternal life in God.* While funerals are a great comfort to those who mourn because they hold before us the promise of the gospel, we know that at all times and places the words of Paul in Romans are trustworthy and true: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)