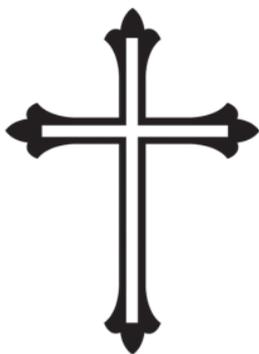


# **Minister's Pocket Manual**



**Brian T. Sutton**

CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY  
EDITION



# **Minister's Pocket Manual**

## **Church of God of Prophecy Edition**

A handy reference manual for sermons, ceremonies,  
and programs

Special Services

Memorial Services and Funerals

Simple, Church, and Formal Wedding Ceremonies

20 Questions Ministers Should Ask Before  
Sharing from God's Word

Child Dedication Ceremonies and Services

Church Groundbreaking Ceremonies

Mortgage Burning Ceremonies

MINISTER'S POCKET MANUAL  
CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY EDITION

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When passages are paraphrased by the editor for the sake of clarity, they are consistent with a commitment to the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, KING JAMES VERSION®.

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The first edition of the Minister's Pocket Manual was compiled almost half a century ago by Bishop C.T. Davidson as a resource that could be easily carried in a minister's pocket. I received a copy of the first edition and it blessed me for over 25 years of pastoral ministry. Since its original publication, societal and cultural changes have called for this updated and expanded edition. In this third edition of the Minister's Pocket Manual, I have taken the original design and expanded it to offer a larger selection of outlines, sermons, services, and programs. Additionally, I have included a section on scriptural exegesis and presentation called, "20 Questions Ministers Should Ask Before Sharing from God's Word."

It is staggering to consider how varied cultures, customs, and practices are throughout the world, particularly in the observance of Christian services. I have attempted to write The Minister's Pocket Manual for a universal context with the hope of suggesting some best practices of Christian ministry. However, those who utilize this resource must recognize it is not exhaustive and sensitivity to local customs and traditions should always be considered. Users of this manual are encouraged to adapt the suggested practices of this work to best suit the observance of Christian ministry and service in their respective culture and tradition.

Brian T. Sutton

Executive Director of Leadership Development and Discipleship  
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# **Excellence in Ministry**



## Excellence in Ministry

*“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”*

2 Corinthians 5:20

I hear people use the phrase, “excellence in ministry,” often. We may not always know what excellence in ministry looks like, but we can more easily identify what it shouldn’t look like. I like the idea of the ministry striving to be excellent in the service of God and His people, as long as we are able to differentiate between the expectations of the secular or business world and the genuine work of building God’s kingdom.

As Christ’s ambassadors, we are called to:

- offer our very best efforts to God
- prepare ourselves to be used of God
- execute ministry with a dependence upon the Holy Spirit
- strive to have a compassionate heart for those to whom we are called to minister

This is excellence in ministry. As you utilize the resources throughout the *Minister’s Pocket Manual*, please consider the following essential truths in ministry.

### Preparation

Before we engage in the task of conducting a ministry service or event, ample preparation is necessary. The ministry Christ desires to do through us can only be

fully realized when we allow Him to work in us. If we desire to be effective, prayer must be the essential element of our preparation. There is no need to tell the congregation how much or how little time you have spent in preparation for your responsibilities, as they will clearly see it in your execution. Excellence in ministry rarely takes place without adequate preparation.

## **Operation**

All of the preparation in the world will be wasted if we do not have a plan and follow the plan we have prepared, as directed by the Holy Spirit. Proper execution of the order of service will require the leader to ensure expectations are understood and followed by all parties involved. Often special services and ceremonies, like the ones described in this work, will require more attention to detail than a regular weekly worship service. Know what to do and when to do it and then see that it is done. This is the time to lead!

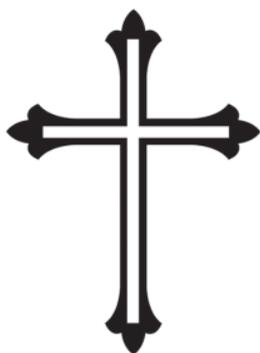
## **Anointing**

When engaged in the task of ministry, we must ask the question, “How can I respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit?” Our best hope is to minister in response to what the Holy Spirit is doing rather than petitioning His blessing upon what we are doing. There is a great difference between those who minister out of professionalism alone and those who minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **Compassion**

Times of sorrow and celebration are often the most critical times for those to whom we minister. Ministers must seek to embody the compassion of Christ and allow God's grace to flow through us to heal wounds during sorrow and share joy during celebration.

# **Organizing a New Local Church**



## Organizing a New Local Church

After a new area has been evangelized, and the people have been made acquainted with the church through its prominent Bible doctrines, teachings, and scriptural standards for eligibility of membership, the minister in charge must come to a conclusion about the advisability of organizing a local congregation. No church should be organized without the approval of the national/regional/state overseer.

### **Considerations That Should Be Included:**

- ◆ The strength or weakness of the new church if organized with the prospective members, including any who may transfer from an already organized church.
- ◆ The prospects for future growth in view of the stability of the community's population and the attitude of the community toward the church.
- ◆ The availability of a building or regular place to hold services.
- ◆ The national/regional/state overseer's advice.

All of the above being favorable, the overseer or authorized minister—bishop or licensed minister—acting as moderator may proceed with the business of setting the new church in order.

## Organizing Procedures

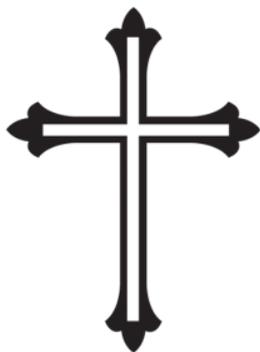
The following procedures should be used in organizing a new church:

- ◆ Be sure a capable person will record the minutes of the organization of the new church.
- ◆ The moderator should begin with a clear statement to the congregation concerning the intention to organize and explain the purpose of such organization according to the Scriptures.
- ◆ The prominent teachings of the Bible should be carefully read and explained.
- ◆ The moderator should give opportunity for any who desire membership to present themselves and then administer the church covenant to them.
- ◆ The moderator will appoint a clerk and treasurer, and other church officers, depending on the local situation and the willingness of such persons to serve.
- ◆ If the overseer is not present, he should be notified of the new church immediately so that he may appoint a pastor.

(Ministry Policy Manual 2015 edition, page 38)



# **Conducting Business Conferences**



## Conducting Business Conferences

While it is not absolutely necessary to use *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, it provides a guide for the orderly conduction of business. These, however, should not interfere with the spiritual nature of the conference when spiritual matters are being decided.

The following is the usual order of business:

- a. Official opening of the conference, usually with a statement similar to the following: "The local church at \_\_\_\_\_ is now in business conference to transact any business which may properly come before it" (The statement is necessary to make the acts of business legal and binding in case the minutes should be needed in legal procedure any time in the future. The clerk must include this statement in the minutes of each conference).
- b. Minutes should be read by the clerk of the last regular conference and of any and all called conferences held since, with opportunity being given for corrections and acceptance.
- c. The treasurer's report, including an itemized statement of receipts, disbursements, and balances, with discussion, corrections, and acceptance following
- d. Reports from the ministry activities of the local church, which include those of the deacons and lay ministers
- e. Pastor's report of the local church ministry
- f. Receiving and granting of membership transfers

- g. Reopening of any unfinished business from previous conferences
- h. New and/or miscellaneous business
- i. Adjournment of meeting
- j. Approved minutes of conference should always be dated and signed by both the pastor and church clerk.

### **Responsibilities of the Local Church Conference**

The rights and duties of members during the conference include the following:

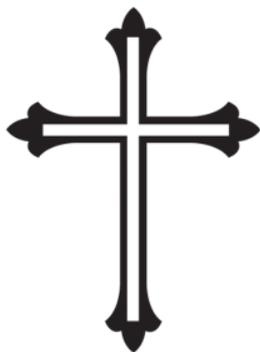
- a. The right to offer motions or resolutions
- b. The right to discuss or explain (or request explanation of) any subject brought before the conference
- c. The right to hold the floor without interruption until finished unless such is called out of order by the moderator
- d. The duty to await recognition by the moderator when introducing or discussing a motion or when otherwise desiring to speak
- e. The duty to refrain from speaking on any matter not properly moved, seconded, and stated by the moderator
- f. The duty to not interrupt one who has been given the floor even when opposing a matter
- g. The duty to indicate a choice by a “yea” or “nay” or “abstain” when “the question” is put before the conference by the moderator

## **The Decision-Making Process in Business Conferences**

All administrative decisions are concluded by the local conference when an overwhelming consensus of the members present are in agreement. However, spiritual matters, such as setting one forth in the ministry or withdrawing fellowship from a member, are to be decided upon in “one-accord.”

(Ministry Policy Manual 2015 edition, pages 65–66)

# **Property and Building Dedications**



## **Property and Building Dedications**

The planning and execution of services and ceremonies pertaining to the construction and dedication of church buildings and mortgage burnings are very important. Enthusiasm for these types of ceremonies is often contagious in the congregation and in the community, as well.

I will offer suggestions for the following occasions:

- ◆ A groundbreaking ceremony
- ◆ A building dedication service
- ◆ A mortgage burning service

By virtue of his office, the pastor is generally the emcee for these occasions. They can serve as wonderful opportunities to invite other church leaders to participate, as well as local, regional, and state officials. It is always a great idea to document these activities with photographs. Prepare a written press release with the details of your occasion and share it with local news outlets. You may also invite your local newspapers, television, and radio stations to cover your event for maximum community involvement. And encourage your congregation to share it on social media, as well.

## **Groundbreaking Ceremony**

A ceremony to announce the construction of a new church building can be truly invigorating. The service should highlight the goodness and provision of God. The following are some reasons to hold a groundbreaking ceremony.

- ◆ It is a sign of gratitude to God for His provision, inspiration, and guidance.
- ◆ It will enhance the courage and morale of the congregation. Enthusiasm and drive are essential to any building program. Such an undertaking requires commitment and financial sacrifice from the congregation.
- ◆ News of your groundbreaking will help expose your community to the work of God in your congregation.
- ◆ Some congregations use the groundbreaking ceremony as an opportunity to launch a fund-raising campaign for their building project. This will allow the community outside of the congregation to become aware of the financial need for the project.

### **Suggested Order for Groundbreaking Ceremony**

#### **Welcome by Emcee**

(The emcee is usually the pastor or building committee chairperson.)

Welcome everyone present and thank them for their attendance. Give thanks to God for His provision to the congregation and for revealing His vision of this building project.

## **Prayer for the Ceremony by Pastor or Selected Person**

### **Recognize Any Particular Guests in Attendance**

Introduction of guests who may speak. (Each person designated to speak should be instructed before the ceremony regarding the duration of time given them.)

### **Song(s) of Worship**

### **Scriptural Address Regarding God's Vision for the Project**

*“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain” (Psalm 127:1).*

### **Gather Those Who Will Break Ground**

Gather those who will take shovel in hand to break ground where the building will be constructed. Adequate preparation should be done prior to the ceremony to identify any individuals who will be breaking ground. The pastor and representatives from the Building Committee, Trustees, or Finance Committees usually participate.

Insure that an adequate number of shovels or tools are available prior to the ceremony, and have them on hand and ready to be used.

### **Benediction of Praise and Thanksgiving by Pastor or Leader**

## **Dedicating a Ministry Facility**

If the congregation is a part of a larger Christian movement, invitations should be extended for regional, national, or international representatives to attend the dedication. State presiding bishops and or International Offices leadership present will be a blessing to the congregation and the ceremony.

Additionally, local, state, and regional political officials should be invited, as well as members of the local media.

### **Suggested Order of Church Dedication Service**

#### **Call to Worship by the Pastor or Church Leader**

*“I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1).*

*“Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who minister by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who is the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 134:1–3).*

*“Praise the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord; praise him, you servants of the Lord, you who minister in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant” (Psalm 135:1–3).*

### **Congregational Songs of Worship and Praise**

## **Introduction of and Greeting by Special Guests Present**

Any guests who will be speaking should be informed of expectations regarding length of address and topic prior to the service.

## **Introduction of and Address by Keynote Speaker**

### **Prayers of Dedication for the Building**

This prayer of dedication is the most important part of the service. Congregation should stand during this time of prayer.

Prayer and supplication for God's blessings may be led by one person or you may choose to have several people lead a prayer for specific aspects of the use of the building. You may also choose to pray a responsive prayer with the congregation.

Prayer time may be led by someone from each generation represented (children, youth, adults, senior adults, etc.).

### **Benediction**

Announcements and directions should be given at this time. Often congregations use the time following dedication to participate in a fellowship meal. It is proper to invite all present at the dedication to participate.

### **Sample Prayer of Dedication**

“Heavenly Father we come to You today with thankful hearts for Your provision for us during the construction of this house of worship. We have labored together as a community of believers to expand Your

kingdom. We now give this building to You for Your glory and honor. We desire for You to accept this as a sacred place of worship to Your name. Lord, make this a place of hope for the hopeless, rest for the weary, and healing for the broken. May it be a place where peace, joy, and happiness can be restored to fallen humanity. Make it a place where You commune with Your people, speaking to us through your Word and by your Spirit. And, may Your power and grace be experienced in every service of worship. We offer to You this structure for Your glory and our own bodies as temples of your Holy Spirit. Amen.”

### **Sample Responsive Congregational Prayer**

(To be read in response with congregation standing)

MINISTER: “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory in the heavens.

CONGREGATION: “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!”

ALL TOGETHER: “We love You, our Lord. You are our God, our Rock, our Fortress, and our strength. You are the source of our salvation, our High Tower, our Deliverer, our Savior in whom we continually trust.”

MINISTER: “We thank and honor You, O Lord, for granting us strength and making it possible for us to construct this building for Your Kingdom’s sake. We thank You for the sacrifices and work of those who have willingly given of themselves and their means for Your glory.”

CONGREGATION: "We thank You, O Lord, for granting us strength and for allowing us to share in the work of Your kingdom."

MINISTER: "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

CONGREGATION: "Lord, I love the house where You live, the place where Your glory dwells."

MINISTER: "And now, Lord, we express our appreciation for Your provision. We humbly ask that You make this a place where Your glory dwells."

CONGREGATION: "Abide in this house always, Lord. Bless it and keep it consecrated to Your service."

ALL TOGETHER: "Therefore, O Lord, we dedicate it to You, for the work of Your Kingdom. Amen."

### **Scriptural Thoughts for Building Dedications**

#### **We Dedicate This House to God**

##### **We dedicate this house for the worship of God.**

The people of God have dedicated this place as a house where we may assemble together in order to worship our God. It is the Lord's house!

*"Lord, I love the house where you live, the place where your glory dwells"* (Psalm 26:8).

##### **We dedicate this house for seeking the face of God.**

Christians pour out their soul to God in prayer because

they want more of God. We desire to become transformed into the image of Christ and work in His kingdom. To dedicate a church as a place where a congregation may meet together to seek Him is pleasing to the Lord.

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng (Psalm 42:1–4).*

**We dedicate this house for coming together in unity for the glory of God.**

The house of God is a designated place where the people of God come together to partake in the sacraments, seek the face of God, unite in worship, receive instruction from God's Word, and share fellowship together. We gather here so that we may share in each other's suffering and joy, pain and wholeness, loss and celebration.

*"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).*

## **Mortgage Burning Ceremony**

The mortgage burning ceremony is a wonderful celebration that takes place when the congregation retires its debt on a house of worship or ministry facility. This is a special day to thank God for His provision and to recognize those who have faithfully served the congregation.

Like any celebration, the mortgage burning ceremony should be well advertised to the congregation and community. Special guests should be invited, especially those pastors who may have served the congregation during the construction and dedication of the building and during the life of the building's indebtedness.

### **Suggested Order of Mortgage Burning Service**

#### **Welcome by the Pastor**

#### **Songs of Worship**

#### **Introduction of Special Guests in Attendance**

This may be a great time to allow former pastors who have served the congregation during the indebtedness to speak. Instructions regarding length of time requested and topic should be given at invitation.

#### **Prayer of Thanksgiving for God's Provision**

#### **Mortgage Burning**

As a rule, the pastor and a committee member, or the chairman of the finance or building committee, burns the mortgage papers while the congregation watches.

(It is suggested that a copy of the mortgage be burned symbolically rather than burning the actual legal mortgage papers.)

The burning of the mortgage may be done either inside or outside the church building. If it is to be done inside, precaution against fire hazards should be taken. Some congregations prefer to burn the mortgage outside the church building, usually on the low step of the building, with the congregation assembled about the front. Either of these options is acceptable.

### **Introduction of Guest Speaker**

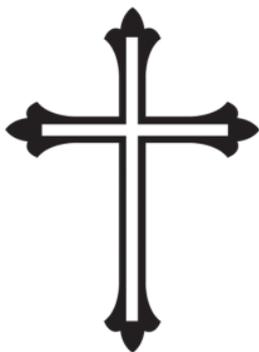
### **Message by Guest Speaker**

### **Benediction and Announcements**

Photographs of the entire congregation are commonly taken on the day a mortgage-burning ceremony occurs.



# Dedication of Children



## **Dedication of Children**

Dedicating children to God in the presence of family and the church congregation is an important aspect in family life and the life of the church as it sacramentally reinforces the work of prevenient grace in the life of a child. The memory of the occasion will remain in the hearts of the parents and will be a source of comfort in prayer as they raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

The presiding minister should plan the service carefully and ensure that parents understand what will take place during the dedication program. Parents should be encouraged to invite grandparents, great-grandparents, and extended family members to attend the dedication service.

### **Suggested Services For Dedication of Children**

#### **Child Dedication Option 1**

Parents, the child to be dedicated, and all family members present are invited to join the minister on the stage. Minister should begin by recognizing parents and the child being dedicated. The child's name and date of birth should be mentioned.

Minister should recognize each person on the stage and their relationship to the child. It is important to obtain the names and relationships of all those present from the parents prior to the service. It is better to recognize no one than to accidentally leave some out. If you fear you may omit someone, you may simply recognize that the

extended family is present and welcome them as a group rather than recognizing each family member by name.

Minister addresses the family and congregation:

The Psalmist declared, *“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him”* (Psalm 127:3). We believe the Psalmist’s assertion; therefore, we now enter into this time of dedication.

In the book of 1 Samuel, we read that Hannah was barren but she prayed and asked God for a son, so God gave her Samuel. Hannah declared, *“After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always”* (1 Samuel 1:22). She did as she had said, reminding Eli, the Lord’s servant, of all she had done and why she and her son—Samuel—were present at the house of the Lord. *“Then she said, ‘So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.’ And she worshiped the Lord there”* (1 Samuel 1:28).

As a result of the unselfish dedication of this son by his mother, God’s presence stayed with Samuel throughout his long life. Great blessings followed him and the Lord never let his words fall to the ground during his lifetime.

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus paid special attention to little children and blessed them. The Scripture records, *“People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them”* (Mark 10:13, 16).

Parents, this is an unparalleled privilege with which you have endowed your child. Rest assured that God will remember your pledges made here in offering this beloved child to Him in sincere dedication. It is my prayer God would grant you the ability to always trust in Him for divine protection and guidance throughout the child's life. In the fear of God, we charge you to teach and train this child in the ways of the Lord and to always seek to be kind and considerate of them and their search for happiness in the Lord. Never neglect to pray for your child.

The minister then takes the baby into his or her arms and prays the dedicatory prayer. If another is assisting, he or she honors the assistant by having the assistant pray first. If the child is large enough to walk or stand, the child may do so as the ministers pray (assistant first) and lay hands upon the child while the dedicatory prayer is offered.

A presentation is then made to the parents and child. Some small gift may be given as a memento of this occasion such as flowers, a Bible, or certificate for the occasion.

Parents, children, and family present may then be dismissed from the stage by the minister.

## **Child Dedication Option 2**

Parents, the child to be dedicated, and all family members present are invited to join the minister on the stage. The minister should begin by recognizing the

parents and the child being dedicated. The child's name and date of birth should be mentioned.

The minister should recognize each person on the stage and their relationship to the child. It is very important to obtain the names and relationships of all those present from the parents prior to the service. It is better to recognize no one than to accidentally leave some out. If you fear you may omit someone, you may simply recognize that the extended family is present and welcome them as a group rather than recognizing each family member by name.

### **Minister addresses the family and congregation:**

It is wonderful to have grandparents with us here for this dedication. Proverbs 17:6 records, "*Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.*" Grandparents, we know you are proud of your grandchildren, and proud of your children, for making this step of faith and prayer today.

**Parents**, we trust that the step of faith you're taking today will one day make your children proud of your actions. Children are a gift from God. Psalm 127:3 proclaims, "*Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.*" As followers of Christ we are called to recognize that children belong first and foremost to God. God in His goodness gives children as gifts to parents. They not only have the awesome responsibility of caring for this gift, but also the wonderful privilege of enjoying the gift. Because children belong to God and are given by grace as gifts to

parents, it is only proper and appropriate that children be dedicated to God.

In the book of 1 Samuel, we read that Hannah was barren but she prayed and asked God for a son, so God gave her Samuel. Hannah declared, *“After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always”* (1 Samuel 1:22). She did as she had said, reminding Eli, the Lord’s servant, of all she had done, and why she and her son—Samuel—were present at the house of the Lord. *“Then she said, ‘So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.’ And she worshiped the Lord there”* (1 Samuel 1:28).

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**Parents**, I call your attention to the commands recorded in holy Scripture. Deuteronomy 6:4–7 tells us:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children.*

*Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

Ephesians 6:4 records: “*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*”

**Parents**, I call on you to love God with every ounce and fiber of your energy and teach your children to do the same. As you love God and one another, you will model before your children a wonderful love for God that they will want for themselves. By coming forward before God and His people, you do hereby declare your desire to dedicate yourselves and your children to the Lord. Having come freely, I ask now that you enter into the following commitment in the presence of God and His people so that your children may walk in the abundant life that Christ offers:

Do you **parents** vow by God’s help and in partnership with the church, to provide your children with a home of love and peace, to raise them in the truth of our Lord’s instruction and discipline, and to encourage them to one day trust Jesus Christ as their own Savior and Lord? (Their answer should be, “We do.”)

For encouragement in fulfilling these vows, these parents call upon these grandparents to also enter into this time of dedication.

**Grandparents**, by coming forward before God and His people, you do hereby declare your desire to help these parents fulfill the vow they have just made. Having

come freely, I ask now that you enter into the following commitment:

So that these children may walk in the abundant life that Christ offers, do you vow by God's help, to pray for and encourage these parents in their effort to raise their children in the fear of the Lord, so they might receive our Lord's guidance and instruction? (Their answer should be, "We do.")

Finally, I ask that the church make a commitment, as well. As believers in the body of Christ, as a community of faith, we have a responsibility to teach the Gospel story to our younger generation. In fact, the Old Testament prophet Joel commands us to tell of God's work "*to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation*" (Joel 1:3). So I direct my questions now to the congregation. (Ask the congregation to stand.)

**Church:** I ask now that you make the following commitment to those who stand before you:

So that these children may walk in the abundant life that Christ offers, do you vow by God's help, to be faithful in your calling as members of the body of Christ, to help these parents be faithful to God, and to help teach and train their children in the ways of the Lord? If you accept this responsibility, please respond by saying, "We do."

Pastor and congregation pray a prayer of dedication. Pastor should lay hands on the child and parents during this time of prayer.

At this time, two separate presentations can be made.

1. A certificate for each child dedicated. “So that these children and parents may remember this day, and the commitments that have been made, we present this certificate recording the date of this dedication.”
2. A Bible for each child dedicated. “We present to this child a Bible, which is God’s holy Word. May they make this living document a lamp for their feet and a light for their path, and may they hide this Word in their hearts that they might not sin against God.”

Parents, children, and family present may then be dismissed from the stage by the minister.

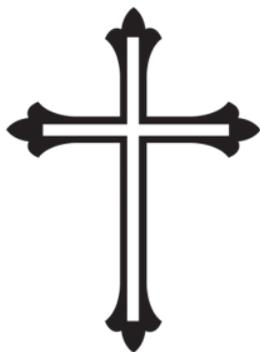
**Note:**

Certificates dated and signed by the pastor or minister in charge should be prepared and presented to the parents at the particular service of dedication. Certificates are a preferred part of such a service as they afford an accurate record for future reference. The presentation of a Bible may also serve as a source of strength for the parents and children. Appropriate certificates and gift Bibles may be obtained at the White Wing Publishing House.

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# Wedding Ceremonies



## **Wedding Ceremonies**

### **Considerations for Officiating Wedding Ceremonies and Services**

The covenant of marriage is of divine origin and should be held in high esteem. It is considered the culmination of the respect, love, and devotion of two people. Two separate hearts that blend together as one. It runs like a golden thread throughout the history of man, for God so willed it from the very beginning. So solemn is it that death only should sever its bonds, when verified by vows and covenants according to the will of the Lord. Strange as it may seem, the marriage vow, honored by God, causes two people, male and female, to become one.

Since wedding practices contrast in the different nations and communities of the world, one should not expect in this little volume a detailed dissertation of them all. While we will refer to several practiced among us, do not be surprised if these too are changed and pursued differently to suit some particular custom.

Let us remember also that wedding vows, or covenants, are not confined to administration by ministers alone, but may be administered by certain civic officials to whom such authority is granted. Such ceremonies by civic officials are often administered outside the church. Remember, too, that some couples prefer a private wedding, possibly at someone's home or elsewhere, without fanfare. This is perfectly acceptable. It is a good idea to ensure that two witnesses are present to sign any documents that may be required by local governments.

The focus of the wedding ceremony should be upon the bride-to-be. Her wedding highlights one of the greatest and most important periods of her life. Therefore, she should never be deprived of her liberty of choice and decision. After all, it is her wedding. Without her there could be none, nor is the bridegroom forgotten or neglected in this important step of his life. Usually the bride and groom decide what they want done and how it is to be done. They set the date, the time, and the place. The bride first announces her acceptance of the proposal and sees that the invitations are sent out.

If it is to be either formal or semi-formal wedding, at a church or elsewhere, the bride usually chooses her bridal party, and other assistants, who are at her command throughout, and during the reception that follows, when requested. Of course, the groom works with his prospective companion, for they are now getting a first opportunity to agree harmoniously.

The minister who is to perform the ceremony (more than one minister may at times be called upon to participate) will receive his instructions from the bride and groom. The minister does not control the party or direct the wedding but only carries out his part as instructed. However, the part of the minister is held in high esteem and professionalism of the minister is of critical importance.

Some will have an official wedding planner who may direct the specific schedule of the ceremony, or the bride may choose to do so. From time to time, the minister may be asked to direct the specifics of the ceremony. Discuss what is expected of you concerning the rehearsal dinner beforehand to be sure of your role throughout.

Prior to the rehearsal and ceremony, the minister should consider certain family dynamics that may be of concern for the wedding ceremony. Assistance in navigating issues and disagreements between the families and wedding party may be necessary for the minister. Prayer, compassion, and wisdom will be needed and may be expected if these issues arrive. Be sure the bride is always front and center in these decisions and that her wishes are being honored.

### **Personal Requirements for Officiating Weddings**

Many ministers draft a document titled, “Requirements for Officiating Marriage Ceremonies.” This document may be referenced as a set of ethics for the minister. This could prove to be of significant importance in the ever-changing landscape of today’s culture. When called upon to perform wedding ceremonies, ministers often share this document with the bride and groom. Explanation is given that this document is not singling out the bride and groom requesting their services, but rather, the minister has a certain pre-determined ethical requirement that must be agreed upon by all parties for the minister to officiate the wedding. The following are examples of items that could be included in a minister’s requirements for performing marriage ceremonies:

- ◆ The couple must agree to regular counseling, at least two sessions, with the minister or other pre-marital counselor.
- ◆ Both parties should be biblically eligible for marriage

to each other, based upon scriptural guidelines accepted by the requested minister.

- ◆ The couple should not engage in pre-marital sexual activity.
- ◆ If the minister is not the pastor of the requesting couple, consideration for remuneration for services rendered should be discussed.

### **Counseling for the Prospective Couple**

The minister who is to officiate the wedding does a disservice to the couple if he does not require premarital counseling before officiating the service. If the minister will be providing the premarital counseling, there should be ample time given to discuss areas that may become a challenge to the couple in their marriage.

Premarital counseling also gives an excellent opportunity for the minister to share the love of Christ with the prospective couple, especially those couples who have not trusted Christ as Savior. The minister should focus on the need for God's direction and blessing in marriage and the blessing to the prospective couple of being an active part of a church family.

### **Marriage Licenses and Requirements**

Marriage licenses and meeting all legal requirements are the sole responsibility of the respective couple to be. This should be explained at the first meeting with the minister. Encourage the couple to handle all requirements early, such as securing marriage licenses. This cannot be ignored and will help to avoid any embarrassing situations before the wedding ceremony.

## **Professionalism of the Minister**

The minister must remember that he or she is an ambassador of Christ and behave as such in all situations. Often great expense has been taken in preparation and execution of the wedding ceremony. Those responsible for paying for and planning the wedding ceremony will expect the minister to be punctual, professional, and prepared. The minister should recognize this wonderful opportunity to be a light for Christ to your community.

The minister's attire should be proper for the wedding ceremony, depending upon the culture and situation at hand. Likewise, consideration should be given to the spiritual magnitude of the marriage ceremony. The minister should officiate a wedding as he or she officiates a church worship service, with dependence upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and a reverence for the presence and work of God.

Wedding ceremonies should be considered Christian services that request the blessing of God for the union between one male and one female. Ministers should also recognize the needs of the bride to be. This is her special day and the minister should pray for her and work to see that her wedding is special and blessed by God.

If it is the minister's responsibility to complete and submit the legal documents required for the legalization of the ceremony, he or she should do so in a timely manner. Copies of any legal documents should be made and retained by both the minister and couple before the minister submits them.

## Ceremony Examples

### Simple Wedding

This simple wedding is informal and usually brief. The bride may or may not have an attendant, and the groom may or may not have a best man. Sometimes there may be several witnesses present and at times this will not be the case. At least one additional witness should be present (in addition to the minister) when the marriage covenant is taken, depending upon the legal requirements as outlined on the marriage certificate.

When all is ready the minister may ask the couple to stand at a certain place in the room, facing the minister as he or she administers the covenant as follows:

#### Message

The Lord, who said it was not good for man to be alone, instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden. So, He created a helper suitable for him, and said, "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."

Inasmuch as we are gathered here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. Wherein they are now two they shall be one afterwards. By mutual agreement they now desire to be joined into this holy estate of marriage and therefore seek the approval of God.

If either of you can show any just cause why you may not be lawfully joined together, I charge you before God and these witnesses that you now confess it. If no such cause exists, you may please join your right hands.

## **Marriage Vows**

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Will you take this woman whose heart you have won, and whose confidence you have cherished to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others cleave only unto her so long as you both shall live? If so, please answer with, "I will."

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Will you take this man, whose love and confidence you have won, to be your wedded husband, to live together in holy matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, cleave only unto him so long as you both shall live? If so, please answer with, "I will."

## **Ring Ceremony**

Will you both present the rings?

The ring is a time-honored symbol of love and marriage. It is often made of gold, which represents a love that is strong, precious, and forged in the fires of time. It is made as a continuous circle, symbolic of a love between a husband and a wife that is continuous and without end.

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you give this ring to your bride as a token of your love for her? (Response should be, “Yes.”) You may place the ring on her finger.

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take this ring as a token of his love for you and will you wear it as a token of your love for him? (Response should be, “Yes.”)

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you give this ring to your groom as a token of your love for him? (Response should be, “Yes.”) You may place the ring on his finger.

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take this ring as a token of her love for you and will you wear it as a token of your love for her? (Response should be, “Yes.”)

### **Prayer for the Couple**

Father, we thank You for bringing (groom) \_\_\_\_\_ and (bride) \_\_\_\_\_ together today. We pray that You will bless them as they seek to honor You and one another over the days, weeks, months, and years to

come. As they keep You first in all things, may they find the true, deep, love that can only be found in a life lived fully for You. May this holy union be a true reflection of Your holy Trinity. May these two souls be united as one and serve as a reflection of how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit also are one. Keep them, bless them, and honor them as they bless and honor You. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

### **Proclamation**

Inasmuch as (groom) \_\_\_\_\_ and (bride) \_\_\_\_\_ have agreed together by covenant, in the presence of God and these witnesses, I do now, by the authority vested in me as a minister of the Gospel, pronounce you husband and wife, with the scriptural injunction, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” You may now kiss your bride.

### **Presentation**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present to you, for the very first time, (groom's and bride's first names with new last name) \_\_\_\_\_ !

## **Semi-Formal Wedding**

The semi-formal wedding contrasts from the simple wedding in that it typically takes place in a more formal setting or venue. It also tends to include more formal dress, more formal entrances and exits of the bridal party and bride, as well as feature selected songs.

Songs, music processional are all prearranged.

## **Entrance of Wedding Party**

At the proper time, the concealed minister emerges from either right or left and just before he reaches his designated station, the best man, followed shortly by the groom, enter to take their places.

Then enter the bridesmaid(s), or maid-of-honor (whichever is used) to take their places. The bride enters when the designated music begins. Generally, she is escorted by her father or person of honor whom she has chosen. The bride moves slowly down the aisle to the front then stops in her designated place.

## **Giving Away of the Bride**

“Who gives this woman in marriage?”

The reply from the father is: “Her mother and I.”

(This may be altered pertaining to the circumstances of the bride’s family)

The minister steps forward, takes the hand of the bride and places it into the hand of the groom (who steps forward as the father speaks) and the couple follows the minister to the place where the vows are to be exchanged.

Some couples desire to stand with their backs to the congregation, with the minister facing the congregation. Other couples prefer to face the congregation during the ceremony. Either is acceptable.

## **Selected Song**

## **Brief Message From the Minister**

Few things are more precious or blessed than the mutual communion and devotion shared by a man and woman who love each other and leave footprints of their love wherever they travel. Marriage was instituted in the Garden of Eden by the creator of the universe, for He said that it was not good for man to live alone. So He created a helper suitable for the man and said, "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31). So with these strong and encouraging words, man and woman are joined together for life.

Inasmuch as we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the presence of these witnesses, to unite this man and woman in holy matrimony, we appeal to almighty God for His presence and approval. For, though they are now two they shall be one, afterwards. By mutual agreement and consent they now approach the altar and desire to be joined in the holy estate of marriage.

If anyone here knows of any reason why this ceremony of marriage should not be pronounced, will you speak now, or forever hold your peace."

(To the couple)

If either of you can show any just cause why you may not be lawfully joined together, I charge you before God and these witnesses that you now confess it. (Pause here) If no such cause exists, you may please join your right hands.

## **Marriage Vows**

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Will you take this woman whose heart you have won, and whose confidence and love you have cherished, to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others cleave only unto her so long as you both shall live? If so, please answer with, "I will."

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Will you take this man, whose love and confidence you have won, to be your wedded husband, to live together in holy matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, cleave only unto him so long as you both shall live?" If so, please answer with, "I will."

## **Ring Ceremony**

Will you both present the rings? The ring is a time-honored symbol of love and marriage. It is often made of gold, which represents a love that is strong, precious, and forged in the fires of time. It is made as a continuous circle, symbolic of a love between a husband and a wife that is continuous and without end.

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you give this ring to your bride as a token of your love for her? (Response should be, "Yes.") You may place the ring on her finger.

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take this ring as a token of his love for you and will you wear it as a token of your love for him? (Response should be, "Yes.")

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you give this ring to your groom as a token of your love for him? (Response should be, "Yes.") You may place the ring on his finger.

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take this ring as a token of her love for you and will you wear it as a token of your love for her? (Response should be, "Yes.")

## **Prayer for the Couple by the Minister**

### **Selected Song**

### **Proclamation**

Inasmuch as (groom) \_\_\_\_\_ and  
(bride) \_\_\_\_\_ have agreed together by

covenant, in the presence of God and these witnesses, I do now, by the authority vested in me as a minister of the Gospel, pronounce you husband and wife, with the scriptural injunction, “Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.”

You may now kiss your bride.

### **Presentation**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present to you, for the very first time, (Groom’s and bride’s first names with new last name) \_\_\_\_\_!

### **Formal Wedding Options**

A formal wedding may feature more elaborate venues and decorations than the simple or semi-formal wedding. A formal ceremony may include physical representations of the couple’s union such as: lighting of a unity candle, shared sand ceremonies, sharing of candlelight ceremony with the congregation, pouring of salt together, partaking of communion, or washing of each other’s feet, or any other cultural symbol of the couple’s union.

The formal ceremony will generally also be greater in length than the simple or semi-formal wedding as it will include use of these physical symbols. The minister’s message will also be in greater detail. However, this may be altered to suit the wishes of the bride and groom.

Due to the complexity of requests a minister may receive, I will suggest several options for a Formal Wedding Ceremony.

## **Formal Wedding Option 1**

### **Wedding Party Entrance**

At the proper time, the concealed minister emerges from either right or left and just before the minister reaches the designated station, the best man, followed shortly by the groom, enter to take their places. Then enter the bridesmaids, and maid-of-honor (if used) to take their places. The bride enters when the designated music begins. Generally, she is escorted by her father or person of honor whom she has chosen. The bride moves slowly down the aisle to the front, then stops in her designated place.

### **Invocation by Minister**

Let us pray. Our wonderful and gracious Father and Lord of all heaven and earth, You, Lord, are the Creator of all things. We recognize today that every good and perfect gift comes down from You. We call upon You in this hour to hear our prayer for blessing. We call upon You that You would come and honor us today with the blessing of Your presence. May the power and presence of Your Holy Spirit hover over this chapel, this congregation, and this couple, as we turn our hearts toward You to unite this man and this woman in the holy union of marriage. Guide our hearts and bless our efforts. We humble ourselves before You to receive Your mercy, Your grace, and Your power. We ask these things in the name of Your Son, the head of the Church and Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Declaration and Consent**

“Who gives this woman in marriage?” The reply from the father is: “Her mother and I.” (This may be altered pertaining to the circumstances of the bride’s family)

The minister steps forward, takes the hand of the bride and places it into the hand of the groom (who steps forward as the father speaks) and the couple then follow the minister to the place where the vows are to be exchanged.

Some couples desire to stand with the backs to the congregation, with the minister facing the congregation. Other couples prefer to face the congregation during the ceremony. Either is acceptable.

## **Selected Song**

### **Message by the Minister**

What an amazing turn of events has brought us to this day, when this man and this woman stand together before these witnesses, and in the sight of God, to be united in marriage. How wonderful it is to see a man search the world to find the woman of his dreams. It is humbling to realize we have a God who loves us so much that He would create someone for us to be united with throughout our lifetime. We acknowledge that the God we serve is wonderful and loving. He cares deeply for His children. And He allows us to find the one who enables us to know Him more fully through the sacred union of marriage.

In marriage, love comes down to two things: a fall and a choice. Holy Scripture tells us to guard our hearts, for our hearts are fragile. We are cautioned to be careful

about who we date, because the heart can fall head over heels for someone. This is what we call “falling in love.” When we fall in love, we get weak in the knees. We see the most beautiful woman or the most handsome man and our hearts can think of nothing else. A fall happens when we trip over something, as something unforeseen comes upon us as we walk that causes us to stumble and be knocked off our feet.

Love is the same. Falling in love happens when we cross the path of a person who causes us to lose focus and fall, and that fall is hard. We become vulnerable. Our hearts are exposed and suddenly we are blind to every imperfection, blind to every fault, blind to every mistake. Such a fall happens without choice. Falling in love is something that happens to us rather than a decision made by us. But the fall is not all there is, because after the fall, there must then be a choice.

While the “fall” in falling in love is powerful and undeniable, it pales in comparison to what happens next in the choice. The “falling in love” will probably only last for a season of time. While it is happening, couples are encouraged to “ride this wave of love” for all it’s worth. Enjoy not seeing the faults, and imperfections, and less than wonderful conditions, for there will come a time when love will become more of a choice than a fall, and it is at this moment when I believe love becomes more powerful than ever before.

The apostle Paul describes what love is in one of the Bible’s most familiar passages. In Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth, chapter 13, he says, “*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not*

*proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”*

All of these aspects of love as described by Paul refer to choices we make concerning love. If you are going to be patient, you will, with the help of the Holy Spirit, have to make a choice to be patient. If you are kind, you have to make a choice to be kind, even at times when kindness will not come easy or naturally.

It is a wonderful thing to have someone fall in love with you, but it is a far better thing to know a person has made a choice to love you. In marriage, your love will daily be a choice. Marriages fail when people say they have just “fallen out of love” with the other person. It is at this moment of falling out of love that true love must then come forth, for it is with true love that God loved us and chose to love us, when we were not worthy of love. He loved us so much that He gave Himself away for us, and this is ultimately what marriage is: each person making a choice today, now, in this moment—to make a choice every day for the rest of their lives—to give themselves away and choose to love each other as Christ has loved them.

Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, describes how Christ modeled love for us and how we are to live out love in our relationships with each other. He said, *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Jesus Christ: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used*

*to His own advantage, rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 3:5–8).*

What amazing love that Christ has given to us and what amazing love we can give to one another in marriage, when we choose to give ourselves away, in love, to our spouse. It is amazing when we choose to dedicate ourselves to helping them become more like Jesus, to love them through every circumstance, and to choose to love them every day.

Now this bride and groom enter into this choice to love each other today, and to renew that choice to love each other each and every day, for the rest of your lives.

### **Marriage Vows**

Inasmuch as we are gathered here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony: Wherein they are now twain, they shall be one afterwards. By mutual agreement they now desire to be joined into this holy estate, and therefore seek the approval of God. I ask that you please now join your right hands.

Groom \_\_\_\_\_ Will you take this woman whose heart you have won, and whose confidence you have cherished to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health,

and forsaking all others cleave only unto her so long as you both shall live? If so, please answer with “I will.”

Bride \_\_\_\_\_ Will you take this man whose love and confidence you have won, to be your wedded husband, to live together in holy matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, forsaking all others cleave only unto him so long as you both shall live? If so, please answer with “I will.”

### **Ring Ceremony**

Will you both present the rings? The ring is a time-honored symbol of love and marriage. It is often made of gold, which represents a love that is strong, precious, and forged in the fires of time. It is made as a continuous circle, symbolic of a love between a husband and a wife that is continuous and without end.

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you give this ring to your bride as a token of your love for her? (Response should be, “Yes.”) You may place the ring on her finger.

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take this ring as a token of his love for you and will you wear it as a token of your love for him? (Response should be, “Yes.”)

To the bride: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you give this ring to your groom as a token of your love for him? (Response should be, "Yes.") You may place the ring on his finger.

To the groom: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you take this ring as a token of her love for you and will you wear it as a token of your love for her? (Response should be, "Yes.")

### **Salt Vow**

(Any other physical observance may be done at this time such as lighting candles, sand vows, communion, etc.)

At this time, (groom's name) \_\_\_\_\_  
and (bride's name) \_\_\_\_\_ would like to observe a salt covenant with each other.

The salt covenant in Bible times was a covenant of loyalty. The God we serve is a God of covenant. The Word of God declares that the Lord keeps His covenant for a thousand generations to those who love and keep His commands.

Salt is used because in history it has been priceless. Men have been paid in salt for their labor. We still have the word "salary" from the Latin word for salt. We also have the saying, "He who is not willing to work is not worth his salt." In the eyes of God, every believer, like salt, is priceless in His sight.

In ancient times, when two people wanted to enter into a covenant of loyalty, they would recite the details of the

covenant, exchange salt from one pouch to the other, then shake the pouches. The symbolism is powerful. The only way this contract could possibly be broken is for them to individually retrieve their own grains of salt, which is impossible. So, once the covenant of loyalty is spoken and made, it is bound on earth and recorded in heaven. The bride and groom would like to now observe this covenant with each other.

**Note:** A song should be shared during this observance.

### **Family Blessing (optional)**

This is the prayer for the union of the couple. It may be prayed by the officiating minister or designated family member(s).

At this time, I would like to call the designated family member(s) to come and pray for the bride and groom. Those sitting at your seats are invited to participate in prayer with the family for this union.

### **Proclamation**

Inasmuch as (groom) \_\_\_\_\_ and (bride) \_\_\_\_\_ have agreed together by covenant, in the presence of God and these witnesses, I do now, by the authority vested in me as a minister of the Gospel, pronounce you husband and wife, with the scriptural injunction, “Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.”

You may now kiss your bride.

## **Presentation**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present to you, for the very first time, (groom's and bride's first names with new last name) \_\_\_\_\_!

## **Recessional**

Bride and groom exit the venue, usually while a selected song is being played. Bridal party exits as directed. The officiating minister is typically the last to leave and dismisses the guests after the party has completely exited. Additionally, the officiating minister will make announcements pertaining to the reception. At this point, the ushers come to release each row of attendees, moving from front to back.

## **Formal Wedding Option 2**

### **Wedding Party Entrance**

At the proper time the concealed minister emerges from either right or left, and just before he reaches his designated station, the best man, followed by the groom, enter to take their places. Then enters the bridesmaids, or maid-of-honor (whichever is used) to take their places. The bride enters when the designated music begins. Generally, she is escorted by her father or person of honor whom she has chosen. The bride moves slowly down the aisle to the front, then stops in her designated place.

## Declaration and Consent

“Who gives this woman in marriage?” The reply from the father is: “Her mother and I.” (This may be altered pertaining to the circumstances of the bride’s family)

The minister steps forward, takes the hand of the bride and places it into the hand of the groom (who steps forward as the father speaks) and the couple then follow the minister to the place where the vows are to be exchanged.

Some couples desire to stand with the backs to the congregation, with the minister facing the congregation. Other couples prefer to face the congregation during the ceremony. Either is acceptable.

## Message by the Minister

*“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord”* (Proverbs 18:22).

Modern society has led us to a misconception about marriage. Many teach and believe that marriage is bondage. That suddenly, after walking down the aisle and saying “I do,” you are now a slave to that person and that union. I will say to you today that if marriage is done properly it is not bondage, but rather, a *bonding*. Where bondage chains a person to another person, a bond is a compelling force that draws two people together.

Marriage vows are often written to include, “in sickness and in health, for richer and poorer, and for better or worse” for a reason. There will be times when things do not go exactly as planned. You’ve likely experienced this

already just in the past few days! This marriage bond will be the force that compels you to stay together. This bond is strengthened or weakened, through the years, by a couple's willingness to sacrifice for each other and to put their spouse ahead of themselves. This bond grows as both parties learn the principle of: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Galatians 5:22 paints the perfect picture of what the marriage bond should be as the apostle Paul describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit. "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance*" (KJV).

Marriage *bondage* says, "I love you . . . as long as you stay thin and beautiful, or muscular and handsome, or give me materially what I desire. In a marriage *bond*, love says "I love you no matter what comes our way, regardless of what changes we may encounter."

In marriage *bondage*, joy is based solely on having more than the neighbors. In a marriage *bond*, joy says, "I will be happy regardless of what we do or do not have."

In marriage *bondage*, peace is sought through monetary means, but never comes. In a marriage *bond*, peace is found solely in Christ.

In marriage *bondage*, there is no long-suffering. Perfection, which cannot be attained, is demanded by the spouse. This brings resentment from both parties. In a marriage *bond*, long-suffering is shown to one another by recognizing that the person you married was, in fact, not absolutely perfect. But you are long-suffering through their faults and committed to them in spite of their shortcomings.

In marriage bondage, there is no gentleness but only, “my way or the highway!” In a marriage bond, gentleness is shown by each person in everyday conduct.

In marriage bondage, each spouse feels there is no goodness in his or her partner and surely there is someone out there better. In a marriage bond, goodness is shown in the relationship through unfailing character. Each partner feels that their spouse is in fact one of the greatest people they know.

In marriage bondage, there is rampant distrust. Jealousy lurks around every corner and truth is neither regarded nor respected. In a marriage bond, there is faith: faith in God, faith in each other, and faith that God has a plan for this family and we are committed to the fulfillment of this plan.

Finally, in marriage bondage, there is no meekness; there are only selfish wants and desires, and a constant pursuit of personal gratification. In a marriage bond there is selflessness and self-control, that seeks to put your beloved ahead of yourself in every situation. It’s a selflessness that seeks to do everything in my power to make sure that this sacred vow I’m taking today before God and man will govern my life and my choices.

Love is the guiding principle of all positive characteristics regarding the fruit of the Spirit. It will be love that enables (groom’s name) \_\_\_\_\_ and (bride’s name) \_\_\_\_\_ to have a successful marriage and find the happiness that can be found only through the blessings and grace of God.

## Prayer For Couple by Minister

### Selected Song

### Marriage Vows

Will you please face each other and join hands? May the promises you make this day live always in your hearts, and in your home. May all that you now share deepen and grow through the years, leading you through a lifetime of happiness. Are you prepared to make these promises?

(Groom's name) \_\_\_\_\_ and (bride's name) \_\_\_\_\_, as you take these vows, I would have you remember to love is to come together from the pathways of our past and move forward hand in hand, along the uncharted roads of our future, ready to risk, to dream, and to dare, and always believe that all things are possible with faith and love in God, and in each other.

(Groom's name) \_\_\_\_\_, will you take this woman, whose hand you hold, choosing her alone to be your wedded wife? Will you live with her in the state of true matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, through good times and bad, in sickness and in health, honor her at all times, and be faithful to her? If so, please answer with, "I will."

(Bride's name) \_\_\_\_\_, Will you take this man, whose hand you hold, choosing him alone to be your wedded husband? Will you live with him in the

state of true matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, through good times and bad, in sickness and in health, honor him at all times, and be faithful to him? If so, please answer with, "I will."

### Ring Ceremony

Will you present the rings? May the giving and receiving of these rings serve as a symbol of your love for one another. And just as the ring encircles your finger, may it also remind you both that you are surrounded by each other's constant love.

To the groom:

(Groom's name) \_\_\_\_\_, will you now place the ring on the finger of (bride's name) \_\_\_\_\_ and repeat after me? "I (groom's name) \_\_\_\_\_ take you (bride's name) \_\_\_\_\_ to be my wife. I will love and honor you, respect and cherish you, all the days of my life. With this ring, I thee wed."

To the bride:

(Bride's name) \_\_\_\_\_, will you now place the ring on the finger of (groom's name) \_\_\_\_\_ and repeat after me? "I (bride's name) \_\_\_\_\_ take you (groom's name) \_\_\_\_\_ to be my husband. I will love and honor you, respect and cherish you, all the days of my life. With this ring, I thee wed."

## **Unity Candle**

(Any other physical observance may be done at this time such as pouring unity sand, salt vows, communion, etc.)

At this time, (groom's name) and (bride's name) will be lighting a candle to symbolize their love and unity together. Jesus said we are the light of the world, and today these two hearts will unite their light as one.

**Note:** A song should be shared during this observance.

## **Proclamation**

For as much as (groom's name) and (bride's name) have consented together in holy matrimony, and have witnessed the same before God and before this company, I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. You may now kiss your bride!

## **Presentation**

Ladies, gentlemen, friends, family, and loved ones; it is with great pleasure that I now introduce to you, for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. (groom's and bride's names with new last name, if applicable):

## **Recessional**

Bride and groom exit the venue, usually while a selected song is being played. Bridal party exits as directed. The officiating minister is typically the last to leave and dismisses the guests after the party has

completely exited. Additionally, the officiating minister will make announcements pertaining to the reception. At this point the ushers come to release each row of attendees, moving from front to back.



# **Sacramental Observances**



## Sacramental Observances

### Water Baptism

Water baptism is a sacramental sign of the saving work of Jesus Christ in the heart and life of the believer. The act of water baptism was instituted by Christ and was instructed by Him to be observed. Water baptism proclaims the spiritual death of our old life and the spiritual resurrection of our new life in and through Jesus Christ.

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:13–17).*

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19, 20).*

*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).*

*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).*

Some ministers have made it a practice to ask a question regarding salvation to water baptism candidates. Usually this question will be asked before the baptism and in the presence of the congregation. While this is not a required practice, it is an option for the service and may be a blessing to the candidate and congregation. A sample question for response might be: "Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died on the cross, and on the third day rose from the dead for the forgiveness of your sins?"

Some also allow a simple testimony to be shared concerning the participant's salvation experience. If this is allowed, prepare the participant beforehand concerning the time given and the content of the testimony.

When it is time for the actual submersion, it is helpful to have participants cross their arms over their chest. Instruct them to close their nose with one hand and to firmly grip their forearm with the other. This should be demonstrated before the event. As you begin the submersion, hold one hand on the participants back and the other to the arms crossed in the front. It is often helpful to have a third person in

the water with you (possibly a deacon or other church leader) to assist with the submersion.

Participants should be submerged in water after the minister makes the following statement: “In obedience to the command of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Once the baptism is complete, have others on hand to help the participant safely out of the water.

### **Communion Observance**

Communion through the consuming of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine is observed as a sacramental sign of remembrance of Jesus being broken and poured out for us, as well as the consummation of His work in the eschaton. Believers consume these elements during a service directed by a minister. There are many differing customs in this ordinance.

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:26–28).*

*“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Then the Jews began to argue sharply*

*among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever” (John 6:51–58).*

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).*

It is appropriate to administer the sacraments with the bread first, and the fruit of the vine second. This follows the order of events as seen in the 1 Corinthians passage. You may pray between each element, before each element, or after each element.

There are several options for the elements which can be obtained at your Christian bookstore. Real bread broken into small pieces is certainly an option. Some also practice intinction, which is the practice of dipping the bread into the fruit of the vine and taking both the cup and the bread as one in this manner. If you choose this latter format, take special care concerning which bread you use to ensure the bread leaves no crumbs in the cup after dipping.

### **Observance of Washing The Saints' Feet**

Washing of feet is a sacramental sign of the cleansing power of the sacrificial death of Jesus and His cleansing power. It is observed as believers humble themselves and follow Christ's example of serving by washing another's feet. The washing of feet enables us to participate in the humble, unselfish nature of Christ. Philippians 2 reminds us that Jesus emptied Himself of His divine rights as He took on flesh and lived among us. Foot washing was the ultimate act of Jesus' humility, and we are asked to participate in this sacred act.

*It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he*

*got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:1–17).*

Be sure to announce a foot washing service well in advance to allow ample planning time. Simple plastic basins are often used for this practice. Very little water is needed, only an inch or two will suffice. Traditionally, men and women are separated so only men wash men's feet while women wash women's feet. You may choose to separate men and women in different rooms, or simply put them on either side of the same room. Chairs should be facing one another, with ample room between. Make sure each participant has a towel available to dry, as well. Pitchers for pouring water can be helpful to those who might have a hard time bending down low enough to use the water in the basin.

When the washing begins, it is common to pray softly for the person as you wash. Wash one foot, dry it off, and then wash the other. Washing is done by simply splashing or pouring water over the foot. Once both feet have been washed, the two participants can switch places and the one who was washed now does the washing in the same manner. Soft music in the background is helpful, but not necessary. A few worship songs to conclude may be beneficial, as well. It is common and appropriate to practice foot washing and communion together, as it follows the example of Jesus in the John 13 passage.

### **Praying For The Sick**

The Bible presents Jesus Christ as the healer of our physical bodies and His healing can and does occur in response to prayer. The practice of anointing with oil

as a sacramental sign of this healing, accompanied by the laying on of hands and praying for the sick, is encouraged in Scripture. While God does not always heal instantaneously in response to all prayers for healing, having the elders and ministers of the church pray for the sick in faith is undoubtedly a clear, biblical duty

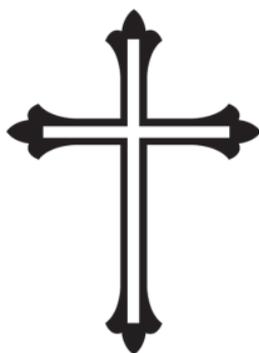
When praying for the sick, it is a common practice to touch the head or shoulder of the sick person. To anoint the sick person with oil before praying for them, place a drop of oil upon your finger and touch it to the body of the person for whom you are praying. Placing the drop of oil upon the forehead of the person is most common. It is not necessary to use a large amount of oil. Great care should be given to anoint and pray for a person in a way that respects them and does not cause them harm, fear, or reluctance. Care should also be taken to ensure that you do not touch a person of the opposite sex inappropriately while anointing and praying for them.

*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:4, 5).*

*Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered*

*in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops (James 5:13–18).*

# **Church Membership Observance**



## Church Membership Observance

It is the practice of the Church of God of Prophecy to unite members into the church through a covenant to God's Word, in the presence of the local congregation. The Church of God of Prophecy holds the biblical principle of genuine repentance toward God (an individual's experience of salvation) as its qualification for church membership in accordance with the early church's practice and God's own activity in adding to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:41, 42, 46–47; 1 Corinthians 12:12–14). When new members are received into the church through covenant they are joining both the local congregation and the larger, global Church of God of Prophecy family.

Church membership is an important step in the spiritual life of the Christian believer. Therefore, prospective members who wish to unite with the church through covenant should be provided a membership orientation/course regarding the benefits, responsibilities, and expectations of church membership, prior to their uniting with the church.

The ceremony to receive members into the church should take place in the presence of the local congregation and may be held as a part of the congregation's scheduled worship service or in a special called service. Sometime during the course of the service candidates for membership should be invited to join the minister who will administer the covenant on the stage or at the focal point of the gathering. Once the candidates have joined the minister they should face the congregation, each one

holding their personal copy of the Bible, where possible. The minister should face the candidates as ask them to enter in to the following covenant to God's Word:

***Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses that you will accept this Bible as the Word of God, believe and practice its teachings rightly divided—the New Testament as your rule of faith and practice, government and discipline, and walk in the light to the best of your knowledge and ability? \****

Each candidate should be given the opportunity to answer in the affirmative. When all candidates have answered, the minister should ask the congregation to pray for the spiritual growth and ministry of the candidates. At the conclusion of the prayer, the minister should address the new members, "We now welcome you as members of the Church of God of Prophecy."

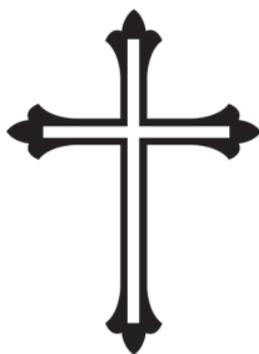
Membership in the church denotes acceptance, which is the basic need of every believer. It is recommended to have a time either during or after the service to extend the "right hand of fellowship" from the congregation to those who have united with the church. This is a time of greetings, acceptance, and celebration.

The minister should be diligent to make certain that the church clerk has recorded the names and information of each new member into the church roll.

\*After its historic usage in various forms, the church covenant in its present form was formally sanctioned by the 82nd International Assembly on September 10, 1987.



# **Funeral and Memorial Services**



## **Funeral and Memorial Services**

### **Considerations for Officiating Memorial Services**

#### **Ministering to the Family**

Though you may be accustomed to dealing with death and loss, the family will probably be in shock and they will look to the minister for comfort and support. Be kind and compassionate to them. The responsibility of the minister is to provide godly wisdom and direction during this time. While you may feel like you are an expert at these matters because of previous experience, your ministry will be far greater if you depend upon the Holy Spirit rather than your experience and charisma. In pastoral ministry, it is important to recognize that people may not remember every message you preach, but they will remember every moment you stood by their side during times of need. This is your time to be used of God.

#### **Leadership**

The minister must take the lead during the service, without excuse or blame for the failings of others. Biblical leadership is extremely important during times of loss. The family and guests will look to the minister to display godly wisdom. The actions you take will be remembered long after the service has concluded. Pre-service planning is critical to the proper execution of a memorial service. Take the extra time needed to plan and coordinate what will take place during the service and then convey that plan to all parties involved.

## **Cultural Questions**

Ministers must pay special attention to observe any cultural needs of the family. Customary practices vary from area to area and from family to family. These questions should be answered during the planning of the service.

## **The Minister's Attire**

Most ministers wear black during a memorial service; however, other colors are acceptable as long as they convey respect from the minister to the deceased and the family. The minister should consider the cultural norms of the area, as well as the wishes of the family. The minister should always dress professionally when officiating a funeral, with shoes shined and clothes pressed.

## **Other Ministers**

When more than one minister is involved in the officiating and planning of a memorial service, mutual humility and respect for all parties is required. Often the local church pastor will be responsible to take the lead in the planning and moderation of the memorial service. However, the wishes of the family should be honored. To avoid embarrassment and duplication of subjects if multiple ministers will speak during a memorial service, it is a good practice to share with each other the scriptures and thoughts that will be presented. This is not the time to try to "out-do" the other ministers involved. Consideration for the amount of time each minister speaks is important so the service will be a blessing to family and friends rather than a source of physical and emotional fatigue.

## **The Position of the Minister**

Generally, the minister will always precede the casket when it is traveling, either by foot or by automobile. If other ministers are with him/her they should also precede the casket either following the officiating minister or walking/standing by his/her side. However, cultural considerations must be observed during a memorial service. Therefore, consideration for position of the minister must give way to accepted norms of the area, as well as the need of the venue and service.

## **Minister's Automobile**

Many areas no longer practice a full automobile funeral processional. However, if this is practiced, the minister's car should precede the hearse. Where possible, the minister's automobile should be clean and in proper working order.

## **Pre-Service Preparation**

The officiating minister must ensure that an order of service is prepared and that all persons involved in the service have received a copy. He/she should also take responsibility to ensure that all parties involved understand their roles in the service.

## **Graveside Considerations**

During a graveside service, the minister should stand at the head of the casket, when possible. Often the head of the casket will be placed toward the sunset, but this

is not true in every situation. It is common practice for the minister(s) to greet and comfort each family member present after the conclusion of the graveside service.

It is virtually impossible to plan every aspect of a service. It is important to be patient and flexible in dealing with the family during times of loss. If an unplanned moment occurs during a memorial service, do not overreact. Handle each situation with kindness, humility, and a dependence upon the leading of the Holy Spirit.

## **Sample Order of Service For Memorial Service or Funeral**

### **Note:**

Practices at memorial services vary greatly depending upon cultural and family traditions. Often memorial services will include comments by friends or family members, messages by multiple ministers, and video tributes. When planning a memorial service, time is always an important consideration. The family of the deceased will look to the memorial service as a source of comfort and strength. Effort should be made to design the service to be an appropriate length of time that will bless the friends and family without prolonging it beyond their physical and emotional capacity. The following is simply an outline submitted as a suggestion.

**Processional** (if applicable)

**Selected song**

**Greeting, reading of obituary, and prayer by minister**

**Selected song**

**Message by selected minister**

**Selected song**

**Benediction**

**Recessional**

## Funeral Sermon Starters

### Funeral Sermon Starter 1: “His Glory Revealed In Us”

*The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God (Romans 8:15–19, 21).*

As the apostle Paul penned these words to the church at Rome, he considered his life and the situation, circumstances, and even trials he had faced in his lifetime. Verse 18 of chapter 8 shares the focus of Paul regarding his life, “*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*”

For those who have lived their lives walking with Jesus Christ in His kingdom, something strange often happens as they begin to approach death. Heaven and

their eternal reward become clearer to them. Much like when we squint our eyes as we attempt to see something far away, we go about our daily lives and pursuits and heaven can seem so far away from us and often hard to see. In the latter days of our lives, I believe heaven will come into focus for us and we begin to see more clearly what is waiting. Also, it's at this point in our lives that we begin to agree more fully with Paul's words, "The sufferings of this world" do not compare to what is waiting for us.

Paul shared in the book of 2 Timothy:

*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6–8).*

When we look at that word, *departure*, Paul used in this passage, we find it has multiple meanings. Sailors would use this word to describe what happened when people gathered at the harbor to watch a ship depart and sail over the horizon. People would say, "There she goes," as they saw the ship sail out of sight. So as the people saw the ship disappear, they would know that somewhere in another harbor there would be people waiting. They would be waiting for that same ship to come into their harbor and they would say, "Here she comes."

*Departure* was also a term soldiers would use when they would break camp, pull up their tent stakes, and move on. Farmers would also use it while taking the yoke off their oxen to “unburden” them after a day of working in the field.

Today as we consider losing this saint of God, we recognize that we are saying goodbye as we see them depart. But we also understand that Jesus and the hosts of heaven were waiting to welcome them. They have folded up their tent and departed to a more permanent place where they are unburdened of the loads and trials of this life. Without question, Jesus has relieved them of sorrow and welcomed them into their new harbor.

*I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:20–24).*

Paul says in verse 21, “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*” When Paul wrote this letter, he was imprisoned under house arrest in Rome. He may have even been chained to a Roman guard. Though Paul was a prisoner, his letter sounds like he was full of joy.

Though our lives are often filled with difficulties or trials, life with Christ can be full of joy and rejoicing. We may not always be happy about the situations we find ourselves placed in, but we can rejoice over what Christ is doing in and through us. We rejoice over the wonderful things that happen to us but we can also rejoice over those things which challenge us, knowing God is working in them to make us stronger and more like Him.

God has a specific purpose for each of us. We are not like a ship that has set sail with no rudder. If we will allow Him, Christ will direct our paths and enable us to live for His plans and purposes.

Do you remember what it's like to be a young child and dream about going on a trip? It may have been a vacation with your family, a school field trip, or even a summer camp. The feelings of anticipation were at times overwhelming. You couldn't wait to take your trip and you counted the days until it arrived. Living a life for Christ is somewhat like this. Today we've lost a friend, a family member, or an acquaintance. But, we recognize this was a trip they were always planning for and anticipating. Their spiritual bag was packed and when Christ called, they were prepared. God's timing is perfect.

## Funeral Sermon Starter 2: “Our Passage to Heaven”

Though we are certainly saddened today over the loss of our loved one and friend, it is hard to focus only on our loss when we consider their gain. If we are in Christ when we depart this life, we take a direct route into God’s presence. The apostle Paul shares in 2 Corinthians 5:6–8:

*Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

The moment we take our last breath here on earth we take our first in paradise. We are absent from the body and immediately present with the Lord. Then in God’s time we receive our glorified bodies at the return of Christ. Will we know one another in eternity? I believe the answer is yes. We will be known in our resurrected or heavenly bodies, just as Moses and Elijah were recognized when they appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. If you remember, Moses had been dead for over 1,400 years and Elijah had been caught into heaven in a whirlwind over six centuries before Jesus lived. The disciples recognized Moses and Elijah, although they did not have their resurrected bodies. At death, we will be with the Lord and be immediately recognized.

When our bodies cease to function and we leave this life, our spirit is not dead or asleep. When we leave our bodies, we depart to be with Christ, and then we wait for our adoption and the redemption of our bodies. Our

bodies will be renewed and transformed, like that of the resurrected body of Jesus Christ.

Billy Graham told a story of a missionary family forced to leave China when an enemy had overtaken the country. As this family fled, they were forced to sleep in a different place each night. As they were fleeing one night, unexpectedly, the mother of the family passed away. This death was devastating to the husband, but especially to her children.

None of the children would allow their mother's body to be left behind and buried where she died, since they were soon moving on to another place. The father was faced with a very difficult situation. He knew the family needed to continue to flee to safety but he understood the grief and anxiety of the children. He prayed, asking God for wisdom.

After prayer, he shared with the children that the body of their mother was just the house she lived in. He explained that during the night their mother had now left that house, even though she loved it. He reminded them that they had all been on a journey staying in different houses as they fled and they had to leave them behind. This, too, was the case with their mother; she had left this earthly home behind and was no longer there.

The missionary convinced his children to bury the body of their mother there, awaiting the time when Christ would resurrect her body, renewing it and restoring it to her spirit. This was enough to help them understand and they left the body of the mother there.

We, too, are on a journey. When we leave this life, we leave this former house behind. It is no longer our home.

We are moved to a new and better place as we wait for the renewal and restoration of our old dwelling place.

Many times, I have seen businesses with a sign on their door that says, "Closed for Remodeling: Will Open Again Soon." This is the picture of death for the believer in Christ. Though this mortal body is no longer in use, it will be renewed and resurrected, and will be joined with our renewed inward being. We will be renewed with changes and improvements over our old bodies. No more pain, sickness, and death.

In our walk with God, there are many joys. Our families are a source of love and inspiration to us. Even in death we remember the promise of Jesus, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Our walk with the Lord is one we take step-by-step and day-by-day, following Him wherever He leads.

As we remember our friend and loved one today, we are reminded of their walk with Christ and how it resembles a story told many years ago. There was a young boy in a church Sunday school class who was asked by the teacher if anyone knew the story of Enoch, the man who did not die. The little boy said he knew the story and was then asked by the teacher to tell the class this Bible story. The boy described it as this: "There was a man named Enoch who was God's friend. Every day Enoch and God took walks together. Each day Enoch and God walked farther and farther together. One day while on their walk, God said to Enoch, "Enoch, we've walked so far that we are closer to My house than yours, rather than going home, why don't you just come home with Me? So, Enoch did."

Although we've lost someone dear to us today, we still have cause to rejoice. We rejoice because they walked with God day-by-day, but now God has said, "Since we are closer to my house than yours, why don't you just come home with me." We are sad that we won't see them again in this life, but we rejoice that we, too, can walk with Jesus and someday be reunited in the presence of the Lord.

*Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).*

### **Funeral Sermon Starter 3: “What Is Unseen Is Eternal”**

*All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:15–18).*

There are many things in life that can impair our vision. Imagine that you are driving a car late at night, trying to make it to an appointment many hours away, and you're running far behind schedule. You'd love to make up time, so you try to drive faster, but it's dark, and it's foggy. The fog has rolled in and it's so thick that you have to slow down because you can barely see in front of you. You even change your headlights from bright to dim and dim to bright again, trying to see more clearly. But the fog on the road is so intense that it's impairing your vision.

Many times, our spiritual lives can feel like driving in a thick fog. The God of the universe, the Creator of all things, has an eternal plan for each and every one of us. His plan of love for you and for me began long before we were even born. God has been working in our lives to perform His perfect will for us and in us. But, because we don't always see clearly, we may not be able to see

what God is doing. We hope God has a plan; we believe God has a plan, but we can't always see that plan because of the impairments we deal with every day. Like a thick fog that has rolled in on a dark night, we can try with all of our might to see, but in some moments, we simply cannot see or comprehend all the ways God is at work.

But God, in His infinite wisdom, has the ability to look at any life and see what we can become rather than what we are. God is a great organizer. He is never without a plan. From the beginning of our lives, God has a plan and we can rest assured that He is always working to accomplish this plan.

We begin as a ball of clay. Do you remember as a child playing with clay, molding it, working the clay, and creating new things? Did you ever leave your clay out of its container only to come back later to find it had dried out? The hard, brittle clay was impossible to mold once dry. Our lives are much like that ball of clay, with one major exception—God will never let you dry out.

There is a struggle of wills. God sees what your life should be—and often our ideas are much different from God's—but God doesn't allow the clay to dry out or harden in us. He just continues to work, shape, and mold us. God uses every situation, every experience, every trial, every blessing, every mountaintop and every valley. In every moment, God is working on us and in us to drive us to His intended goal line. The funny thing about all this is, we don't always know exactly when or how God is working on us. Through our natural eyes, an illness would seem devastating. What good could possibly come from being terminally ill or experiencing sickness?

But God can and does use all experiences to mold us, even until we take that final breath.

It would be easy to focus on our sadness today. We will wake tomorrow and this friend and family member will not be here in body. They will, however, be seen in the faces and lives of family and friends. What part did they play in your life? How did they take part in God's sculpting of you? What is your greatest memory of them? What seemed insignificant at the time—the hug, the kiss, the “I love you”—means more now than ever. We must draw strength from the positives and the good times we have experienced with our friend.

The psalmist David said it wonderfully in his description of God's hand in his life:

*O Lord you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive by thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in behind and before, you have laid your hand on me . . . Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me; your right hand will hold me fast. For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:1–5, 7–10, 13, 14 NIV, 1984).*

## Committals For Graveside or Tomb

### Believer's Committal

Jesus proclaimed:

*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die (John 11:25, 26).*

Job proclaimed:

*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 1:21, 19:25–27).*

In His divine providence, our God has chosen to call to eternal rest the soul of our dear deceased brother/sister. Therefore, we commit this body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; awaiting the resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; at whose glorious appearing, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed, and made like unto His own glorious body.

The Book of Revelation proclaims:

*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'" (Revelation 14:13).*

Let us share in the prayer of our Lord together (Ask those present to recite this prayer with you aloud):

*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, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Matthew 6:9–13 KJV).*

### **Unbeliever's Committal**

Job proclaimed: *"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised"* (Job 1:21).

In His divine providence, our God has chosen to call to eternal rest the soul of our dear deceased brother/sister. Therefore, we commit this body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; awaiting the resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; at whose glorious appearing, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those

who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his own glorious body.

Let us share in the prayer of our Lord together (Ask those present to recite this prayer with you aloud):

*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, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen (Matthew 6:9–13 KJV).*

## Memorial Services Using the All Nations Flag

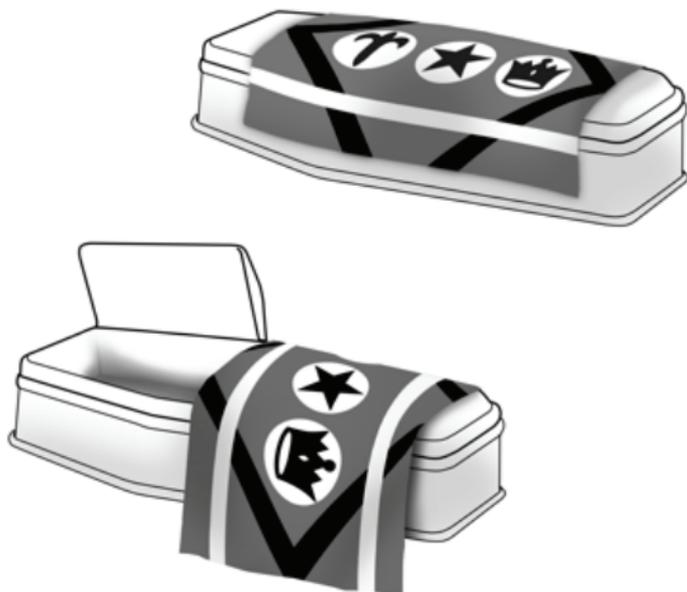
The All Nations Flag was accepted by the 28th International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy in September 1933 to represent the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the church and serves as the recognizable ensign for its fellowship in all nations where the Church of God of Prophecy meets.

When the All Nations Flag is used for memorial services the following procedures should be followed.

### **When carrying the All Nations Flag preceding the funeral party or casket:**

Flag should be carried at full mast by one individual. The flag may be used alone or as a part of other national, local, or state flags that may be displayed.

### **When the All Nations Flag is used to drape a casket:**



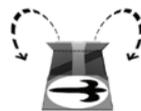
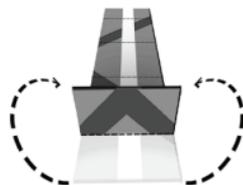
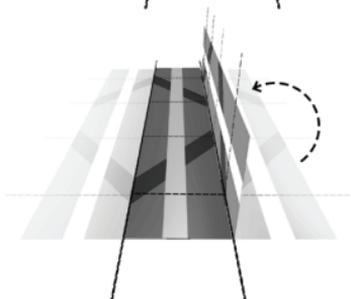
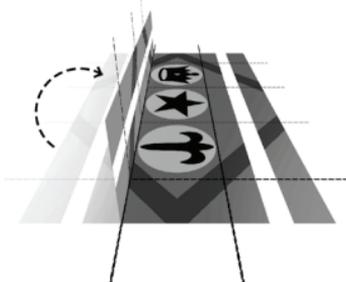
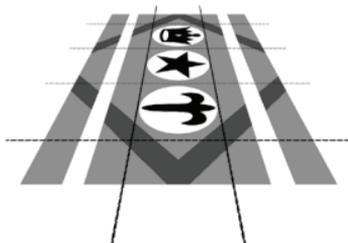
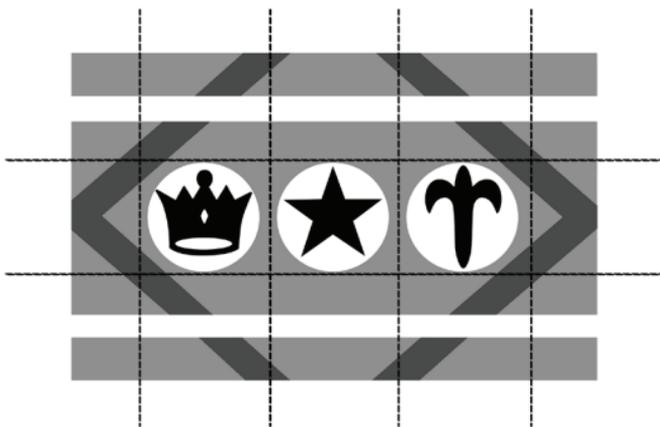
The scepter should be placed at the head of the casket with the top of the scepter pointing to the left side of the deceased.

Please note: When the lid of the casket is raised to permit the remains of the body to be viewed by the audience, the All Nations Flag should be removed and draped vertically across the unopened part of the casket with the crown at the bottom on the deceased one's right, facing the congregation.

### **When the All Nations Flag is used at the grave site:**

The All Nations Flag should not be lowered into the grave. If the flag draping a casket is presented to a close relative it should be folded in such a way that the crown in the circle of white is on top with very little of the red showing. The person presenting the flag to the deceased relative should pay respect to the recipient in memory of the deceased.

# Instructions for folding the All Nations flag



## Old Testament Scripture Passages for Memorial Services and Funerals

*“The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death”* (Isaiah 57:1, 2 ESV).

*“For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning”* (Psalm 30:5).

*“I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live”* (Psalm 116:1, 2).

*“Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble. They spring up like flowers and wither away; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure. Do you fix your eye on them? Will you bring them before you for judgment? Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one! A person's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. So look away from him and let him alone, till he has put in his time like a hired laborer. At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant. But a man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more. As the*

*water of a lake dries up or a riverbed becomes parched and dry, so he lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, people will not awake or be roused from their sleep. If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! If someone dies, will they live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come” (Job 14:1–14).*

*“Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22 ESV).*

*“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).*

*“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isaiah 55:6, 7).*

*“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).*

*“Show me, Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure” (Psalm 39:4, 5).*

*“For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him” (Psalm 22:24 ESV).*

*“For you have been my hope, sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth. My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long. Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. Do not be far from me, my God; come quickly, God, to help me. My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long—though I know not how to relate them all. I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone. Since my youth, God, you have taught me and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you—I whom you have delivered” (Psalm 71:5, 8, 9, 12, 15–17, 23).*

*“For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love” (Lamentations 3:31, 32).*

*“A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:4–6, 10).*

*“Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. With whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’” (Isaiah 46:4, 5, 9, 10).*

*“However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 11:8–10).*

*“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you*

*are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalm 139:1–10).*

*“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23).*

*“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).*

*“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers” (Psalm 1:1–3).*

## **New Testament Scripture Passages for Memorial Services and Funerals**

*“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:12–22).*

*“The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural*

*body, there is also a spiritual body. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:41–44, 49–54).*

*“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be*

*with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).*

*“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:16–18, 21).*

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 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? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:1–3).*

*“Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:25–29).*

*“The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there”* (Revelation 21:21–25).

*“But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered”* (Hebrews 2:9, 10).

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11:28, 29).

*“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”* (Philippians 3:20, 21).

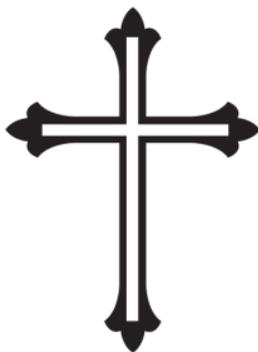
*“Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”*  
(John 11:24–26).

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”*  
(Romans 8:35, 37–39).

*“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life”* (2 Corinthians 5:1–4).



**20 Questions Ministers  
Should Ask Before Sharing  
from God's Word**



## **20 Questions Ministers Should Ask Before Sharing from God's Word**

### **Suggested Steps for Exegesis of Biblical Text and Sermon Preparation**

The task of interpreting the meaning of the Bible and presenting it to hearers must be done with great reverence for God's Word and dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Proper biblical interpretation and presentation are two of the most essential functions of the Gospel minister. The minister must seek to interpret and discern the original meaning of the biblical text and share this meaning with others through the preaching and teaching of God's Word. Additionally, the truths discerned in observation must be properly applied to the lives of the interpreter and hearers in their culture and context.

Due to the limitation of time and resources, a minister of the Gospel may be required to preach or teach from God's Word without ample, desired preparation. The following 20 questions may serve as a guide for the busy minister who seeks to carefully interpret and share the Word of God through preaching and teaching. These questions serve only as a suggested, systematic process for interpretation and application. It is my prayer that the use of some or all of this exegesis and sermon preparation process will assist those who desire to share the truths of God's Word with a hurting world.

### **1. What specific passage of Scripture should you share?**

Before you begin studying, spend time seeking God for a passage of Scripture to share. After prayer, select a central text from the Bible and follow the following steps to prepare your talk or sermon.

### **2. What is the setting of your passage?**

Gather information from the text itself and from other Bible resources to understand what was happening in the life of the author and the lives of the original recipients.

### **3. What is revealed in the passages before and after your selected text?**

Context is everything! Read the passage and chapters before and after your selection until you have the bigger picture.

### **4. Is there a theme of the book your passage is taken from?**

The passage you have selected may be a critical part of the author's overall message in this book of the Bible. Determine the author's main thought and condense the message of the book into one or two sentences. This will help you place your text in perspective.

### **5. How does your passage fit into the theme of the book your passage is taken from?**

Discover how the passage you have selected fits into the author's overall message in this book of the Bible.

## **6. What are the differences between the biblical audience this was written to and us?**

Research the time period. Gather information from historical sources and writings that were contemporary with the book from which you took your text. Commentaries and scholarly papers are good resources.

## **7. How do the differences between the original audience and us today affect how we discern what the Holy Spirit is saying?**

This is a critical step that should never be overlooked in the discovery process! The instructions for the biblical audience will reveal to us timeless, applicable truths.

## **8. Does your selected passage complete, introduce, or further describe a story?**

Find how your text fits into a larger message and why it is part of the Gospel.

## **9. How is Jesus revealed in your passage?**

At times, Scripture mentions Jesus specifically and other times we see Jesus as we connect the truths of Scripture. For example, Jesus is often seen in the Old Testament in prophecies and types. It may help to look for resources that show how Jesus is revealed in each book of the Bible.

## **10. How does your text relate to loving God and loving you neighbor as yourself?**

Judge your passage against Mark 12:29–31. Since Jesus said these commands are the two most important, find how your text relates to them.

**11. How does your selected passage fit into God's whole redemption story?**

God's plan for humanity and indeed all of creation is to redeem and re-create. God's Word is a love letter written to us describing this redemption plan. Consider your passage in the light of God's big plan to more clearly understand the significance of events, stories, and truths.

**12. How does your selected passage relate to the mission of God (Missio Dei)?**

The mission of God is reconciliation of mankind to Himself and restoration of all that was lost in the Fall.

**13. What is God's central message (the main point) of your passage?**

Identify the central and overriding message God is conveying in this passage. Write it as a complete sentence.

**14. How does your selected text speak to the needs of your audience today?**

The Bible is alive and active and speaks to us today. Consider the needs of those who will listen to you share. Find an effective way to show them how the truths of your text apply to their physical, emotional, or spiritual needs.

**15. Who is prominent in your story? Who will your hearers most identify with?**

Determine the key people in your passage. Show how their story relates to your hearers' present lives and their own stories.

**16. What is the most encouraging way to share your passage?**

Offer hope to your hearers. Share the truth from your selected passage with specific encouragement for your hearers.

**17. What are the simplest ways to present the truths of your passage?**

Simple can be profound. Make sure it is applicable and understandable to different levels of listeners.

**18. What is the most personal way to share your passage?**

Show how God worked in your life relating to your passage. Share God's faithfulness to you with your hearers and what God desires to do for them.

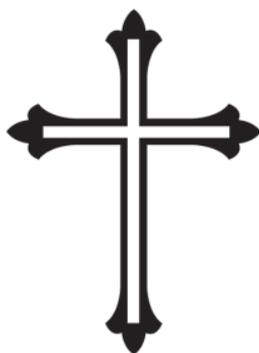
**19. What are the benefits to your hearers as they respond to God's Word?**

God's Word demands a response. Help your hearers discover how they will benefit if they respond to the Word and follow God's leading.

**20. What should your hearers do in response to your passage?**

Give your listeners clear direction regarding how to respond to God's leading in His Word. Invite them to respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

**Church of God of Prophecy**  
**Statement of Faith**



## **Church of God of Prophecy**

### **Statement of Faith**

We believe in the Holy Trinity—one God, eternally existing in Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in one God the Father, creator of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. All things were made through Him and for Him. He is true God and true man. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He suffered, died, was buried, and on the third day He rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and He will return to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who eternally proceeds from the Father. He is Teacher, Comforter, Helper, and Giver of spiritual gifts. Through Him the saving and sanctifying works of Jesus Christ are applied to the life of believers. He is the empowering Presence of God in the life of the Christian and the Church. The Father has sent His Son to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues and bearing the fruit of the Spirit are New Testament signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross; and that He died in our place. The believer's sins are forgiven by

the shedding of His blood. We believe that healing of mind, body, soul, and spirit is available to the believer through the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the grace of God brings forgiveness and reconciliation to those who repent, as well as transformation in holiness, enabling them to live a Christ-like life. Sanctification is both a definite work of grace and a lifelong process of change in the believer brought by the blood of Jesus, the Word of God, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one holy, universal church, composed of all true believers in Jesus Christ, offering fellowship and calling for service to men and women of all races, nations, cultures, and languages. We believe in the spiritual and ultimate visible unity of the church.

We believe that the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is God’s revelation of Himself and His will to humankind, sufficient for instruction in salvation and daily Christian living. The Bible is the Christian’s rule of faith and practice.

We believe that God will ultimately reconcile all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Therefore, we look forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Note: This Statement of Faith was approved by the 99th International Assembly, July 13, 2016 (99th Assembly Minutes, pages 95, 96). For updates concerning the Statement of Faith, please access [www.cogop.org/statementoffaith](http://www.cogop.org/statementoffaith)



## Minister's Notes

