

choosing a coffin

The coffin should always be the cheapest decent model available. No honour is done to the dead by extravagance now, and no guilt can be assuaged by giving in death what may have been neglected in life.

cremation or burial?

It doesn't matter. If you choose burial, all the mourners are invited to accompany the body to the grave. Cremation is part of the *preparation* of the body for burial. There is no *need* for mourners to travel to the crematorium. If cremation is chosen, there will need to be the interring of ashes later.

memorial garden

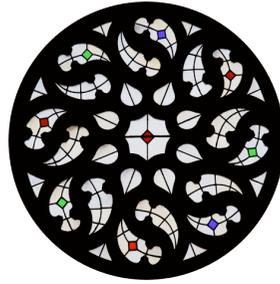
Unlike a cemetery, in a memorial garden the ashes rest among the *living*; integral to the continuing life of the Christian community. The St John's Memorial Garden is available for the interring of ashes. A fee does apply.

children

Children grieve as much as adults, and need to express their feelings. Children should never be excluded, but given real choice about presence or absence. Some adults avoid their own discomfort by saying, "S/he's too young to understand", or "We don't want to upset them further". Children need adults to help them experience death as part of life, not protect them from reality or prevent them from expressing their emotions. The worst betrayal is to pretend everything is normal, and that you are 'OK'.

want to know more?

If you would like to discuss this sacrament, for yourself or for someone you love, please feel free to contact us:



st john's
ANGLICAN CHURCH
CAMBERWELL

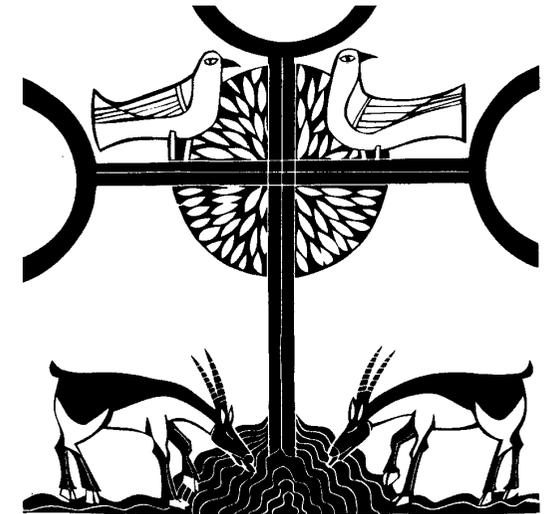
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*Loving God,
if the hour has come
to make the break,
help me not to cling,
even though it feels like death.
Give me the inward strength
of my redeemer, Jesus Christ,
to lay down this bit of life
and let it go,
so that I and others may be free
to take up whatever new and fuller life
you have prepared for us,
now and hereafter. Amen.*

December 2016

Funeral

Sacrament of Farewell



st john's
camberwell

the final enemy

Death comes to us all, and there is no escaping. Christians, like everyone else, acknowledge this truth. Our hope in the resurrection of the dead lightens the darkness, but does not remove it. Death has been overcome in Christ, but it is still being overcome in us each day until, and including, our last day. We live and die trusting the love of God revealed in the cross, praying that our passover from this life to the next may be yet another opportunity for growing in faith. This is why the church speaks of “making a good death”. Hope in the resurrection gives us courage in facing the certainty of our own death, and the deaths of people we love, so that we can look this reality in the face without overwhelming fear. This pamphlet is intended to help you to make a good death, to plan for a Christian funeral, for yourself, or for someone you love.

planning the funeral

The best funerals are planned in advance of death, long before any suggestion that death is on the horizon. We are never too young to give this serious consideration. A funeral plan should include the type of liturgy, choices of Scripture, music, and hymns, and who is to preside, preach, and deliver the eulogy. These instructions can be given to executor and also to the parish priest. It is certainly much easier for those left to plan a funeral when they know what the person who has died wants. Perhaps not everyone can cope with talking about their own funeral arrangements, but many more people can and will, if only we allow them. Dying people usually know when death is near, and usually they are relieved when family gives them permission to speak about it. They may indeed long to be able to talk openly. The real question may not be ‘can the dying person cope’, but can we?

what kind of liturgy?

For a baptised and communicant member of the church the obvious funeral liturgy is the celebration of the Eucharist. Following our Lord’s command, in the Eucharist we reaffirm “the Lord’s death until he comes”, that “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again”, that “we who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.” In the act of sharing in Holy Communion we are united with Christ and the whole Communion of Saints. It is natural that we do not want to exclude family members or friends who may not be churchgoers. But we should keep in mind that the words of a Christian funeral are exclusive in any case, since they proclaim faith in Christ and his resurrection, and presumably reflect the faith commitment of the person we love who has died. It especially makes sense that the one liturgical celebration which has been so central to a person’s life-long spiritual practice should be celebrated at their death. Regardless of the type of liturgy preferred, and regardless of the “status” of the person who has died, the church is always available for the celebration. No funeral *need* be held in commercial premises. It is never *necessary* to go to the crematorium. Everyone is welcome to use the church.

keeping vigil

Traditional Christian practice includes the keeping of vigil with the person who has died, especially in the night prior to the funeral. Vigil can be kept in the church, on the night prior to the funeral.

someone is dying

Call the priest. Don’t delay until after the death, since the ministry of the priest can assist the person in dying well. This will always involve listening. It will not always involve “religion”. In some situations it will involve confession and absolution. For some it includes a final anointing with holy oil and laying-on of hands. For some it includes Holy Communion - the “viaticum”, food for the last journey. We can

make it very difficult for dying people to talk honestly about what is happening. Dying people need to be free to talk - the ministry of the priest is one way this need may be met.

death has come

Call the priest – regardless of the hour of night or day. Call because there are things that can be done. We pray. We commend the dead person to the mercy of God and prayers of the saints. You can do these things yourself, of course - and the priest can help you. This is the beginning of the final letting go, and allowing the person to proceed on their journey. Don’t be too quick to call an undertaker. There is no medical or legal need to remove the body with haste. Between death and removal we have precious leave-taking time. Allow family members and close friends to come and make their farewell. The priest will stay with you during this time if you don’t want to be alone. Don’t go into ‘overdrive’! Funerals often happen too soon. This looks ‘practical’ in advance, but experience says waiting can be creative and healing. Waiting also helps reduce post-funeral shock - the sudden realisation that death is more than a passing nightmare. When death comes suddenly and tragically space is needed, but this is often true in more ‘ordinary’ circumstances too. What needs to be done is what’s best for those bereaved, not what is most convenient for funeral directors, or clergy. Hasten slowly. Let things fall into place gently.

awaiting burial

It is normal and natural, as well as spiritually and psychologically healthy, to see and touch the body of a person who has died. Sometimes people say, “I prefer to remember her as she was at Christmas”. The point of viewing the body is our need to come to terms with the fact that this person we love is *really* dead. You will not remember the person merely in the form you see in the coffin. Indeed, what you see in the coffin assures you that this is no longer the person that you love. So you *will* remember her “as she was at Christmas”, and as she is in photographs, and in your mind’s eye.