



## **Funerals & Memorials**

Beloved in the Lord,

“... Do not grieve like those who have no hope, because if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, so must we believe that God will bring with Jesus all those who have died believing in Him.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Our hope in the Resurrection is the pinnacle of our faith, St. Paul tells us, if Christ is not raised from the dead; our faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:17). As Orthodox Christians we are a spiritual family. In the same way that a family rejoices and prays together at a baptism or wedding, we come together to grieve, support, and pray together at the most difficult time, the loss of a loved one. The time leading up to death, the loss of a loved one, and taking the steps forward into a new world without our beloved are all difficult times. *Christ and His Church are here to support you.* The following information may seem overwhelming, but is offered as a resource, in order help prepare and guide you through these difficult times. Rest assured, we are always here to help.

***Spiritual Preparation.*** When preparing for the passing of a loved one it is important to be in contact with your Parish Priest. While our loved ones are still with us, it is important that we do everything possible to make them comfortable, supported and loved, and spiritually prepared. In the Orthodox Christian Church we do not practice ‘last rites’ but rather always pray for the health and salvation of our beloved. It is important to ask the Priest to come and visit at home or in the hospital as soon as we learn of a negative prognosis, so that our loved ones can participate in prayer, Holy Confession, and receive Holy Communion, and have the spiritual support needed.

**Note:** Orthodox Christians must be conscious to receive Holy Communion, if they are unconscious, a prayer can always be said. If someone is nearing the end, but struggling to let go, it is advised that the Priest come and read a prayer for the peaceful separation of soul and body. When our beloved pass, if possible, it is important for a trisagion (memorial) prayer to be read after their passing.

***Practical Preparation.*** It is important to have a support structure and action plan in place, so as to not have added pressure while mourning. Having a family member as the designated representative, preplanning with the funeral home, and notifying the Parish Priest of an imminent death are always helpful. Preplanning can help avoid situations of pressure or duress in trying to mourn the passing of a loved one, but also planning a dignified funeral.

**A few quick points that can help:**

- **Cemetery Plots:** Our Community owns cemetery plots at Valley View Cemetery, which are sold at a discounted rate to our Community members. You can call the Hellenic Community of Vancouver office for prices and more info at 604.266.7148.
- **Preplanning:** – Preplanning is encouraged, as the loss of a loved one is difficult. Doing everything possible to give yourself the time to properly mourn is valuable. Our Community is fortunate to have a great relationship with Mount Pleasant Funeral Home – 604.876.2161, who not only know and honor our customs and traditions, but sponsors your Community events year round.
- **Organ Donation:** This is viewed as an act of love in the Orthodox Church. It’s best to speak with your Parish Priest when planning on organ donation.

**When funerals are not allowed:**

- Funeral Services are not prayed for Non-Orthodox Christians. We can always say a prayer for the departed, but Funeral Rites are reserved for Baptized Orthodox Christians who are in good standing with the Church.
- The Orthodox Christian Church does not practice *cremation*. If a loved one wishes to be cremated, only a trisagion (memorial) is prayed, before the cremation, with the body of the deceased present, and not in the Church, but in the Funeral Home Chapel. If finances are an issue, there is support and guidance available from the Parish Priest, our Community, and Funeral Home.

- If someone has *left the Orthodox Church* for any reason, a funeral service will not be prayed. Examples of reasons constituting leaving the Church are: Not being married in the church, joining another religion, or publicly rejecting the faith and teachings of the Orthodox Christian Church.
- As no one is permitted to take the life of another, likewise no one is permitted to take his/her own life; that is, *suicide* is viewed by the Church as self-murder, and consequently as grave sin. Only when a doctor certifies that such a person as mentally ill and had lost his/her sanity can a Church funeral be held. In cases of mental illness, and with the permission of our Metropolis, the church always shows compassion for the deceased and the family by praying a full funeral.

**Trisagio & Funeral.** Funeral Services take place at the Church, typically at 10 AM. The family waits in the Church Hall, which is east of the Narthex (Church foyer). Five minutes before the funeral, the funeral directors assemble the Pall Bearers and family. The pallbearers bring the casket in from the hearse, meeting the Priest at the doors of the Church, and process into the Church, followed by the family. The Family sits in the front right pews during the service, and the pallbearers on the left (or with their family members). The Funeral Service is prayed and the Priest/Bishop give the Sermon at the end of the Service. Those in attendance pass by the casket paying their respects and briefly greet and console the family. The family is the last to pass the casket. Everyone returns to their seats after the recessional. The Priest leads the casket out of the Church, followed by the family, and gives the final blessing at the doors of the Church. The family immediately processes to the cemetery for the internment. At the cemetery the Priest leads the casket, carried by the pall bearers, to the grave. A trisagion (memorial) is prayed and the casket is lowered into the ground. Beginning with the family, all those in attendance place dirt or sand and/or kolyva (wheat) into the grave. After the internment those in attendance traditionally attend a memorial luncheon.

A few quick points that can help:

- Flowers: Flowers sent to the Church in memory of the deceased will be placed outside of the Church (as is customary in Greece). The only flowers allowed in the Church are a casket spray (on top of the casket) and a maximum of two arrangements from immediate family (children & grandchildren), on either side of the casket. All other arrangements will be placed outside the doors of the Church. This requirement is in line with that of baptisms or weddings, where only two arrangements are allowed. The Church is the house of God, and it is not permissible that the altar and icons be hidden or impeded by anything.
- Picture: An 8 X 12 picture placed on an easel to the right of the casket. This picture must be a bust only (chest and head shot) of the deceased. The photo must not be containing any other imagery. This same photo can be used at memorials.
- Kolyva (wheat): Traditionally a bowl of undecorated wheat is placed on a table in front of the picture of the deceased. This is typically raw, but sometimes boiled. This wheat is thrown into the grave symbolizing the hope in the resurrection and new life.
- Inside the casket: It is custom in the Orthodox Church to not bury our beloved ones with Crucifixes or icons. Pictures, letters, or other items may be placed in the casket, keeping in mind the sanctity of the Church, and the belief that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- Eulogy: As a directive of our Metropolis, only the Orthodox Christian Clergy is allowed to speak in the Church, with the blessing of the Parish Priest. The Priest or Bishop gives a sermon at the end of the Trisagio and/or Funeral. The sermon will not incorporate a biography or write up by the family, but will be based on the Gospel and tradition of the Orthodox Church. The appropriate place for any other eulogies or speeches is at the Makaria (memorial luncheon).
- Other Clergy: Only Canonical Orthodox Christian Clergyman are allowed to participate in the services of our Church, always with the blessing of the Parish Priest and the Metropolitan if the Clergyman is of another Orthodox Christian Jurisdiction.
- Church Fees: Our Community charges a small fee for the maintenance, operation, and upkeep of our Church with regards to Funerals. It is a \$100 donation for either a trisagio or funeral, or \$150 donation for both. This does not include any coffee or catering after the trisagio or funeral. There is an additional \$100 honorarium, \$50 each, for both the Chanter and Church Caretaker. Honorariums for the Clergy are at the discretion of the family. Church Fees and Honorariums may be given by the family, or taken care of by the Funeral Home at the direction of the family.
- Memorial Donations: Donations cards for charities may be placed in the Narthex along with a book of condolences. If you would like donations in memory of your loved one made to the Community, the legal name is *Hellenic Community of Vancouver*. Tax receipts will be sent to the donor, and you will receive a letter with all the names and addresses of those who have donated in memory of the deceased.

**Makaria** (Mercy Meal or Memorials Luncheon). It is customary, but not required, to offer a coffee and tea reception after the Trisagion Prayers, and a fish luncheon after the Funeral Service in memory of the deceased.

- Our Community offers Catering Services and typically both receptions take place in the Community Hall for convenience and to support our Community.
- Memorials Luncheons always take place after the internment, upon returning from the cemetery.

**Memorials** . It is tradition in the Orthodox Christian Church to pray memorials on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, 9<sup>th</sup> day, 3 months, 6 months, one year, and three years after the passing of Orthodox Christians. Typically the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> day memorials are usually encompassed by the funeral services in themselves, as in North America funerals take place days after the passing, and not immediately as in Orthodox Countries. With regards to the 3 month, 6 month, 1 year & 3 year memorials, these typically take place on the Sunday nearest to the date. This may change do to other Church events and celebrations, or feasts of the Church, where memorials are not allowed, or clash with the celebration at hand.

- To arrange a memorials please call the Hellenic Community of Vancouver office at 604.266.7148.
- Please leave your name, the name of the deceased, indicate which memorial it is in terms of time, the preferred Sunday, and arrange with the catering services of the Community for the coffee after Church. The Secretary will coordinate with the Parish Priest and Catering Manager, and will call you back to confirm the arrangements.
- On the Sunday of the memorial, the family brings flowers and the picture used at the Funeral to the Church before 9am. It is important that the family arrives for the beginning of Liturgy; please check the Church Service Schedule for times. The Council members will escort the Family to the appropriate pews. Seating is arranged in order of the memorials taking place (the more recent ones go first), then in order of who booked it first, and then in light of any other Church celebrations that may take place. The memorial takes place at the end of Liturgy. It is recommended that the families of the deceased prepare for Church through fasting and prayer, and if possible Holy Confession, so that they may receive Holy Communion during the Liturgy where the memorial will be prayed. After Church, it is customary for coffee to be offered in the Church hall, along with the Kolyva, cognac, and paximadia (biscotti), in memory of the deceased.
- Only Kolyva (memorial wheat trays) made by approved vendors can be used at our Church for a public memorial as we require them to be insured, and to adhere to the customs and traditions of the Orthodox Church. Our Office can put you in contact with one of these vendors.
  - For private memorials, after Church or at the cemetery, kolyva can be home made, or you can contact one of the vendors to help.

**Memory Eternal** . The Church always prays Memory Eternal at every trisagio, funeral, and memorial service. It is important to remember that although our loved ones have passed, they are alive in Christ, and in order for us to honor their memory; we must be alive in Christ. It is important to remember our loved ones in our prayers, to pray for them at any opportunity we can, in Church by bringing their name to be commemorated during liturgy, at the Saturday of the Souls before Great Lent and Pentecost, or by arranging a memorial with the Parish priest at any time. That being said, the best way we can honor the memory of our loved ones is by living a Christ-like life, by being alive in Christ through our faith, prayers, thoughts, words, and actions. The Church is here to love and support us, and to help us move forward into this new reality without the physical presence of our beloved.

I hope and pray that God gives you strength as you face this difficult challenge, the loss of a loved one. Difficulties, spiritually, emotionally, and logistically are unavoidable when facing death, don't forget, you are not alone. If you need any help, advice, or just to have someone listen, please feel free to contact me at 604.266.7148.

***Christ is Risen from the dead, by death He has trampled down death, and to those in the tombs, He has given life!***

With love in Christ,

***Rev. Fr. Constantinos Economos***  
*Parish Priest – St. George Greek Orthodox Cathedral*