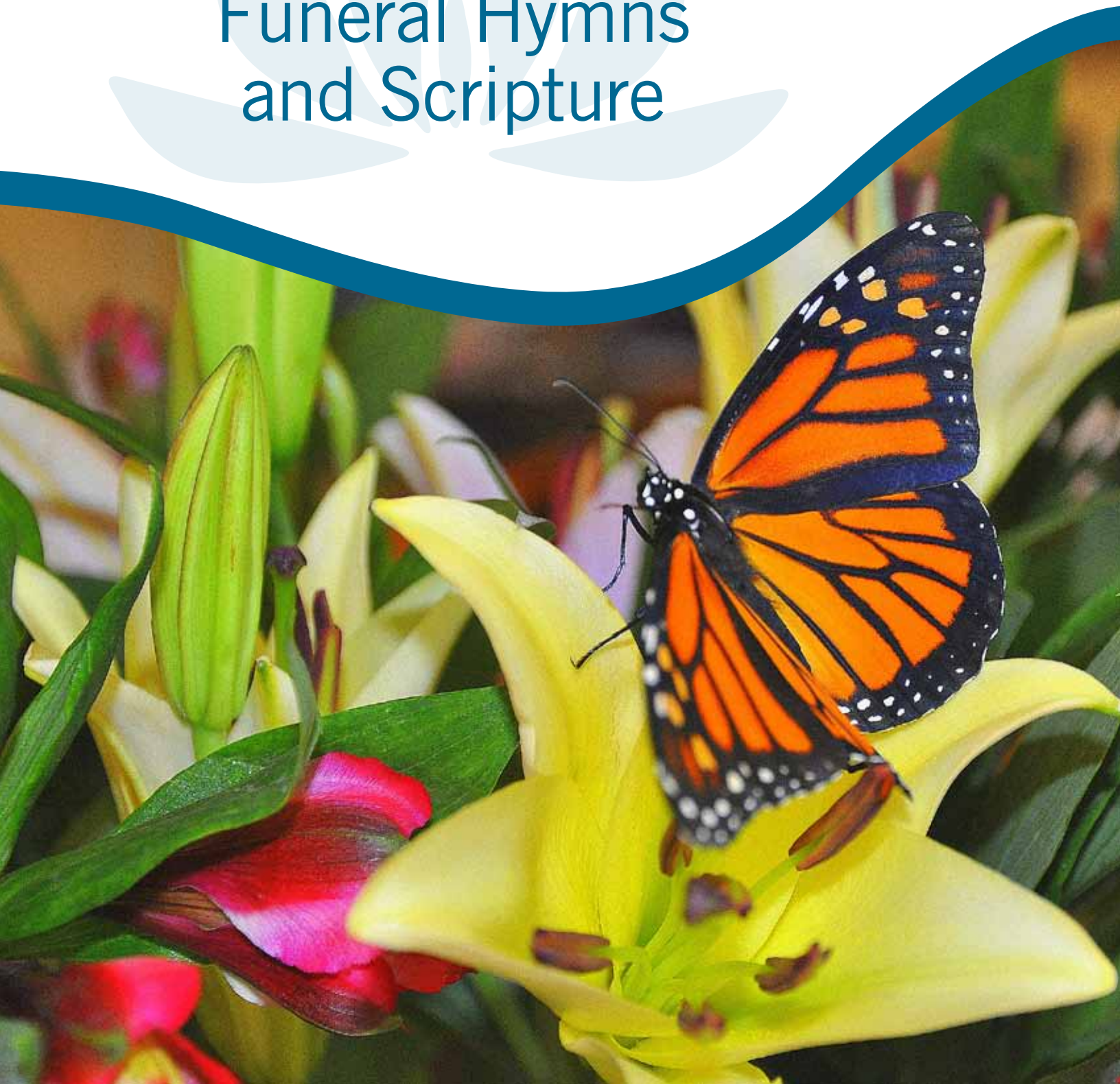


# Living Hope: Funeral Hymns and Scripture



God “has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

1 Peter 1:3b–5

*Living Hope: Funeral Hymns and Scripture* was written by Sue Edison-Swift, with special thanks to Anne Krentz Organ, the Rev. Stephen Larson, the Rev. Michelle Miller, the Rev. Craig Mueller and Barbara Burswold. Theological review by the Rev. Roxi Kringle. Cover page photograph by Sue Edison-Swift.


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# Living Hope: Funeral Hymns and Scripture

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## How to use this resource

This program has a simple yet profound purpose: *to claim and proclaim the living hope found in the hymns and Scripture texts of funerals*. Many of the participants will leave with texts and hymns selected for their own or a loved one's funeral; they also may leave committed to further funeral planning. Because one important purpose of a funeral is to console the living, participants should be encouraged to remember that hymn and text choices for one's own funeral are intended to be shared as a loving gift, not as a controlling directive. (See *Reflection A: All Are Welcome, in Appendices, p. 18*)

### Assumptions

The program, as written, is limited to a consideration of hymnal music and Bible readings. In this resource, "funeral" is used to refer to both a funeral service and a memorial service. This resource is based on *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, copyright © 2006 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, published by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers. All hymns and hymn numbers referenced in the program are found in *ELW*.

### Leadership

This program is best led by at least two people: a program facilitator and a pianist/musician familiar with funeral music. The program facilitator is in charge of planning and coordination, logistics and group process. The facilitator and musician work together to plan and lead the program. Others, such as the pastor and member care coordinator, may be involved as well.

### Scheduling

This program might be used during the Easter season or in connection with All Saints Day, November 1.

As written, the program is anticipated to take a minimum of 90 minutes and could easily expand into a two-session program or a three-hour mini-retreat. (See *Adapting this program* later in this section for ideas on how to do so.)

### Hospitality and accessibility issues

To be sure everyone will feel welcome in the group, issues of accessibility need to be considered in advance. For example:

- Unless the space is intimate and the group is small, a microphone and sound system should be available for use.
- Will some of the participants need large-print program materials? It's easy to enlarge handouts on a copier.
- The room selected for the program should be accessible to those with wheelchairs or walkers, and an accessible restroom should be nearby.

### Needed for the program

- A round table or tables
- Piano
- Nametags
- A worship book and a Bible for each participant
- Copies of program handouts included with this resource in the Appendices. (Resources of the congregation may be used in addition to or instead of those provided.)
- *Optional:* additional print references (such as a Bible concordance or *Indexes to Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) or Internet access to an online Bible reference such as the Oremus Bible Browser, found at <http://bible.oremus.org>



### Adapting this program

- The program might be started or concluded with a dessert or meal potluck, giving a nod to the all-important “funeral lunch.” For a mini-retreat, the potluck would work well between the morning and afternoon sessions. This fellowship time is also a great time to encourage participants to share stories of funerals and funeral hymns.
- By using the local church and community “people resources” available, this core program can expand readily into a retreat or multi-session program. There are many important “last things” that merit attention, including grief and dying, funeral planning, end-of-life wishes, organ donation and estate planning.
- Even as written, the program can be expanded into two sessions. The group might spend more time with Activity 1: Thought Questions and the Gathering Activity at the beginning, and then spend more time with the reflections and personal funeral planning.
- Individuals contemplating their own or a loved one’s funeral service may find it helpful to work through this program (and its resource attachments in the Appendices) on their own.



## Preparing for the program: Notes to the facilitator

Gather the funeral-planning resources offered to families in your congregation. Have copies available for participants as supplements to the materials provided with this resource, or use your congregation's resources instead of the lists of Scripture texts and hymns provided here.

Adapt the handouts to reflect the worship book(s) you use if you are not using *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*. Note that the Matching Exercise Key (*Appendices, p. 17*) offers hymn numbers for *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice* as well as for *ELW*.

Customize Handout A: Thought Questions (*Appendices, p. 13*) with your program details and distribute it in advance to all likely participants. The handout is designed to invite and welcome participants as well as to give them a chance to do some thinking in advance. The introverts in your group especially will appreciate that opportunity. If you feel that your group would not welcome "homework," wait to distribute it until indicated during the program.

Consider the reflections offered in the *Appendices*. You may wish to invite one or more participants in advance to reflect on the hymns and texts they chose for a funeral.

Ask participants to bring a Bible and, if they have one, a personal copy of the worship book.

After reviewing an early version of this program, Nancy J. Stelling, former editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*, recalled the planning she and her husband Gary did after the death of Gary's mother Frona.

*Maybe not surprisingly, the section [of this resource] that spoke to me the most was the Reflections section, with its six personal stories, each one precious in its own right. What it did for me, right away, was make me think, "If I'd been asked to provide a reflection for this section of the program, what would I have written about?"*

*For me it would have been Frona's sudden death and the three funerals we decided to hold for her in three different parts of the country to give those who knew her the chance to mourn and rejoice in person with the family. And how we decided to use Psalm 116:15 as the focal Scripture passage in the services. Frona and I had just come across that passage in our devotions a few days before her untimely death. Psalm 116:15 reads: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones."*

*You do suggest inviting one or more participants to reflect on the hymns and texts they chose for a funeral. It might be interesting to go a step beyond that and suggest that participants (maybe as "homework") write a brief reflection from their "funeral experience." Groups, if they wished, could share those reflections with the congregation, encouraging still others to think about the same.*

## Presenting the program: Instructions for the facilitator

### Gathering Activity, Part I

#### Materials needed:

Copies for each participant of Handout B: Matching Exercise (*Appendices, p. 15*), customized, if necessary, to include hymn numbers from the worship book(s) used by your congregation

As participants assemble, encourage them to work in small groups to complete the Matching Exercise. Asking groups to form as participants arrive may encourage participants to mix in new ways. The exercise is also offered to engage participants quickly in the texts and hymns of funerals.

It's likely that groups will have time to complete only the hymn portion of the exercise. Let the group know that after the opening hymn you'll complete the exercise together. You may want to invite a few experienced participants to begin with the Bible passages instead of the hymns. Assign volunteers to read one or more of the Bible passages later in the session.

Encourage the small groups to welcome late arrivers. Discourage competition; the exercise is not a test or contest.

### Opening

Warmly welcome participants.

Share the purpose and scope of the program: "The purpose of our time together is to *claim and proclaim the living hope found in the hymns and Scripture texts of funerals*. This program is focused specifically on hymnal music and Bible readings. It is not meant to be an exhaustive review of music or texts, nor is it intended to be actual funeral planning. That said, we hope that you'll leave here with ideas for the Bible texts and hymns that will help tell your faith story at your funeral or memorial service. We also hope that this program will encourage you to begin or continue this conversation with loved ones."

Transition to the opening hymn: "We live in the here and not yet. With grieving hearts and tear-filled eyes, we can still sing *Alleluia* because we know that our redeemer lives."

#### Opening hymn suggestions:

ELW 619 I Know That My Redeemer Lives! (stanzas 1, 7, 8)

ELW 367 Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds

### Gathering Activity, Part II

Quickly review the hymn titles in the Matching Exercise. As you go along, encourage participants to share whether a hymn is a favorite or if it's new to them.

Ask participants who volunteered in the first part of the Gathering Activity to read the assigned Bible passages in the order in which they're listed. Together as a group, decide on the summary or key words. Invite people to share a connection to a passage. For example, "This was read at my dad's funeral," or "This is my confirmation verse."

As a group, complete the "Match" section of the Matching Exercise sheet by deciding on the hymns and Bible verses which match. If the group needs help, the pianist should start playing the hymn.

### Activity 1: Thought Questions

#### Materials needed:

Copies of Handout A: Thought Questions (*Appendices, p. 13*) which participants have completed ahead of time

Acknowledge and affirm those participants who completed the Thought Questions handout ahead of time. (If the handout was not distributed in advance,



distribute it now.) If your program will extend over two sessions, spend some time exploring participant responses. Otherwise, focus on one of the questions about hymns and one of the questions about Bible passages.

Ask people to introduce themselves to their small group or the whole group by saying their name, a favorite hymn and whether they've ever helped to plan a funeral or memorial service.

### Optional:

Review the funeral liturgy in the worship book (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 279-285). Ask these questions:

#### Why do you think the service includes the "Thanksgiving for Baptism"?

*When we are baptized in Christ, we are baptized into his death and resurrection.*

*A faith journey, begun at baptism, is celebrated at the funeral and continued in eternal life.*

#### What about funerals and memorial services reminds you of Easter?

*At a funeral we proclaim that Jesus died and rose again, and we claim that we, too, shall have resurrection life.*

*Belief in the resurrection is at the core of our faith; hope in the resurrection is the core of our comfort when we grieve.*

## Activity 2: Comfort, Connect, Christ

### Materials needed:

- Copies of all or some of the reflections (*Appendices*, pp. 18-23):
- Reflection A: All Are Welcome
- Reflection B: Circles of Our Lives
- Reflection C: Do Not Be Afraid
- Reflection D: On John 3:16
- Reflection E: Lead Me Home
- Reflection F: The Formula and/or pre-arranged reflections from selected participants
- Copies of all or some of the reference sheets (*Appendices*, pp. 24-32)
- Reference Sheet A: Funeral Liturgy Information Sheet
- Reference Sheet B: Hymns for the Funeral (Sample 1)
- Reference Sheet C: Hymns for the Funeral (Sample 2)
- Reference Sheet D: Scripture Readings for the Funeral (Sample 1)
- Reference Sheet E: Scripture Readings for the Funeral (Sample 2) and/or funeral resources from your congregation

The heart of the program is to introduce the idea that the hymns and Bible passages chosen for a funeral can work together to *comfort, connect* and proclaim *Christ*.

### First 'C': Comfort and console the grieving

The gathering prayer of the funeral service beautifully summarizes the comfort of a funeral:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of all mercy and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in our sorrows so that we can comfort others in their sorrows with the consolation we ourselves have received from God.* (ELW, p. 279)

Have participants consider the reference sheets of hymn and text suggestions (*Appendices*) or similar lists from your congregation. Ask this question:



### What hymns or Scripture texts do you find especially comforting? Why?

Ask participants to shift their focus to the mourners who attend a funeral. Encourage them to make it personal by recalling or imagining a family funeral. Ask this question:

#### What funeral choices—especially hymns and texts—would your family find especially comforting? Why?

*“For my husband’s funeral I chose hymns familiar to both Lutherans and Roman Catholics.”*

*“I was comforted knowing that my mom chose the hymns to be sung at her funeral.”*

*“My family (are, are not) singers, so...”*

*“My sister-in-law took her dad’s death very hard. It was comforting to her, and therefore comforting to the rest of the family, to sing...”*

### Second ‘C’: Connect to the saint who died and the saints gathered in grief

Funeral choices—music, readings, sermon—should be different from one service to the next because the saint who died and the saints who gather in grief are different. Grief attends every funeral, but the grief is different depending on the circumstances of death and the realities of those who mourn. A funeral service is most comforting when it connects to, when it is congruent with, the mourners. For example, for an elderly pastor’s funeral, hymns that triumphantly proclaim the faith would likely be a great comfort. For the funeral of a child, though, triumphant hymns of faith may hurt more than help.

#### How might funeral choices, especially hymn and Scripture choices, “connect” to the person who died and the people who gather for the funeral?

Ask this question if you have time and if your group is eager to contribute to the discussion.

Funeral hymns and Scripture texts offer mourners the comfort of remembering when those choices connect to the unique person who has died. Imagine the “good tears” shed when singing a harvest hymn for the funeral of a farmer or “Earth and All Stars” (ELW 731) for the funeral of a teacher. Imagine the comfort of hearing that “nothing can separate us from the love of God” (Romans 8:31–35, 37–39) at the funeral of someone who took his or her own life.

Funeral choices that connect to the church year can open new meanings and offer unexpected comfort. A funeral held during Advent, for instance, might incorporate hymns and Scripture texts emphasizing the expectant nature of all of life that is now fulfilled for the loved one who has died.

#### Invite participants to share “connecting” stories from funerals they’ve attended or planned. Ask this question:

**How did a hymn or text connect with the person who died, the people gathered to mourn or the church year?**

A few or many of those gathered for a funeral—family, friends, friends of family—may be of a different faith tradition, be lapsed church members or be unchurched. Ask this question:

**What are some examples of “connecting choices” that might offer the comfort of welcome and invitation to visitors at funerals?**

- Asking the pastor to specifically welcome all Christians to the Lord’s Table
- Choosing hymns familiar to the faith traditions of “both sides” of the family
- Having a soloist or “requiem choir” instead of all congregational singing
- Printing all responses, including the Lord’s Prayer, in the bulletin

**Third ‘C’: Proclaim Christ**

We gather for a funeral “in the name of Jesus, the Savior of the world.” We gather to worship and “to proclaim Christ crucified and risen” (*ELW*, p. 279). We are an Easter people; our funeral choices claim and proclaim our living hope of resurrection in Christ.

Some funeral choices proclaim Christ with gentle hymns of remembrance; others are triumphant proclamations of faith. All Christian funerals will preach the good news of Christ’s victory over death. Ask these questions:

**What is your favorite hymn that gently proclaims and claims a living hope in Christ?**

**What is your favorite hymn that offers a strong proclamation of that faith?**

*Together as a group, generate lists of “gentle” hymns and “strong” hymns. See “Reference Sheet C” (p. 28) for suggestions.*

**Exercise: Considering the ‘3 Cs’**

Consider one or more of the reflections provided in the Appendices and/or reflections written by participants to find hymn and Scripture choices that offered comfort and connections and pointed to Christ. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to break into smaller groups. In that case, you could assign each small group a different reflection to consider before you bring the groups back together for a summary discussion. There are no right or wrong answers here, and a choice can cover all three “Cs.” This exercise is designed to help participants move beyond only “picking favorites” to making funeral choices that comfort, connect and proclaim Christ.

For example, have participants consider the reflection “Circles of Our Lives” by Linda Post Bushkofsky (p. 19). Examples of the three “Cs” might include these:

*Comfort:* All the texts and “O Blessed Spring,” which is especially meaningful to Linda.

*Connections:* “Blessed Assurance” connected to her mother’s Southern Baptist roots. The Isaiah text connected to the church season (Advent).

*Proclaim Christ:* John 11:21-27

**Optional:**

**Exercise: Bringing it home**

If possible, allow people time to quietly consider the hymn and Scripture choices they might suggest for their own funeral, keeping in mind the importance of comforting and connecting to those who attend the funeral. Now is also a good time to remind people that hymn and text choices for one’s own funeral are intended to be shared as a loving gift, not as a controlling directive. (*See Reflection A: All Are Welcome, p. 18*)

Here are a few of the “Cs” to note in the other reflections, pp. 18-22:

- “All Are Welcome”: “Healer of Our Every Ill” was comforting; “All Are Welcome” was connecting (inviting). The brass band Syd plans for her dad’s funeral will be connecting and comforting.
- “Do Not Be Afraid”: Hymns chosen by Sarah’s late husband and her young children offered comfort and connection. “Lord of All Hopefulness” connected to her husband, who was an engineer known for his carpentry projects. “You Are Mine” offered a gentle proclamation of Christ.
- “On John 3:16”: The Scripture text connected and proclaimed Christ.
- “Lead Me Home”: Imagine the connection, comfort and assurance of a living hope in Christ offered when singing “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,” at the funeral of someone who suffered from ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease).

## Closing

Arrange with someone to offer the closing prayer, asking her to include petitions that allow participants to name in prayer people who are ill and people who are grieving.

### Closing hymn suggestions:

*ELW 732* Borning Cry

*ELW 543* Go, My Children, with My Blessing

# Appendices

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## HANDOUT A

# Thought Questions

The purpose of the program is to “claim and proclaim the living hope found in the hymns and Scripture texts of funerals.” Many participants will leave the program with hymn and text ideas for their own funeral or the funeral of a loved one. The “thought questions” below will help you prepare for the program. You will find it helpful to have handy a worship book and your Bible as you consider the questions. *As time permits*, please complete the worksheet before coming to the program.

*Please bring this handout with you to the program. If you are unable to complete it ahead of time, don't worry, just come! You are welcome, you are most welcome.*

### When:

---

*[Date, start and anticipated end time]*

### Where:

---

*[Specify the location within the church building]*

### Details:

---

*[Leaders, a note about refreshments, etc.]*

### Recall Scripture texts and hymns that have special meaning for you.

What Bible verses do you know “by heart?”

Note one or two below with as much detail as you remember. For example, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16) — my confirmation verse.* If you have an Internet connection on your computer, it's easy to check your memory using the Oremus Bible Browser (<http://bible.oremus.org>).

1. Name two or three of your favorite hymns, noting why these hymns make your heart sing. For example, *“Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee” (ELW 836), because it was sung at my wedding.* If such a task seems daunting, consider your favorite hymns for a church season, such as Christmas.
2. Do you associate a hymn or Bible verse with someone who is or was dear to you? For example, *My friend's favorite hymn is “You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore” (ELW 817).*



**Recall funeral hymns and Scripture texts that have special meaning for you.**

3. Do you associate a hymn or text with someone's funeral? For example, *"You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord" (ELW 787) was sung at my mother's funeral service, so now when it's sung at church I remember her and shed some "good tears."*
  
4. Do you remember a hymn or text from a funeral you've attended? Why did it make an impression? *For example, In December I attended a very sad memorial service. One of the hymns was "In the Bleak Midwinter" (ELW 294); it fit the season and the mood.*
  
5. Have you selected funeral hymns and Scripture texts for someone else's funeral or in anticipation of your own? What did you choose? Why?

## HANDOUT B

### Matching Exercise

Work in pairs or small groups to complete the following exercise. First, look up and review the hymns, noting the titles in the first chart. Then, look up the Bible passages and jot down a summary or key words in the second chart. Finally, in the third column of the first chart, match each hymn to its corresponding text.

ELW Hymn #	Hymn Title	Match
#379		
#422		
#438		
#449		
#485		
#613	<i>Thy Holy Wings</i>	2
#619		
#622	<i>Neither Death nor Life</i>	6
#728		
#780		
#787		

**HANDOUT B**

Matching Exercise, page 2

Bible Passage	Summary/Key Words
1. Job 19:23–27	
2. Isaiah 66:10–14	<i>As a mother comforts a child</i>
3. Psalm 23	
4. Psalm 91	
5. Romans 6:3–9	
6. Romans 8:31–35, 37–39	<i>Nothing can separate us from the love of God</i>
7. 1 Corinthians 15:51–57	
8. Revelation 7:9–17	
9. John 11:21–27	
10. Matthew 5:1–10	
11. John 12:23–28	

## Matching Exercise Key

ELW Hymn #	Hymn Title	Match
# 379	“Now the Green Blade Rises” (LBW 148)	11
# 422	“For All the Saints” (LBW 174)	8
# 438	“My Lord, What a Morning” (WOV 627)	7
# 449	“We Know That Christ Is Raised” (LBW 189)	5
# 485	“I Am the Bread of Life” (WOV 702)	9
# 613	“Thy Holy Wings” (LBW 741)	2
# 619	“I Know That My Redeemer Lives” (LBW 352)	1
# 622	“Neither Death nor Life”	6
# 728	“Blest Are They” (WOV 764)	10
# 780	“Shepherd Me, O God” or “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” (LBW 456)	3
# 787	“On Eagle’s Wings” (WOV 779)	4

Bible Passage	Summary/key words
1. Job 19:23–27	I know that my Redeemer lives
2. Isaiah 66:10–14	As a mother comforts a child
3. Psalm 23	The Lord is my shepherd
4. Psalm 91	Dwelling in the shelter of the Lord
5. Romans 6:3–9	Baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection
6. Romans 8:31–35, 37–39	Nothing can separate us from the love of God
7. 1 Corinthians 15:51–57	Death is swallowed up in victory
8. Revelation 7:9–17	God will wipe away every tear
9. John 11:21–27	I am the resurrection and the life; “will rise again on the last day”
10. Matthew 5:1–10	Blessed are they who mourn
11. John 12:23–28	A grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, yielding a rich harvest

## REFLECTION A

## All Are Welcome

*Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: All are welcome,  
all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.*

“All Are Welcome”\*

I recently attended a funeral where the music really spoke to me. The opening fanfare, “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” and hymn, “All Are Welcome,” were inviting and inclusive. We were comforted in our sorrow as we sang “Healer of Our Every Ill” and were sent off with “My Life Flows On in Endless Song,” a fitting summary of my friend’s life.

Even though I will not hear the texts or the songs at my own funeral, I think about my funeral because, if my husband survives me, he will want some direction. My most important funeral planning, though, would be for my father and my husband. I would want my husband’s funeral to celebrate what his life and our lives together have meant to me. I would find comfort thinking about my father’s crooked finger silently conducting the brass band he’d like (and I would arrange to have) at his funeral service.

Until recently, my father was a hospice volunteer, and he and my late mother took hospice training together. In that training they were asked to plan each other’s funeral, not their own. I thought that odd at first, but Mom explained that chosen texts and songs are to give comfort to those attending the funeral. My father made choices for my mother’s funeral that would be of special comfort to him, and vice versa.

A few years ago, my husband had a near-death experience. It reminded me that our lives can be changed in an instant. Though we may not have a lot of time to prepare funeral plans, we can plan to be prepared. We have so much life to celebrate in death!

Syd Brinkman  
St. James Lutheran Church  
Allison, Iowa

\*“All Are Welcome” (ELW 641), v. 5. Text and music © 1994 GIA Publications.

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## REFLECTION B

## Circles of Our Lives

*As winter comes, as winters must, we breathe our last, return to dust;  
still held in Christ, our souls take wing and trust the promise of the spring.*

“O Blessed Spring”\*

My husband and I selected three hymns for my mother’s funeral service this past December:

- “Blessed Assurance” (ELW 638), a nod to my mother’s Southern Baptist roots;
- “O Blessed Spring” (ELW 447), a hauntingly beautiful text that so aptly describes the circle of our lives—I picked that one just for me; and
- “Lord of All Hopefulness” (ELW 765), a hope-filled sending.

We knew those gathered for the funeral would not be many and some would have few connections to the Christian life. The first and third hymns are set to familiar enough tunes that we expected most to easily sing along, and they did. Even some who regularly worship were not familiar with the tune for “O Blessed Spring.” My husband’s strong voice had to carry the tune for us all when we came to the fourth verse and tears consumed me despite the hopeful picture painted by those words.

The texts we used were Isaiah 40:1–11, 28–31 (“Comfort, O comfort my people...Prepare the way of the Lord”); Romans 14:7–9 (“We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves”); and John 11:21–27 (“I am the resurrection and the life”).

Linda Post Bushkofsky  
Executive director, Women of the ELCA  
Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church  
Arlington Heights, Ill.

\*“O Blessed Spring” (ELW 447), v. 4. Text © 1993 Susan Palo Cherwien, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

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## REFLECTION C

## Do Not Be Afraid

*Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by name.  
Come and follow me, I will bring you home; I love you and you are mine.*

“You Are Mine”\*

Music was always important to my husband Curt, and he was known to belt out a hymn so he could be heard at least five or six pews ahead. He always sang with gusto and joy (and an invented lyric or two), and I wanted to capture some of that joy in the hymns we chose for his funeral.

As Curt’s brain tumor progressed, it was astonishing how music could reach him even when other means of communicating failed. I asked Anne Krentz Organ, St. Luke’s director of music ministries, to come to Curt’s hospital room with a keyboard so we could play some hymns for him. About 10 days before his death, Anne and Pastor Stephen Larson were among the small group gathered around Curt’s bedside. We sang our way through about a dozen hymns, several of which had Curt smiling and tapping his toes. I really believe that in many ways Curt chose his own funeral hymns.

The hymns we chose for his funeral were:

ELW 781 Children of the Heavenly Father

ELW 780 Shepherd Me, O God

ELW 765 Lord of All Hopefulness (It’s an irresistible reference to carpentry.)

ELW 728 Blest Are They

ELW 581 You Are Mine (Our children chose this one.)

ELW 342 There in God’s Garden

If anything, these hymns are more beautiful and more poignant to me now than ever. I will never hear them in exactly the same way again.

Sarah Post

St. Luke’s Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Park Ridge, Ill.

\*“You Are Mine,” ELW 581. Text and music by David Haas, © 1991 GIA Publications, Inc.

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## REFLECTION D

### On John 3:16

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish  
but may have eternal life.*

John 3:16

We did not make it to my Ohio hometown before my mom, Alice Andrews, died. I got the phone call saying the time of her death was 4:16 p.m., Eastern Standard Time. When I relayed the news to a friend back in Chicago, he said, “Well, that’s 3:16 Central Time.”

With that we knew the Gospel text for Mom’s funeral: John 3:16. At the funeral, my son Matt read Isaiah 25:6–9 (“God will wipe away the tears from all faces”) and offered a brief reflection as he showed the “John 3:16” stone carving from Pastor Karen Kaye’s office. Later, Pastor Karen mailed the carving to Matt; it means a lot to him.

We learned last week that Pastor Karen died unexpectedly the night before Thanksgiving (almost two years to the day of my mom’s death), after officiating at a funeral earlier that day. She was 46 years old. *For all the saints...*

Barbara Andrews  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
St. Charles, Ill.

## REFLECTION E

## Lead Me Home

*Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. ...  
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.  
“Precious Lord, Take My Hand”*

My husband Wayne and I had talked for years about planning our funerals. In 2007, when Wayne was diagnosed with ALS (which some people know as Lou Gehrig’s disease), we went ahead and independently planned our own funerals.

Wayne had a strong faith in the Lord and loved singing in the church choir; therefore, choosing hymns for his funeral was an easy task for him. Holding the number of hymns to a few...not so easy. Singing in church was one of the many ways Wayne had of expressing his faith in Christ. Choosing hymns such as “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” (ELW 697), “Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound” (ELW 779), “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (ELW 773), and “Shepherd Me, O God” (ELW 780) expressed his heart-felt closeness to his Lord.

Wayne was a member of a choir at St. Luke’s, and after he could no longer attend church, Anne Krentz Organ, the choir director, offered to arrange for choir members to come to our home and sing to Wayne. For a time Wayne postponed the visit; although he fully accepted his diagnosis and prognosis, he connected that proposed visit with a closeness to death. Anne was willing to wait until Wayne was ready to receive the choir and their gifts of music.

The time did come when choir members came for a visit, and it was a glorious occasion! The choir sang hymns that Wayne had chosen for his funeral service, and he sang right along with them. It was almost as if he were present at the service he had planned. Especially knowing the love behind the visit, this special event will remain in my heart forever.

On the day of Wayne’s funeral, a Requiem Choir was formed to lead the congregation in song and praise. Having a Requiem Choir present at a funeral is a service provided by St. Luke’s to all families that request it. For all of Wayne’s family, it was a wonderful experience seeing the choir in the loft raising their voices in praise, knowing they were singing what Wayne had chosen for his final church service on earth.

Joanna Anderson  
St. Luke’s Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Park Ridge, Ill.

## REFLECTION F

### The Formula

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

Matthew 5:4

As funeral directors, my parents had a quiet ministry helping area clergy lead good funerals. Kermit and Norma knew what they meant by a “good” funeral and offered this formula:

A good funeral = Gospel story + personal story.

A great funeral, by the way, connects the Gospel and personal stories in meaningful ways.

“It’s about balance,” Mom explained. When a funeral is heavy with personal story, the assembled may miss the rest of the story: *death is defeated*. They may miss the comfort of a sure hope in Christ’s resurrection.

When a funeral is light on personal story, the gathered may miss the comfort of remembering. Sadly, my mom’s funeral sermon illustrates the point. Though the sermon the pastor seemed to have pulled from his file could have been good on paper, it wasn’t a good funeral sermon because it offered no connection to my mom or her faithful life. It’s been 19 years, but I remember I didn’t shed a tear until the soloist sang “On Eagle’s Wings.”

These days, as a frequent member of my congregation’s Requiem Choir, time and again I’ve witnessed the blessing of balanced funeral and memorial services. Personal story and Gospel story are beautifully and profoundly connected. With tears and laughter, those gathered in grief claim, proclaim and cling to a living hope.

Sue Edison-Swift  
St. Luke’s Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Park Ridge, Ill.



**REFERENCE SHEET A**

## Funeral Liturgy Information Sheet

Compiled for use by Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chicago. III.

**THE FUNERAL LITURGY** is in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 279-285. The service can be adapted for a memorial service without a casket. The burial service is intended primarily for use in the church, the most appropriate place for the funeral of a Christian. Holy Baptism, which marked the beginning of Christian life and the promise of eternal life, took place in the church. Other significant passages, such as confirmation and marriage, also occurred in the church. So it is appropriate that the final celebration of a Christian's life and death take place in the church setting, where loved ones are surrounded by the primary symbols of the Christian faith: cross, font, altar, lectern, paschal candle. The service can be adapted when it is held in a funeral home or in some other location.

**HOLY BAPTISM** is remembered and celebrated during the funeral liturgy, which brings out the connections among Holy Baptism, the resurrection of Christ, and our hope of eternal life. In Baptism we became God's children forever. We are never alone, even when we die. In Baptism we were marked with the sign of the cross as these words were spoken: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." There are several symbols in the funeral liturgy that point to Baptism and our unity with the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coffin may be covered with a pall, recalling the white garment given in Baptism, the robe of Christ's righteousness that clothes us. The pall also reminds us that in death and before God all people are equal, regardless of whether the coffin is simple or elaborate. The

white color of the pall is a reminder of Easter and Christ's victory over death. The *paschal candle*, placed at the head of the coffin, is also a symbol of Easter. The candle is lit at the Easter Vigil, during the Easter season, and at baptisms and funerals.

**HOLY COMMUNION** can be a great source of strength and peace at a funeral service. Sharing the bread of life and the cup of blessing can be especially comforting at the time of loss, for God is present not only in words, but also through eating and drinking at the Lord's Table. Through this intimate meal we are given strength, hope and the promise of eternal life. For those who find Holy Communion to be central to their Sunday worship life, it will seem natural to celebrate the Eucharist at the occasion of a funeral.

**THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD IS AN EASTER LITURGY.**

The feelings of grief and desolation are recognized and given expression at a funeral, but the service also moves beyond them to a confident hope. Both the sadness and joy must be seen together, each tempered by the other. The liturgy makes the bold proclamation that each baptized member has been united into a death with Christ and will thus share in his glorious resurrection.

**THE SERVICE OF COMMITTAL** is used when the body is brought to its final resting place, usually a cemetery. Although the common practice now is for mourners to depart after the final words are spoken, mourners are encouraged, whenever possible, to stay to see the body lowered into the grave, rather than to

remember its resting on top of the device by which it will later be lowered. This can give the family and other mourners a clearer memory of what happened to the body. Some earth is cast on the coffin as a reminder of the earth from which we came and in which now we rest.

**A MEAL** at the church or someone's home often follows the burial. This gathering allows people to renew old friendships, to reconnect family ties, and to express emotions in various ways. The shared meal is an affirmation of life in the face of death.

## REFERENCE SHEET B

## Hymns for the Funeral (Sample 1)

Compiled for use by Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chicago, Ill.

Hymns for a funeral service are most appropriate when they express death seen in the context of our baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection. Consider the following from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

**Funeral hymns for any time of the year**

629	Abide with Me	630	In Heaven Above
468	Around You, O Lord Jesus	867	In Thee Is Gladness
362	At the Lamb's High Feast	628	Jerusalem, My Happy Home
425	Behold the Host Arrayed in White	697	Just a Closer Walk with Thee
728	Blest Are They	660	Lift High the Cross
656	Blest Be the Tie That Binds	765	Lord of All Hopefulness
732	Borning Cry	767	Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me
781	Children of the Heavenly Father	750	Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart
607	Come, Ye Disconsolate	631	Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
855	Crown Him with Many Crowns	596, 597	My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less
790	Day by Day	763	My Life Flows On in Endless Song
422	For All the Saints	782	My Shepherd, You Supply My Need (Psalm 23)
427	For All Your Saints, O Lord	622	Neither Death nor Life
879	For the Beauty of the Earth	839, 840	Now Thank We All Our God
770	Give Me Jesus	500	Now We Remain
428	Give Thanks for Saints	447	O Blessed Spring
543	Go, My Children, with My Blessing	760	O Christ the Same
564	God, Who Made the Earth and Heaven	627	O Day Full of Grace
637	Holy God, Holy and Glorious	880	O God beyond All Praising
414	Holy God, We Praise Your Name	632	O God, Our Help in Ages Past (Psalm 90)
413	Holy, Holy, Holy	542	O Living Bread from Heaven
636	How Small Our Span of Life	313	O Lord, Now Let Your Servant
485	I Am the Bread of Life	441	Oh, Happy Day When We Shall Stand
619	I Know That My Redeemer Lives!	787	On Eagle's Wings (Psalm 91)
769	If You But Trust in God to Guide You	773	Precious Lord, Take My Hand
		418	Rejoice in God's Saints

- 423 Shall We Gather at the River
- 426 Sing with All the Saints in Glory
- 878 Soli Deo Gloria
- 488, 489 Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness
- 654 The Church's One Foundation
- 502 The King of Love My Shepherd Is
- 778 The Lord's My Shepherd (Psalm 23)
- 531 The Trumpets Sound, the Angels Sing
- 342 There in God's Garden
- 826 Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise
- 327 Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow
- 613 Thy Holy Wings
- 451 We Are Baptized in Christ Jesus
- 449 We Know That Christ Is Raised
- 487 What Feast of Love
- 666 What Wondrous Love Is This
- 639 When We Are Living
- 581 You Are Mine

### Funeral hymns for particular liturgical seasons

The Easter hymns listed below are especially appropriate for a funeral at any time during the year.

#### Advent

- 438 My Lord, What a Morning
- 257 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
- 264 Prepare the Royal Highway
- 244 Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers
- 436 Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

#### Christmas

- 273 All My Heart Again Rejoices
- 277, 278 Away in a Manger
- 288 Good Christian Friends, Rejoice
- 287 Let All Together Praise Our God
- 272 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
- 269 Once in Royal David's City
- 286 Your Little Ones, Dear Lord

#### Epiphany

- 302 As with Gladness Men of Old
- 815 I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light
- 308 O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright
- 866 We Are Marching in the Light

#### Lent/Holy Week

- 323 God Loved the World
- 324 In the Cross of Christ I Glory
- 343 My Song Is Love Unknown
- 351, 352 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
- 811 On My Heart Imprint Your Image

#### Easter

- 377 Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen
- 378 Awake, My Heart, with Gladness
- 367 Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds
- 379 Now the Green Blade Rises
- 366 The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done
- 376 Thine Is the Glory
- 368 With High Delight Let Us Unite

**REFERENCE SHEET C****Hymns for the Funeral (Sample 2)**

Compiled by Anne Krentz Organ, director of music ministries, St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Park Ridge, Ill.

**Triumphant proclamations of faith**

377 Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen  
 422 For All the Saints  
 618 Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer  
 856 How Great Thou Art  
 619 I Know That My Redeemer Lives!  
 867 In Thee Is Gladness  
 631 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling  
 627 O Day Full of Grace  
 632 O God, Our Help in Ages Past  
 308 O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright!  
 454 Remember and Rejoice  
 439 Soon and Very Soon  
 376 Thine Is the Glory  
 666 What Wondrous Love Is This

**Gentler songs of hope and remembrance**

629 Abide with Me  
 779 Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound  
 838 Beautiful Savior  
 728 Blest Are They  
 732 Borne Cry  
 781 Children of the Heavenly Father  
 790 Day by Day

374 Day of Arising  
 543 Go, My Children, with My Blessing  
 612 Healer of Our Every Ill  
 429 In Our Day of Thanksgiving  
 765 Lord of All Hopefulness  
 786 O Holy Spirit, Enter In  
 787 On Eagle's Wings  
 423 Shall We Gather at the River  
 342 There In God's Garden  
 613 Thy Holy Wings  
 785 When Peace like a River

**Sung versions of Psalm 23**

502 The King of Love My Shepherd Is  
 778 The Lord's My Shepherd  
 780 Shepherd Me, O God

**Farewell or acclamation**

223 All of Us Go Down to the Dust  
 222 Into Paradise May the Angels Lead You  
 313 O Lord, Now Let Your Servant

## REFERENCE SHEET D

# Scripture Readings for the Funeral (Sample 1)

Compiled for use by Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chicago, Ill.

### First lesson

Job 19:23–27a

I know that my Redeemer lives

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

For everything a season

Isaiah 25:6–9

The Lord will swallow up death forever

Isaiah 40:1–11, 28–31

Comfort my people, says your God

Isaiah 43:1–3a, 5–7

I have called you by name

Isaiah 43:1–3a, 18–19

I am about to do a new thing

Isaiah 61:1–3

God comforts all who mourn

Isaiah 65:17–20, 23–25

New heavens and a new earth

Isaiah 66:10–14

As a mother comforts her child

Jeremiah 31:8–13

I will turn their mourning into joy

Lamentations 3:22–26, 31–33

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases

### Psalm

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd

Psalm 25:1–10

To you I lift up my soul

Psalm 42:1–7

As a deer longs for flowing streams

Psalm 46:1–7

God is our refuge and strength

Psalm 63

Eagerly I seek you

Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place

Psalm 90

You have been our refuge

Psalm 116

You have delivered my soul from death

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills

Psalm 122

Let us go to the house of the Lord

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you

Psalm 139:7–12

The gracious omnipresence of the Lord

Psalm 142:1–6

I cry to the Lord with my voice

Psalm 143

Lord, hear my prayer

### Second lesson

Romans 5:1–11

Justified by faith, we have peace with God

Romans 6:3–9

Baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection

Romans 8:14–23

We groan while we wait for the redemption of our bodies

Romans 8:31–35, 37–39  
Nothing can separate us from the love of God

Romans 14:7–12  
Whether alive or dead, we belong to the Lord

1 Corinthians 15:12–26  
In Christ shall all be made alive

1 Corinthians 15:51–57  
Death is swallowed up in victory

2 Corinthians 4:6–12, 16–18  
Treasure in clay jars

2 Corinthians 4:14–5:1  
What is seen is transitory; what is unseen is eternal

2 Corinthians 5:1, 6–10  
We have an everlasting home in heaven

Philippians 3:20–21  
Jesus will transfigure our bodies to be like his glorious body

1 Thessalonians 4:13–14, 18  
We shall stay with the Lord forever

2 Timothy 2:8–13  
If we have died with him, we shall live with him

1 John 3:1–2  
We shall see God as God really is

Revelation 7:9–17  
God will wipe away every tear

Revelation 21:2–7  
Behold, I make all things new

Revelation 22:1–5  
The Lord God will be their light

Matthew 25:1–13  
The bridegroom is coming; come out to meet him

Mark 16:1–7  
The resurrection of Christ

Luke 2:25–32 (or 2:25–40)  
Simeon is able to die in peace

Luke 23:33, 39–43  
Today you will be with me in paradise

Luke 24:13–35  
The road to Emmaus

John 1:1–5, 9–14  
The light shines in the darkness

John 6:37–40  
All that the Father gives me will come to me

John 6:51–58  
All who eat this bread will live forever; I will raise them up on the last day

John 10:11–16  
I am the good shepherd

John 11:21–27 (or 11:32–45)  
I am the resurrection and the life

John 12:23–28  
If a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it yields a rich harvest

John 14:1–6  
In my Father's house there are many rooms

John 14:25–27  
Peace I leave with you

### Holy Gospel

Matthew 5:1–10  
Blessed are those who mourn

Matthew 11:25–30  
Come to me and I will give you rest

## REFERENCE SHEET E

# Scripture Readings for the Funeral – Sample 2

Compiled by the Rev. Stephen Larson for St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Park Ridge, Ill.

### Old Testament readings

Numbers 6:22–27

The Lord bless you and keep you

Job 19:23–27a

I know that my Redeemer lives

Ecclesiastes 3:1–9

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose

Isaiah 25:6–9

God will swallow up death forever

Isaiah 40:1–2; 11; 28–31

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God

Isaiah 61:1–3

The Lord has anointed me...to bind up the brokenhearted

Lamentations 3:22–26, 31–33

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want

Psalm 30

You have turned my mourning into dancing

Psalm 42

Hope in God, for I shall again praise him

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble

Psalm 90

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart

Psalm 118

O give thanks to the Lord...steadfast love endures forever

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord

Psalm 131

Hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore

Psalm 139:1–16

Where can I go from your spirit?

Psalm 143

Hear my prayer, O Lord

Proverbs 31:10–15, 21, 26–31

A good wife who can find? Her children...call her blessed

Ezekiel 34:11–16a

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep

### New Testament readings

Matthew 5:1–12

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted

Matthew 11:28–30

Come to me...and I will give you rest

Mark 10:13–16

Let the little children come to me

Luke 2: 25–32

Now you are dismissing your servant in peace...for my eyes have seen your salvation

John 3:16–17

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son

John 5:24–29

...all who are in their graves will hear his voice



John 6:37–40  
I will raise them up on the last day

John 11:21–27  
I am the resurrection and the life

John 14:1–6  
I am the way, and the truth, and the life

John 14:18–21  
...because I live, you also will live

John 14:27  
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you

Romans 5:1–11  
While we were yet sinners Christ died for us

Romans 5:17–21  
Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more

Romans 8:31–35, 36–37  
[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God

Romans 12:9–13, 15–16, 21  
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep

Romans 14:7–9  
Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's

1 Corinthians 13:1–13  
...the greatest of these is love

1 Corinthians 15:12–26  
Christ has been raised from the dead

Philippians 4:8–9  
...the God of peace will be with you

1 Thessalonians 4:13–15  
...that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope

1 Peter 1:3–9  
...a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection

1 John 3:1–2  
Beloved, we are God's children now

1 John 4:7–12  
Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God

Revelation 7:9–17  
Who are these robed in white? ...God will wipe away every tear

Revelation 21:1–7  
Death will be no more