

APPENDIX # 1– The Committal Service

1. The act of “committal” is often the most difficult time for the loved ones of the deceased. It is here at the graveside that the raw finality and irreversible nature of death sweeps over them as they see the open grave and the pile of earth waiting to enfold their loved one or friend.

2. When all have gathered around the graveside, it is appropriate that you should lead in prayer asking God to draw near by his Holy Spirit, imparting grace and comfort to the grieving, and to bless the reading of his Word to the strengthening of faith and confidence in the promised resurrection of the body. As you lead in prayer, remember that you have no voice assistance, and that you are speaking in the unconfined open air setting. It is almost impossible to speak too loud in such a setting.

3. Then, some of the following Scriptures should be carefully and thoughtfully read with great emphasis upon the words of certainty contained in them. (Again, remember to read with sufficient volume).

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- Philippians 3:20-21
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-25, 50-57
- John 11:25-26

4. If it is the wish of the loved ones that a hymn should be sung at the graveside, make sure that xerox copies of the hymn are distributed to those gathered for the committal service. If you have no facility to pitch the hymn properly, make sure that you have assigned someone who has that gift to begin and lead the singing with a strong voice.

5. After prayer, the reading of the Scriptures, and possibly singing a hymn, you will then generally bring a brief word containing remarks relative to the deceased, and brief comments upon the Scripture which you have read. Generally, this should take no more than five minutes.

4. If you consult various ministers handbooks, you may find appropriate words of “committal” in them. I suggest the following words of committal for those who may not have access to materials that would give them helpful suggestions for this part of your pastoral duty and privilege.

5. In that case of the death of a believer, you will face the coffin and say words to this effect:

“ We now commit to the earth the physical body of our (brother) or (sister),
_____ in the confidence of (his) or (her) future resurrection in
glory, at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, come Lord Jesus.”

6. In the case of an unbeliever, it would be appropriate to use words to this effect:

“ We now commit to the earth the physical body of _____.
Knowing that it is ‘appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes judgment,’ we

make this committal in the confidence that the day is coming when ‘all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the son of Gaul, and come forth, some to the resurrection of life, and others to the resurrection of judgment.’ ”

7, You should then close the brief committal service in prayer, asking God for his gracious comfort to be given to those who are grieving, and that all of us might be sobered by the reality of our own approaching death, barring the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

8. After the loved ones have lingered for a brief time near the casket, it may well be your responsibility lovingly and graciously to assist them back to their cars or to the funeral hearse. That final turning away from the casket, is often a very wrenching experience for the loved ones. Seek to enter into their felt grief, and yet graciously assist them to do what they must do. If ever it is appropriate for you to place an arm around those who are finding it difficult to leave the graveside, it is in just such circumstances that chaste physical contact is most appropriate and needed. If you stand at the graveside with your arm around a loved one of the deceased, having sought to “weep with those who weep”, the gentle pressure of your arm may be helpful in turning them away from the graveside to help them return to their vehicle.