

DIGNITY WITH BREVITY

A Concise Guide to Crafting Christian Funeral Services

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Contributors	4
Acknowledgements	5
Why Another Christian Funeral Service Manual?	6
A Word on Being Brief	8
A Word on Structure	9
PART I: The Graveside Service	10
1 The Introduction	11
2 The Opening Prayer	19
3 The Eulogy	20
4 The Homily	30
5 The Committal Prayer	33
6 Military Honors	35
7 Columbarium Remarks	38
8 The Graveside Service	40
PART II: The Chapel Service	43
1 Chapel Order of Service	44
a. “Spread Your Sorrows Before Christ” by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher	47
b. “Home” - Active Duty Homily by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher	51
c. “Liturgical Chapel Order of Service” by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh	55
2 Conclusion	58
Appendix 1: Sample Flips	59
Appendix 2: Sample Graveside Services and Homilies	64
a. “Liturgical Graveside Order of Service” by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh	65
b. “Non-churchgoer Graveside Homily” by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher	67
c. “World War II Repatriation Graveside Service” by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher	69
Appendix 3: Sample Chapel Services and Homilies	72
a. “The Inevitable Word” – Dependent Chapel Ceremony by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher	73
b. “Chapel Service for Dependent” by CH (CPT) John Scott	76
c. “Reconciled” – Estranged Family Member Homily by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher	78
d. “Lamentations 3:19-26 Chapel Homily” by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh	79
e. “Active Duty – Motorcycle Fatality” by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh	80
f. “1 Corinthians 15:51-55 Chapel Homily” by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh	81
g. “2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Chapel Homily” by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh	82

h. “John 14:1-6 Chapel Homily” by CH (CPT) Dave Dice	83
i. “2 Corinthians 1:3-5 Chapel Homily” by CH (CPT) Matt Madison	85
Appendix 4: Processional Readings	87
Appendix 5: Final Thoughts	90
Appendix 6: Quick Key Word Reference Guide	92
Appendix 7: Recommended Resources	94

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DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in this work are the editor's own and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of those U.S. Army Chaplains mentioned above, Arlington National Cemetery, the United States Army, the United States Army Chaplain Corps, or the United States government.

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- CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher

WHY ANOTHER CHRISTIAN FUNERAL SERVICE MANUAL?

America has been at war with Iraq and Afghanistan for more than a decade, and during that time, more than two million Americans have been deployed overseas.¹ These combat veterans will one day die, and when they do, it won't just be military chaplains who will be called upon to perform their funeral services. Civilian pastors will also share the honor and bear the burden of burying America's heroes. So, why do we ministers need another funeral manual?

First, this work is *not* seeking to provide you with *answers* but rather with an *approach* to crafting funeral services that rightly reflect your unique situation and your unique personality. Most funeral handbooks provide sample outlines and homilies that can get the job done, but if I were to use those messages I'd feel a little like a pastor performing a funeral in a borrowed suit. This is not to say those works aren't worth referencing; they are. It's just to note that this work has a different intent. The aim here is for you to learn to craft your own funeral services versus preaching the borrowed messages of others. Moreover, knowing we will all one day perform these services for military veterans, this work offers unique counsel and much needed guidance on performing services for our nation's veterans and their family members. Secondly, while there are a good number of books that deal with the theology of Christian funerals, this book has no such lofty ambition. Rather, this work is designed to simply aid you in the execution of funeral sermons that are biblical and succinct. So you won't find this manual filled with personal stories, anecdotes, or illustrations. The demands of full-time ministry, family, and a rather short attention span don't lend themselves to reading on funerals for enjoyment. Therefore, these pages don't contain fluff. This is bottom line material for the working chaplain and minister engaging families in the friction point of their lives. To minister in this friction point is to minister between the passages of life and death, regret and hope, denial and acceptance, loss and inner healing. This book is for those who are engaged in ground level ministry, not for those who want to sit around and discuss ministry over lattes at Starbucks. Like the funeral services we're called upon to perform, every word here is meant to count. Finally, the approach presented here works. There's nothing theoretical about this approach. This manual has been field tested and continually refined over the course of years and thousands of funerals performed right outside our nation's capital in the world's premier military cemetery. Let me explain.

As ministers, there are times when we're put in a position to perform funeral services for individuals we don't personally know. These occasions can seem awkward, particularly when attempting to personalize the message for those present who are in fact acquainted with the deceased. Now imagine executing not just one or two funerals like this a year but upwards to four funerals a day, five days a week, in every kind of weather imaginable. Imagine being able to say that you perform well over 500 funerals like this a year. Now, imagine conducting these funerals at Arlington National Cemetery. These services include chapel services, columbarium services, and graveside services for active duty Soldiers killed in action and non-combat related deaths, for the repatriated remains of Soldiers killed in action or missing in action in America's

¹ "U.S. Veterans: By the Numbers", By LUIS MARTINEZ (@LMartinezABC) and AMY BINGHAM, Nov. 11, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-veterans-numbers/story?id=14928136>

previous wars, for Army veterans, retirees, and for eligible dependents. This is the situation for Army cemetery chaplains assigned to Arlington National Cemetery. When I arrived to my new post in the summer of 2012, I was told, “Welcome to Arlington National Cemetery where every funeral could be your last.” This is a zero defect environment. If any group of ministers knows what right looks like, I assure you – it’s us. What you hold in your hands is essentially our best practices and reflects the lessons learned over the course of years and several thousand Army funeral services.

One final note before we begin: Giving the next-of-kin what she wants must be balanced by providing her with what she needs. Reader, we are ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not masters of ceremony. Therefore, remain true to your convictions. Before performing funerals at ANC, I was provided with this guidance, “Be faithful to God and to your denomination.” If a family requests the support of a Protestant Chaplain, then they’re going to receive a Protestant Christian funeral. I don’t do “spiritual services”, and you shouldn’t either. Be who you say you are. Those who are mourning and struck by grief deserve our very best, and that requires sharing something that’s worth hearing. Showing up isn’t enough. You need to show up with the message.

A WORD ON BEING BRIEF

How long should a funeral service last? You've likely heard, "Never say in 35 minutes what you can say in 20." With that said, the graveside service should take 10 minutes while the chapel service should not exceed 20 minutes. To preach long sermons begs the question, "Is my speaking longer meeting a need in the next-of-kin's life, or is it meeting a need in my life?" To preach our prayers makes one wonder whether or not we're actually praying, preaching, or performing. The service doesn't have to be long to be meaningful or excellent. A funeral message "tends to increase in effectiveness as it decreases in length."² Moreover, by embracing these guidelines, that's all they are, you'll find yourself forced to make every word count. This way, there are no chasing rabbits, and there's no grandstanding at the expense of grieving widows, children, family and friends. Those who preach long often end up appearing unprepared instead of inspired. Their many words betray them. We should keep it meaningful but short, hence the title *Dignity With Brevity*.

² Robinson, Hadden and Craig B. Larson, The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching, Zondervan, 2005, p. 651.

A WORD ON STRUCTURE

As a young and inexperienced minister I remember the stress that accompanied my earlier funerals. I was stressed out on two counts. First, I wasn't adequately prepared for the task at hand. Secondly, I sincerely cared about the family and wanted to ensure that I didn't say the wrong thing or somehow under deliver. If you'll study this manual, you may still experience the stress of not wanting to make a mistake, but you'll also experience the confidence and peace of knowing you are in fact adequately prepared for the mission at hand.

While each funeral is unique, each funeral has also some common traits. But these commonalities should not center on our remarks but rather on the structure of the funeral service itself. In order to provide flow and continuity to the service, the structure of the funeral must consist of a number of transitions requiring a series of transitional statements. Think of this as a sequence of events. Each event once set in motion triggers the following element ultimately leading to the close of the service. Therefore, it's important for you to understand the service in its entirety and your unique role in this very special ministry. Whether I am officiating a service for a Private First Class with eight months of military experience or a Two Star General with over 30 years of service, the structure remains the same. For right now, let's begin our study on the graveside service and more particularly on writing a powerful introduction.

PART 1
THE GRAVESIDE SERVICE

THE INTRODUCTION

The introduction is a vitally important piece as it sets the tone and mood for the entire funeral service, as well as, the family's final experience with the remains of their loved one. Truly, this is a sacred event.

Below are a number of introductions that can be modified to fit any number of settings. However, the greater aim here is to help you learn to write your own introductions versus relying upon a template that may not be the best fit for your particular family and situation. It's important to remember each family's grief experience is unique, so no templated script can accomplish what the man or woman under the direction and influence of the Holy Spirit can achieve during this most solemn of occasions.

The primary introduction many of us use at Arlington National Cemetery is below. Once the family is seated, the Honor Guard has finished unfolding the flag suspending it over the coffin or urn of the veteran, and the Officer in Charge has stepped away from the head of the remains, I step forward and say:

Good afternoon. My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our nation. There are over 400,000 Americans buried here. As you look out on the rows upon rows of headstones, each stone a brick in the foundation of freedom upon which we stand today, I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned.

Please join me in prayer.

"Please join me in prayer" is a natural transition between the introduction and the eulogy which we'll discuss later. The ending may be varied with:

... I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned, and we know **(Decedent's Rank and Name)** has earned his place among us here today.

If the service is taking place inside the columbarium, the above statement may be modified as follows:

Good afternoon. My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our nation. There are over 400,000 Americans buried here. *As you reflect on the rows upon rows of headstones you saw earlier and consider this*

columbarium all around you, I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned.

While preparing your introduction, consider the following:

1. Geography of the location.
 - a. What does the location look like? Any notable land features? How would you describe the setting?
2. Significance of the location.
 - a. What's significant about the cemetery you're performing the funeral service in?
 - b. What is the name of the cemetery? How many years has the cemetery been in operation? How many people are buried there?
 - c. What makes the cemetery unique and therefore meaningful? Is it the view, or who's buried there? Why did the next-of-kin choose this particular location?
3. Significance of the day.
 - a. Is there something significant about the date the decedent is being buried? For instance, is it Memorial Day or Veteran's Day?

From a literary perspective, "the setting can actually take on more prominence and become an actor, influencing the action, driving the storyline, advancing the plot."³ Consider the following introduction by CH (CPT) Clark Sneed:

These hallowed stones tell the story of our country one name at a time, the stories of men and women who answered the call to defend our nation, our constitution, and our national interests here at home and around the world. They have answered that call in times of war, but also in times of peace so that you and I might enjoy those freedoms envisioned by our forefathers. These freedoms have often come at a terribly high price. There are over 640 acres that make up Arlington National Cemetery, and over 400,000 Americans have been laid to rest on these grounds. But no one can buy a place here. Each plot must be earned. **(Decedent's Rank and Name)** has earned his/her place here.

Let us pray.

You can sense the similarities between the above two introductions. However, each fits the unique personality of the minister. CH (CPT) Jason Hohnberger often begins with:

This is the place where Valor rests.

This is the place where our nation has been gathering since May 13th, 1864, to render our highest honors to our fallen warriors and true patriots.

This is the final resting place for privates, presidents, sergeants, generals and **(Decedent's Rank and Name)**.

³ Capps, Ron. Writing War: A Guide To Telling Your Own Story, The Veterans Writing Project, 2013, p. 24.

This is Arlington National Cemetery. No square mile in the United States is more sacred.

Welcome to your family's place in history.

These hallowed stones and marbled walls stand as a lasting tribute to over 400,000 Americans. Each came from different places and different backgrounds but all had one vital trait in common. When our Nation cried out in times of need and said "Whom shall I send?" "Who will go for me?" They all raised their hands and said "Here am I! Send me; I'll go."

Today as you look out on this field of the faithful, this white cloud of witnesses that surrounds us, I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned. And certainly we know **(Decedent's Rank and Name)** has earned his/her place here today.

"This is the place" can be said about any number of places, but when actually sitting in that place, "this is the place" can make the setting come alive adding to the overall effectiveness of the funeral service.

CH (CPT) Matt Madison uses the following introduction when performing graveside services:

Welcome to Arlington National Cemetery. This is where valor rests. This is where our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots for over 150 years. This is where over 400,000 Americans are now buried. This is sacred ground. And as you look upon this most sacred place, with its gently rolling hills and rows of picturesque headstones, I encourage you to remember this: no plot here in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased; each must be earned. We're here today to honor **(Decedent's Rank and Name)** who certainly earned his/her place here on these hallowed grounds.

CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh uses the following introduction:

Welcome to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen patriots. These grounds are distinguished by the hallowed stones and granite walls which stand as a lasting tribute to the men and women who have answered the call of their country. Buried here are more than 400,000 American patriots who have stepped forward in times of war and peace to defend our nation and our constitution both at home and around the world. These men and women have given of themselves so that you and I might continue to enjoy the freedoms and liberties that our forefathers envisioned for this great nation. Such is the life and legacy of our brother/sister **(decendent's name)** whom we lay to rest today.

Again, you can see how these statements parallel one another. Each is different because we Chaplains performing the services are different. Even so, most are comprised of one or more of the following elements:

1. **A greeting of the day:** “Good morning/Good afternoon”
2. **A personal introduction:** “My name is...”
3. **A welcome introducing and/or describing the setting as seen through the eyes of the minister performing the service:** “Welcome to...” or “These hallowed stones tell the story...”

Remember, while performing a funeral service something is happening. Something is happening in the cemetery, and something is happening in the lives of those present. But, what is happening? You’re the one speaking. Part of our responsibility is to inform those present about what is taking place around them *where* they are. For instance, “Welcome to Arlington National Cemetery *where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots.*” What’s taking place *where* the family is seated? *Why* are they present? *Why* have all these people converged on this one place in this one moment of time? *Why* are they all looking to you the minister? *Where* and *why* should be considered when framing your introduction.

4. **Each closes with an opening prayer:** “Please join me in prayer” or “Let us pray.”
5. **Each also serves to captivate the attention of those present.**

Earlier on, not knowing what I know today, my introduction consisted of, “Good afternoon. My name is Pastor Ron Fisher. Please join me in prayer.” But no one shared with me then what I’m sharing with you now. There is a more meaningful way to honor those we bury, as well as, those who are mourning the loss of this person in their lives. This makes this approach worth learning and applying. Let’s continue.

If performing a service for a highly decorated combat veteran, I’ll begin with this quote:

It’s been written: We could go for a generation without doctors, and it would get ugly if you were injured or sick, but civilization would survive. We could go for a generation without engineers and mechanics, and things would break down, but civilization would continue. We could even go a generation without school teachers. But if we ever went a single generation without the warrior who is willing to confront human aggression every day, then within the span of that one generation, life as we know it would simply cease to exist.⁴

(Decedent’s Rank and Name) was one such warrior, and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life and military service with you today.

⁴ Grossman, Dave and Loren W. Christensen, On Combat, Warrior Science Publications; 3rd edition (October 1, 2008).

My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years...

Other times I've substituted the term "warrior" for "warrior-leader" depending upon the decedent's military experience and military occupation specialty.

CH (CPT) John Scott once began a graveside funeral service with:

Who would choose the warrior's life? He willingly goes where others are unwilling to go. He willingly forfeits privileges that others refuse to live without. He willingly sacrifices many of his personal freedoms so others don't have to. His lifestyle is undesirable; his chosen profession often avoided. Yet we revere the warrior, and only God knows what our society would look like today without men (and women) of this vocation. **(Decedent's rank and name)** chose this life, not because he was a man of great courage, but because he was a man of great faith. My name is Chaplain John Scott, and I am honored to celebrate **(decedent's rank and name)** life and military service with you today. Please join me in prayer.

CH (CPT) Jason Hohnberger uses the following introduction when performing services for Soldiers who have committed suicide:

On April 23, 1910, while in Paris, France, Theodore Roosevelt said:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.⁵

(Decedent's Rank and Name) is a man who lived his life in the arena. My name is Chaplain Hohnberger and I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where...

CH (CPT) John Scott once crafted his remarks for a Soldier who committed suicide around the theme "remember". He writes:

It's hard to say goodbye to someone who has touched so many hearts, who has made a powerful impact on so many lives, and is gone much too soon. **(Decedent's rank and name)** is such a person.

⁵ Excerpt from the speech "Citizenship In A Republic" delivered at the Sorbonne, in Paris, France on 23 April, 1910.

While his physical presence is no longer with us, you have the gifts that he left within each one of you; these will remain. All you have to do is remember.

Remember that **(decedent's name)** was the highly intelligent youngest brother with an insatiable desire to be challenged.

Remember that he excelled at any task to which he put his mind

Remember that **(decedent's rank and name)** was a Soldier. He answered our nation's call and served with honor throughout the on-going Global War on Terrorism which included three tours of duty in Iraq. He is one of the few, now less than one-percent of our population, who volunteered to sacrifice some of his own freedoms that others might be free. People such as **(decedent's rank and name)** are the foundation of the American way of life.

Remember that **(decedent's name)** was a **(Company name)**, physically fit, competent, and courageous.

Remember that **(decedent's first name)** was a dear friend, a little brother, and a beloved son. The bonds he developed with his fellow Soldiers will never be forgotten. The pride and love he fostered in his family will never be taken away.

This family was provided with very clear instruction on what to do in light of this unexpected loss in their lives. They were encouraged to *remember*.

On a separate occasion CH (CPT) Jason Hohnberger introduced his funeral service with:

Theodore Roosevelt, the only American President to receive the Medal of Honor, knew that it took a person who loved peace *and* righteousness to preserve our freedoms. In 1913 he wrote:

Love of peace is common among weak, short-sighted, timid, and lazy persons; and on the other hand courage is found among many men of evil temper and bad character. Neither quality shall by itself avail. Justice among the nations of mankind, and the uplifting of humanity, can be brought about only by those strong and daring men who with wisdom love peace, but who love righteousness more than peace."⁶

My name is Chaplain Jason Hohnberger and I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored men and women who with wisdom "loved peace," but who "loved righteousness more than peace." These hallowed stones and marbled walls stand as a lasting tribute to over 400,000 Americans. Each came from different places, different backgrounds; but all had one vital trait in common. When our Nation cried out in times of need and said "Whom shall I send?" "Who will go for me?" They all raised their hands and said "Here am I! Send me!"

⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, foreword of Autobiography, 1913.

(Decedent's Rank and Name) raised his/her hand, and today we honor his/her life, commitment, and military service.

Another tag line to contemplate is, "This is the place where valor rests. Your loved one now joins the ranks of this great cloud of witnesses." While not all cemeteries qualify as places where "valor rests", military cemeteries certainly do. Irrespective of the cemetery itself, all decedents do in fact join a "great cloud of witnesses" which may in fact be worth noting if the gravesite is surrounded by hundreds of other grave markers. Do those buried there share a commonality outside of being deceased? If so, this may be worth noting.

While we have all used various introductions, the one commonality is that we all commit the introduction to memory so as not to take away from the overall effect a properly executed introduction can have on a funeral service. Mumbling, reading a script, or appearing unfamiliar with the material and unsure or uncomfortable takes away from the sanctity of this event and the effectiveness of your delivery. So what we discover then is an introductory template that may look like this:

Good **(morning/afternoon)**. My name is **(name of minister)**, and I want to welcome you to **(name of cemetery)** where for nearly **(years of operation)** our **(community, state, nation)** has honored her **(fallen warriors and patriots, citizens, dearly departed)**. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully **(served our community, state, nation)**. There are over **(number of Americans, number of citizens)** buried here. As you look out on the rows upon rows of headstones, each stone a brick in the foundation of **(freedom upon which we stand today, life as we experience it in this community)**, I encourage you to remember this: **(final thought)**.

Please join me in prayer.

Now, what if you were tasked to perform a funeral at The Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery in Killeen, Texas? A simple Google search while utilizing the above approach and the aforementioned introductions as templates yields the following:

Good afternoon. My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I want to welcome you to The Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery. Since 2006, the state of Texas has honored its fallen warriors and patriots here. Spread across 174 acres, these sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our Nation and will one day provide the final resting place for more than 50,000 of our country's military heroes and their families. As you look out over these rolling hills and picturesque headstones, I encourage you to remember this: No plot on this sacred ground can be purchased; each must be earned.⁷ And we know **(Decedent's Rank and Name)** has earned his place among us here today.

⁷ http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMBFVQ_Central_Texas_State_Veterans_Cemetery_Killeen_TX and <http://www.glo.texas.gov/vlb/veterans-benefits/veterans-cemeteries/killeen-cemetery.html>

Or let's say you've been called to perform a funeral at Rose Hill Memorial Park in Corpus Christi, Texas. Exploring the Rose Hill Memorial Park webpage⁸ while utilizing the same approach, I wrote the following:

Good morning. My name is Pastor Ron Fisher, and I want to welcome you to Rose Hill Memorial Park where for over _____ years, families and friends have come together to remember their loved ones and to reflect upon both the gift and brevity of life. Spread over _____ acres of rolling green lawns, majestic willow trees, and lakeside vistas, this cemetery serves as the final resting place for over **(number of those buried)** of our community's dearly departed. As you look out over these sprawling lawns and picturesque headstones, I encourage you to remember this: Death is not the inevitable end for one who is in Christ but a necessary passageway from this life into eternity.

Let us pray.

Notice there was:

1. **A greeting of the day:** "Good afternoon." "Good morning."
2. **A personal introduction:** "My name is..."
3. **A welcome introducing and/or describing the setting as seen through the eyes of the minister performing the service:** "I want to welcome you to The Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery..." and "I want to welcome you to Rose Hill Memorial Park where..."
4. **Each closes with an opening prayer:** "Please join me in prayer." "Let us pray."
5. **Each also serves to captivate the attention of those present.**

Again, this is not about having a perfect template; the above template is far from perfect. It's not supposed to make your workload lighter either but rather to introduce you to a different approach to beginning a funeral service. This approach requires greater consideration, deeper prayer, and more work. But it's worth the effort.

We'll consider the importance of a well-crafted opening prayer next.

QUESTION FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. How were the *where* and *why* addressed in the above samples?

⁸ <http://www.rosehillmp.com/what-we-do/memorial-property>

THE OPENING PRAYER

My go to opening prayer is:

Lord Jesus, draw us closer to Yourself; bless us with the comfort and peace that only Your presence can provide.

Your Word tells us that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”⁹ So Lord, bring the morning, and with it the joy You’ve promised to those who love You and eagerly await Your second coming. Amen.

Notice this prayer is directed to a *specific* someone - Jesus. It contains *requests* in keeping with the emotional state of those grieving: *draw us closer to Yourself, bless us, bring the morning... the joy*. It contains a biblical *affirmation and truth*: *weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning*; those *who love You and eagerly await Your second coming* will experience having their needs met. This prayer communicates some *core truths* of the Christian faith: Jesus is *Lord, comfort and peace that only You can provide, the joy you’ve promised to those who love You and eagerly await Your second coming*.

I’m not suggesting this is the ideal opening prayer. What I am suggesting, however, is that when crafting your opening prayer you should consider the following:

- 1 Who is the prayer addressed to? Be specific.
- 2 What are you requesting?
- 3 Is there a biblical affirmation and truth expressed through your prayer?
- 4 What core Christian truths and convictions are you communicating to those who may not be praying with you but rather listening to your prayer?

I encourage you to think through your prayer, pray through your prayer, then write your prayer out versus “winging it” at the graveside. Earlier we said preaching our prayers makes one wonder whether or not we’re actually praying, preaching, or performing. Don’t preach your prayers; just pray. But consider the above when crafting your opening prayer.

QUESTION FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. Can you draft a prayer that addresses points one through four above? Do so now.
2. For a more liturgical opening prayer, consider the following from CH (CPT) Ted Randall, “O God of grace and glory, we remember before You this day our **brother/sister (decedent’s name)**. We thank You for giving **him/her** to us to know and love as a companion on our earthly pilgrimage. In Your boundless compassion, console us who mourn. Give us faith to see in death the gate of eternal life so that in quiet confidence we may continue our course on this earth until, by Your call, we are reunited with those who have gone before us - through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

⁹ Psalm 30:5, NKJV

THE EULOGY

After the opening prayer we transition into the eulogy. This can be a real challenge, and opinions vary as to how much to actually say about a person. It's particularly peculiar when you don't know the decedent while everyone else present does. Essentially, they know you don't know the decedent, so if you're not careful you can come across disingenuous if you attempt to discuss the decedent's life as though you were actually acquainted with her. The principle is this: *Don't feign familiarity*. On the other hand, we should attempt to personalize the service as much as possible which requires us to address the decedent's life. The questions we should consider then are:

1. What personal remarks are appropriate?
2. How much should I discuss about the decedent's life, past accomplishments, trade, career, aspirations, and the like?

Remember, in most cases those present are there because they knew the decedent personally. Unless you are the decedent's pastor, family minister, family, friend, or neighbor, you won't know the decedent which means you're simply taking time to tell those present about a person they already know. See the irony? Some ministers deal with this by reading the obituary out loud. However, is this really the best approach? It's likely those present at the service read the same clipping. Reading the obituary can appear lazy. This is not to say we shouldn't use the obituary to write our own eulogies, but if you're going to present the eulogy, you need to do more than just stumble through a piece of writing that often times isn't that well written.

When performing a military service, focus on the date of birth, date of death, age at death, military rank, combat deployments, military occupational specialty (MOS – the decedent's job in the military), particular awards or military achievements meriting mention, particularly notable assignments or time served with notable units (10th Mountain Division, 82nd Airborne Division, Special Forces Group, and the like), and total years of service. When visiting with the next-of-kin prior to the service, ask for a copy of the decedent's service record, specifically the DD214. This is where you'll discover most of this information.

When assigned a funeral, begin by performing a Google search on the decedent's first name, middle initial, and last name followed by the term "obituary". For instance, if assigned a funeral for Command Sergeant Major Jim C. Smith, begin by searching, "Jim C. Smith Obituary".¹⁰ Try to learn something about him via the online obituary before phoning the family. If no obituary exists, call the family and get around to asking if they've written an obituary. Also, be certain to ask the family about Jim's military experience and career. After visiting with them, you might consider beginning the eulogy like this:

Command Sergeant Major Jim C. Smith was born on November 13, 1928, and...

Was CSM Smith a Christian? Did he *die*, or did he *pass on*? Did he *pass on*, or did he *step out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next*? If CSM Smith was not a Christian, say:

¹⁰ You can also search www.legacy.com.

Command Sergeant Major Jim C. Smith was born on November 13, 1928, and died on December 10, 2012, at the age of 84.

If CSM Smith was a Christian, consider:

Command Sergeant Major Jim C. Smith was born on November 13, 1928, and stepped out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next on December 10, 2012, at the age of 84.

Then continue with:

This Korean War and Vietnam Combat Veteran served our nation honorably and with heroic distinction for over 21 years.

His awards include: multiple Bronze Star Medals and Meritorious Service Medals, the Korean Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Ribbon, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Device, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Purple Heart.

It's important for awards to be mentioned in their order of merit. This is not as difficult as it sounds. You can use sites like www.rackbuilder.armyawards.com to learn what order the awards should be mentioned in.¹¹ Even though the Purple Heart is not listed last in the order of merit, I name it last in order to include the following from Wikipedia.com:

The Purple Heart is unlike any other military award. The original Purple Heart was established by George Washington on August 7, 1782. The actual order includes the phrase, "Let it be known that he who wears the military order of the Purple Heart has given of his blood in the defense of his homeland and shall forever be revered by his fellow countrymen." While many have served our nation admirably, Command Sergeant Major Smith literally shed his blood for the freedoms we hold dear today.

Remember, you're the one writing the service. Pausing to emphasize a particular award like the Purple Heart serves to honor the memory of the deceased and to stress the reality of his or her sacrifice.

If CSM Smith was also Airborne and Ranger qualified with a Combat Infantryman's Badge, add:

He also earned the Combat Infantryman's Badge, the Parachutist Badge, and the coveted Ranger Tab.

¹¹ Once on this page, click on "Standard Ribbons" then find the "EZSEARCH" box about a quarter of the page down on the left. Begin typing in the awards or award abbreviations in this box. The award will flash on the screen. Double click it. Another box will open regarding "Oak Leaf Clusters". This is for multiple awards. So, if the decedent has two Bronze Star Medals, that's one Bronze Star Medal with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster. Click on save. This will take you back to the original page where you can repeat the process. Each time you go through this, the ribbon rack will be updated and can be found to the lower right of the "EZSEARCH" box. You may now run your cursor over these awards to determine the order in which they should be referenced.

A graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School makes that person “Ranger Qualified” but not necessarily a U.S. Army Ranger unless he served with a Ranger Battalion. When trying to understand correct military protocol and terminology, speak with your Command Sergeant Major if you’re a Chaplain or a military retiree if you’re a civilian pastor. Remember, there’s safety in a multitude of counselors.¹² After the military portion has been addressed, it’s no longer necessary to refer to the decedent by his rank or title and last name. Instead, transition into briefly discussing the person using his or her first name. Focus your remarks on character traits versus his or her profession. Look to capture three to four bullets. I’m interested in how long he was married (if applicable), what kind of man he was, what he valued in life, what he stood for, what he’ll be remembered for most, and whether or not he was a Christian. For example, using the same sample as before, we might continue:

But Jim was much more than a career non-Commissioned Officer. He was also a husband, a father, and a grandfather. Jim and his bride Mrs. Julie Smith were married for 60 years. Theirs was a romance that spanned well over half a century. This says something about the character of this man, as well as, the unyielding devotion of his wife. Jim loved the Army, and he loved his family. Jim could be a hard man, but he always sought to better the lives of those around him, especially his children. He was dearly loved, and I know he will be dearly missed.

Notice the transitions:

Jim was much more than a _____ (a career non-Commissioned Officer, a career Soldier, warrior-leader), etc. He was also a _____, _____, and _____. (Husband, Father, and Grandfather) or (wonderful human being, gifted artist, and devout Baptist), etc.

You can also write something simpler like:

Jim was many things over the course of his life. After the military, he...

After determining he and his wife were married for 60 years, I continue by adding:

Theirs was a romance that spanned well over half a century. This says something about the character of this man, as well as, the unyielding devotion of his wife.

What if the situation was different though and they had only been married 31 years? I might say:

Theirs was a romance that spanned over a quarter of a century. This says something about the character of this man, as well as, the unyielding devotion of his wife.

Or:

Theirs was a romance that spanned over three decades.

¹² Proverbs 11:14

What if the marriage wasn't such a romance after all? What if CSM Smith struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder? What if the marriage was challenging for Mrs. Smith? Consider:

And though not without their challenges, their marriage spanned over three decades. This says something about these two, particularly about the devotion of Jim's wife.

Did you notice the word "romance" was replaced with "marriage"? These are stock statements that serve to honor the widowed spouse. Such statements acknowledge their life partnership while affirming their individual worth and commitment to the relationship. Picture the scene. Mrs. Smith is sitting there a few feet away from you when you say in front of all those present who likely know the reality of the marriage as well, "And though not without their challenges, their marriage spanned over three decades. This says something about these two, particularly about the devotion of Jim's wife." That last line beginning with the word *particularly* has the potential to minister and affirm Jim's widow as it publicly acknowledges not just her difficulties in life and marriage but more importantly her devotion to her deceased husband.

Let's say we also learn that CSM Smith is survived by his daughters Nicole, Michelle, Nikki, and Elizabeth, his son James, his grandchildren Johnny, Frankie, and Gloria, and one great-grandchild Oscar. Notice also that CSM Smith was born in 1928. This means he is part of the "Greatest Generation." The Great Depression took place between 1930 and 1945. Those born before and into this period of history, especially those who are World War II veterans comprise this Greatest Generation. So, we can conclude the eulogy by saying:

Jim leaves in the wake of his life a legacy that includes his Bride, five children, three grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He also remains one of the last of those considered the Great Generation this country has ever known, and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life and military service with you this afternoon.

Notice that even though we had the names of the surviving family members we didn't use them. There's no reason to. By not saying each name, you don't have to worry about mispronouncing names, including spouses' names, and so on. Yet, by acknowledging the number of survivors, we still recognize those who are in attendance. If Jim was born later though and fought in Vietnam for instance instead of the Korean War, we can transition with:

Jim leaves in the wake of his life a legacy that includes his Bride, five children, three grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He was by all accounts a remarkable man (or extraordinary person/individual), and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life and military service with you this afternoon.

Or, we could simplify this even further by saying:

Jim leaves in the wake of his life a legacy that includes all of you present here today, but not just you. This legacy also includes all those who were impacted by his life and

leadership. Jim was by all accounts an extraordinary individual, and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life and military service with you this afternoon.

Now we're ready to transition into the homily. But let's stay with the eulogy for a little bit longer. What if the decedent is an Army wife with no military experience of her own? What if you're tasked with performing a funeral for a dependent? Essentially, we're conducting a civilian funeral service. All of the above still applies with the exception of the military experience. Let's say that we're now performing a service for Mrs. Smith the deceased spouse of CSM Smith. CH (MAJ) Brad Lewis provides the "Two Classes of Citizens" script below:

Mrs. Julie Smith was born on October 10, 1928, and stepped out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next on December 15, 2012, at the age of 84.

Now, there are two classes of citizens buried here in Arlington National Cemetery: Warriors and Patriots. Warriors like Command Sergeant Major Smith and patriots like his Julie.

Whether Jim was deployed into combat or away on routine training assignments, Julie was fighting a different kind of war at home in his absence. She was waging a war with neighbors, and teachers, and grocery store clerks all the while attempting to retain some sense of normalcy for those in her household. Julie was a very special woman; Julie was an Army Wife.

And while we don't have any awards to present to such selfless women, no campaign medals or gallantry crosses, the reality is that we who serve and fight would never be able to do so without the women who commit themselves to serving us and our families, and in their own significant way, our Country.

Again, notice the stock statement: *two classes of citizens buried here in (name of the cemetery): Warriors and Patriots*. Could this not be said about all military and veteran cemeteries? Consider using this statement when you know you're dealing with a real Army wife, someone who identifies herself with this organization. We can continue by transitioning with:

But Julie wasn't just a patriot. She was also a mother and grandmother. She loved her family. And Julie loved having a good time. Her greatest passion was entertaining others; she loved to dance and put on shows and used this unique gift to serve others including the elderly in nursing homes.

Julie leaves in the wake of her life a legacy that includes five children, three grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. And she is survived by many nieces and nephews. Julie also remains one of the last of those considered the Greatest Generation this country has ever known, and I am honored to celebrate her life with you this afternoon.

Another approach is taken from an obituary found online which reads:

Certain things "come with the territory" of being a military wife. Julie quickly developed the skills needed by the chief of staff of a military family: inoculation scheduling, troop movement, supply line management, protocol, entertainment, and coordinating dress of the day. Julie could totally unpack, decorate, and host a party within a week of arrival at new quarters. Everywhere she lived, Julie learned new cuisines and made new friends whom she kept close through frequent cards and letters.

Again, this statement can apply to any number of military wives and their unique role within the military family. CH (CPT) Jason Hohnberger often uses the following when addressing military spouses:

Soldiers have a saying, "The strength of a nation is its Army. The strength of the Army is its Soldiers, but the strength of its Soldiers..." are the ones like Julie who stand behind them. How appropriate to honor the investment that she made in our freedom here at Arlington National Cemetery today.

The author of Proverbs 31 said it best...

He then reads an applicable portion of Proverbs 31 taken from verses 10-31. CH (CPT) John Scott uses the following when speaking of military wives:

Very few citizens will ever wear a United States military uniform, currently less than one percent of our population. Those who don a uniform to defend freedoms across the globe are part of an elite few. However, there is another group even smaller whose service is not as apparent, but just as important, the military wife. She takes on challenges each day that other wives could never imagine facing. She serves her husband, family, other Soldiers and friends in such a way as to make it possible for her husband to fight. These women are less than half of one percent of our nation's population and yet they are truly the cornerstones of American society. **(Decedent's name)** exemplified such service and sacrifice for her husband, her family, and our country.

If, however, Mrs. Smith did not identify herself with being an Army wife or married CSM Smith after he retired, you can approach the eulogy this way:

Mrs. Julie Smith was born on October 10, 1928, and stepped out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next on December 15, 2012, at the age of 84.

There are two classes of citizens buried here in Arlington National Cemetery: Warriors and Patriots. Warriors like Command Sergeant Major Smith and patriots like his Julie.

But Julie wasn't just a patriot. She was also a mother and grandmother...

Did you notice the transition? *Julie was a patriot, but not just a patriot.* More importantly, she was a mother and grandmother. Then, focus your remarks not upon her unique service to our country but rather her unique service in the home and community.

Are you getting the sense of what we're trying to accomplish here? It's not our role to retell the decedent's entire life history, where he graduated high school, where she attended college, and so forth. The family can discuss these and any number of other details during a reception following the service if they like. So keep it simple. Also, if the decedent is a dependent spouse and is being interred in the columbarium, the entire service will take place at the niche.

Now, if CSM Smith was a particularly difficult man but a professed Christian nonetheless, consider:

My favorite title for Jesus in the Bible is not "Son of God" but rather "Friend of Sinners." Jim was not without his issues or challenges; even so, he had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that changes everything.

This statement then serves as the segue into the homily. But what if CSM and Mrs. Smith are being interred together? We call this a "double interment". When performing these services, consider approaching the eulogy like this:

Command Sergeant Major Jim C. Smith was born on November 13, 1928, and stepped out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next on December 10, 2012, at the age of 84.

This Korean War and Vietnam Combat Veteran served our Nation honorably and with heroic distinction for over 21 years.

His awards include: multiple Bronze Star Medals and Meritorious Service Medals, the Korean Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Ribbon, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Device, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Purple Heart.

His bride Julie, who we also honor here today, was born on October 10, 1928, and went to be with the Lord on December 15, 2012, at the age of 84. Married 60 years, theirs was a romance that spanned well over half a century. This says something about the character of this man, as well as, the unyielding devotion of his wife.

While Jim enjoyed yard work and spending time with his local VFW Chapter, Julie enjoyed arts and crafts and was an avid reader. They loved this organization, our country, and their family.

They leave in the wake of their lives a legacy that includes: five children, three grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. They are also among the last of those considered the Greatest Generation this country has ever known, and we in uniform are honored to celebrate their lives and Jim's military service with you this afternoon.

Sometimes we're asked to perform ceremonies for children. How do you approach a funeral service for an infant or young child?

Good morning. I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our Nation has honored her fallen Warriors and Patriots. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our Nation. There are over 400,000 Americans buried here. But, Warriors and Patriots aren't the only ones interred here; sometimes their children precede them. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, draw us closer to Yourself; bless us with the comfort and peace that only Your presence can provide.

Your Word tells us that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."¹³ So, Lord, bring the morning, and with it the joy You've promised to those who love You and eagerly await Your second coming. Amen.

(Child's name) was born on March 17th...and slipped out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next a mere 7 days later on the 23rd.

The transitional statement: *But, Warriors and Patriots aren't the only ones interred here; sometimes their children precede them*, enables the minister to address the reality of why we've gathered together while moving into the opening prayer. After speaking the baby's name and using the phrase *slipped out of the shadow of this life* as opposed to *died*, we can soften the tenor of the service while transitioning into the homily.

Now, let's tie it all together imagining that we're performing a funeral service for CSM Smith alone whose wife Julie informed us that he was in fact a Christian.

Good afternoon. My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our nation. There are over 400,000 Americans buried here. As you look out on the rows upon rows of headstones, each stone a brick in the foundation of freedom upon which we stand today, I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned.

Please join me in prayer.

Lord Jesus, draw us closer to Yourself; bless us with the comfort and peace that only Your presence can provide.

¹³ Psalm 30:5

Your Word tells us that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”¹⁴ So Lord, bring the morning, and with it the joy You’ve promised to those who love You and eagerly await Your second coming. Amen.

Command Sergeant Major Jim C. Smith was born on November 13, 1928, and stepped out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next on December 10, 2012, at the age of 84.

This Korean War and Vietnam Combat Veteran served our Nation honorably and with heroic distinction for over 21 years. His awards include: multiple Bronze Star Medals and Meritorious Service Medals, the Korean Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Ribbon, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Device, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Purple Heart.

Now the Purple Heart is unlike any other military award. The original Purple Heart was established by George Washington on August 7, 1782. The actual order includes the phrase, "Let it be known that he who wears the military order of the Purple Heart has given of his blood in the defense of his homeland and shall forever be revered by his fellow countrymen." While many have served our Nation admirably, Command Sergeant Major Smith literally shed his blood for the freedoms we hold dear today.

He also earned the Combat Infantryman’s Badge, the Parachutist Badge, and the coveted Ranger Tab.

But Jim was much more than a career non-Commissioned Officer. He was also a husband, a father, and a grandfather. Jim and his bride Mrs. Julie Smith were married for 60 years. Theirs was a romance that spanned well over half a century. This says something about the character of this man, as well as, the unyielding devotion of his wife.

Jim loved the Army, and he loved his family. Jim could be a hard man, but he always sought to better the lives of those around him, especially his children. He was dearly loved, and I know he will be dearly missed.

Jim leaves in the wake of his life a legacy that includes his Bride, five children, three grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He also remains one of the last of those considered the Great Generation this country has ever known, and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life and military service with you this afternoon.

At this point, we are now ready to present the homily.

¹⁴ Psalm 30:5, NKJV

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. When crafting my eulogy, I'm interested in:
 - a. How long was the decedent married? (if applicable)
 - b. What kind of person was the decedent?
 - c. What did the decedent value in life?
 - d. What did the decedent stand for?
 - e. What will the decedent be remembered for most?
 - f. Was the decedent a Christian?

When speaking with the next-of-kin:

- 1) What are you most interested in learning? Why?
- 2) What questions do you most often ask? Why do ask those specific questions?

THE HOMILY

You can craft your homily around a text, a theme, or a perceived need. You'll find examples of all three here. You've probably heard the old adage, "Funerals are for the living, not the dead." This is true. However, your remarks should rightly reflect the reality of the decedent's life and faith. Don't deify the dead, and avoid talking or preaching people into Heaven.

There are two go to homilies I rely on for graveside services: the "Ephesians 2 Flip" and the "Matthew 14:12 Flip". Around the office we began referring to our transitional passages and remarks as "flips". There's nothing irreverent about the name; it just sounds catchier than "transition". Essentially, that's all a flip is though; it's the turn in the message moving the action into the homily. With the Ephesians 2 Flip and the Matthew 14:12 Flip, I can perform nearly all graveside services regardless of the circumstances. Let's explore these now.

CH (CPT) Jason Hohnberger first introduced the "Ephesians 2 Flip" to our team. It begins like this:

But Friends, not only have we come together today to reflect upon the life and sacrifices of a great American, more importantly, we gather today to celebrate the sacrifice that was made for him so that he might have the gift of eternal life.

In Ephesians 2:8-9¹⁵, the Apostle Paul writes, "We are saved by grace through faith and not by works so no man or woman may ever boast before the presence of the living God." Rather, by placing our trust, not in a religion, but in a person – Jesus – believing that He died for our sins and rose again from the dead, we have the promise of eternal life. And, in this place where the fullness of this life is experienced - Heaven - the Bible tells us, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."¹⁶ And for those of us who are in Christ, who have yielded our lives to this Person, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day, we too will be reunited with all those that we have both loved and lost.

Afterwards, we can add:

The Psalm we pray now, we do not pray for Jim but for ourselves – Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd...

Consider committing the Ephesians 2 Flip to memory. It's a familiar passage to many Christians, affirms the core beliefs of evangelical Christianity, and preaches well. But, what if the decedent was not a Christian? How might we transition into the homily and what would we say when we did? This is where the "Matthew 14:12 Flip"¹⁷ comes into play. Since the funeral

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." NKJV

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:9

¹⁷ Matthew 14:12, "Then his (John the Baptist's) disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus." NKJV

service is for the living and not the dead, and the decedent was not a Christian, you can simply move past this reality with a message addressing those in attendance by saying:

Though Jim lived to be 84 years of age, when you lose someone you love no amount of years ever seems quite long enough to fill the void created by a loved one's absence. So, what will you do now with your grief?

In the 14th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew we discover a group of men who are grieving the passing of their loved one, yet they do something significant in the midst of their grief that I submit to you for your consideration. The Bible tells us they "took up the body of their loved one and buried it; then they went and told Jesus." There is no higher way to honor the memory of any Soldier than to hold a service here on these hallowed grounds. You have done well to come to Arlington, but what mainly concerns you now is between Christ and your own souls. And like those men in Matthew's Gospel, I encourage you to go to Christ yourselves and to spread your sorrows there before Him. If you do, you may just find Jim there with Him.

The Psalm we pray now, we do not pray for Jim but for ourselves – Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd...

You may also be able to incorporate more personal comments into the graveside homily like this:

Though Jim remained on the move to the very end, sought to live life to the fullest, passed with no regrets, and lived to be 84 years of age, when you lose someone you love, these truths and those years just never quite seem to be enough to fill the void created by a loved one's absence. So, what will you do now with your grief?

The Matthew 14:12 Flip can serve you in a variety of ways whether you're officiating a service for a non-Christian, a marginal Christian, or simply seeking a way to challenge those present with a tangible course of action.

Theologically, the term "may" in the last statement of this flip is significant. I realize they "may not" find Jim there in the presence of Christ as well. However, encouraging a grieving person to take their sorrows to Jesus is always a great course of action. To go looking for Jim and find Jesus in the process is also great news.

There are many other flips available to you in Appendix 1 of this book (p. 59). These too have been tested over time and serve as the go to homilies for other members of our team.

Before moving into the committal prayer and military honors portion of the graveside service, let's pause to consider the "Liturgy of Hollywood".

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. How do you define a “flip”?
2. How might crafting a number of “flips” serve you when called upon to perform a graveside service?

THE COMMITTAL PRAYER

There are certain elements of a funeral people expect to hear. Due to Hollywood and the dramatizations of funerals on the big screen, those in attendance often expect to hear “And yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...” (Psalm 23) and the closing committal remarks, “From earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” For some, not hearing these statements means they haven’t attended a *real* funeral. This is one reason to consider closing your graveside service with the 23rd Psalm.

If using this Psalm, consider reading it or to at least appear as though you’re reading it even if you have it memorized. Even though I know the Psalm by heart, I always bow my head and at least appear as though I’m reading it so as to avoid giving the impression that I do this so much I don’t even have to look at my book.

Concluding the Psalm with, “...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord my God forevermore. Amen.” Say:

I just want to encourage you. If Jim is in Christ and Christ is in you, then Jim can’t be far.

Let us pray: In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our brother Jim, and we commit his body to the ground – earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.

The above transition into the committal prayer, “I just want to encourage you. If Jim is in Christ and Christ is in you, then Jim can’t be far” always serves to console grieving Christian families. If Jim is not a Christian, however, simply say “Please join me in prayer” and transition directly into the committal prayer.

While reciting the Psalm I still face the family. When I offer the committal prayer, however, I turn my body raising my right hand forward over the casket, but I never turn my back to the family. This is important. I simply turn to the side.

If Jim’s body is in an urn, the committal prayer changes to, “...and we commit his *ashes* to the ground – earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.” Or, if the committal is being prayed in the columbarium, say, “...and we commit his *ashes* to *their resting place* – earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.”

Notice the distinctions here: *commend* comes before *commit*, *body* as opposed to *ashes*, *ground* juxtaposed to *his resting place*. I keep “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” even while at the columbarium due to this Liturgy of Hollywood.

Now, for military graveside services military honors follow the committal prayer. If, however, a veteran’s ashes are being placed in the columbarium, the committal prayer will take place at the actual niche *after* the military honors have already been conducted. We’ll discuss military honors next.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. I transition into the committal prayer by saying, “I just want to encourage you. If **(decedent’s name)** is in Christ and Christ is in you, then **(decedent’s name)** can’t be far.” How do you transition into the committal prayer?
2. What committal prayer do you normally use at the close of a graveside service?
3. Why do you use this particular committal prayer?

MILITARY HONORS

After saying the following:

I just want to encourage you. If Jim is in Christ and Christ is in you, then Jim can't be far.

Let us pray: In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our brother Jim, and we commit his body to the ground – earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.

Turning to face the family again (remember, they've been to my side, not my back), I say:

For our comrade in arms Command Sergeant Major Smith our nation bestows military honors. In life he honored the flag, and in death the flag will honor him.

After saying this I step back out of the way allowing the non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) to step forward to the head of the casket. When he salutes, I salute. When he orders his salute, I order my salute. The firing party will fire three volleys. This is not a "21 gun Salute" but rather three rounds fired by seven riflemen.

As an active duty Army Chaplain, I can say, "For our comrade in arms..." However, a civilian pastor introducing this might say simply, "For Command Sergeant Major Smith our nation bestows military honors. In life he honored the flag, and in death the flag will honor him." The funeral representative will in all likelihood handle this portion for the pastor inviting those present to "Please rise for military honors".

After the firing of volleys, "Taps" is immediately played by a bugler. Once this is complete, the Honor Guard will fold the flag passing it to the NCOIC. The NCOIC holds the flag at chest level so the Soldier who handed it to him can salute. Afterwards, the NCOIC returns to the head of the casket. The Honor Guard will then march off site. When the Honor Guard steps off, I step forward to stand at attention one arm's length directly behind the NCOIC. The NCOIC does an about face and extends the flag to me. Do not *grab* the flag from the NCOIC. Let him extend it to you. Then, *left hand over right*, take the flag from the NCOIC. Now, I hold the flag at chest level so the NCOIC can present honors (salute). It's important to note here that the point of the flag should be pointing towards you the Chaplain. Also, no person who is not in military uniform should ever present the flag to the next-of-kin. I've seen visiting military personnel who don't know any better spin the flag around after receiving it then present it to the family essentially stabbing them with the tip of the flag. You never want to *stab* the next-of-kin, so the point should always be pointing towards you. If for some reason, the NCOIC extends the flag to you with the broadside facing you, then you should spin the flag around before presenting it to the next-of-kin. The next-of-kin should always receive the flag with the broadside facing him/her. Once you receive the flag, and after the NCOIC has saluted, pull the flag closer toward

yourself giving it a little pop, and then very casually walk over to the next-of-kin. As a Chaplain I encourage you not to make hard and rigid facing movements. Just relax and very simply and pastorally approach the flag recipient. This person should be seated in the chair nearest the head of the casket where you're positioned. If you have questions, verify the flag recipient with the funeral director before the service. Once in front of the next-of-kin, bend at the waist extending the flag and making eye contact while saying:

On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States Army, and a grateful nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one's honorable and faithful service.

It's important not to mumble. At the same time, however, you're not presenting the flag to all of those present but to one person seated in front of you. Be mindful though that often the elderly have difficulty hearing, so speak loud enough for her to hear what you're saying. Presenting the flag to children is especially difficult. Suspend your emotions; do your duty. You can cry later if necessary. This is not about your loss; this is about their loss. After making the flag presentation, stand up to the position of attention and *slowly* salute. Hold the salute for five seconds then step back to where you were prior to the military honors portion of the service.

What are you looking at while saluting the flag? Are you staring off into the horizon? Fix your eyes on the flag you're saluting.

The NCOIC will likely offer a "Final Salute". Afterwards the funeral director will give you the nod to move forward to offer your final remarks to the family. Make certain you can make eye contact with the funeral director. After removing my right handed glove, I then return to the next-of-kin and stand in front of each person and slowly move down the first row of seats offering my personal and final condolences for their loss. After shaking hands with the last person seated, stand erect and walk away to your vehicle. Do not hang out afterwards to visit with people and to discuss your remarks. If I was a local pastor and this was one of my congregants, I would remain close by to the family before leaving. As a military chaplain, however, the best course of action is to simply move out after having performed your duty.

Never use specific names during the flag presentation. You absolutely must not take the chance of making a mistake during this most sacred time during a military funeral service. Stick to the script.

Again, if the decedent is being interred in a columbarium, then the honors will likely take place under a pavilion with the committal prayer being offered at the actual niche site. So, let's discuss performing a committal prayer at the columbarium.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. Knowing that more than two million Americans have been deployed overseas since we've been at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, how do you feel about performing a funeral service for a combat veteran?

COLUMBARIUM REMARKS

After the military honors and the flag presentation, the NCOIC will offer the “Final Salute”. The funeral director will then inform the family that we will continue the service inside the columbarium at the niche. The funeral director or someone from the family will carry the urn to the niche. Follow the funeral representative. Once there, a family member will usually place the urn inside the niche. Afterwards, step forward and offer the following meditation:

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus tells His disciples in John 14:

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...for I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

I just want to encourage you. If Jim is in Christ and Christ is in you, then Jim can’t be far.

Please pray with me.

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother Jim and we commit his ashes to their resting place.

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.

Again, if Jim is not a Christian skip, “I just want to encourage you. If Jim is in Christ and Christ is in you, then Jim can’t be far.” Instead, just say, “Please pray with me” and transition directly into the committal prayer. Notice that I still pray the same committal prayer regardless of the decedent’s spiritual orientation or faith background.

Afterwards, I often say, “It’s been a tremendous honor to be here with you today. I’m sincerely sorry for your loss.” Then, I move forward to shake the next-of-kin’s hand and move out. As I walk away, the funeral director will inform those present, “This concludes our service.” Other times I offer the following benediction:

“May the LORD bless you and keep you; may the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may He turn His face toward you and give you peace” in Jesus’ name. Amen.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Numbers 6:24-26, “The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” NKJV

This is followed by, “It’s been a tremendous honor to be here with you today. I’m sincerely sorry for your loss.” Then, I move forward to shake the next-of-kin’s hand and move out.

If you’re wearing ceremonial gloves, make certain to remove your right handed glove before shaking hands.

Now, all that we’ve just discussed provides a skeletal structure by which you the minister have the privilege to flesh out. Other graveside service templates are available for your review in Appendix 2 of this manual (p. 64).

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. How might a service in the columbarium for a dependent differ from a service for an American veteran?
2. What other scriptural meditations besides John 14:1-6 might be appropriate to read at the niche?



THE GRAVESIDE SERVICE

Good afternoon. My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our nation. There are over 400,000 Americans buried here. As you look out on the rows upon rows of headstones, each stone a brick in the foundation of freedom upon which we stand today, I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned.

Please join me in prayer.

Lord Jesus, draw us closer to Yourself; bless us with the comfort and peace that only Your presence can provide.

Your Word tells us that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”¹⁹ So Lord, bring the morning, and with it the joy You’ve promised to those who love You and eagerly await Your second coming. Amen.

Command Sergeant Major Jim C. Smith was born on November 13, 1928, and stepped out of the shadow of this life into the light of the next on December 10, 2012, at the age of 84.

This Korean War and Vietnam Combat Veteran served our Nation honorably and with heroic distinction for over 21 years.

His awards include: multiple Bronze Star Medals and Meritorious Service Medals, the Korean Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Ribbon, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Device, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Purple Heart.

Now the Purple Heart is unlike any other military award. The original Purple Heart was established by George Washington on August 7, 1782. The actual order includes the phrase, "Let it be known that he who wears the military order of the Purple Heart has given of his blood in the defense of his homeland and shall forever be revered by his fellow countrymen." While many have served our Nation admirably, Command Sergeant Major Smith literally shed his blood for the freedoms we hold dear today.

He also earned the Combat Infantryman’s Badge, the Parachutist Badge, and the coveted Ranger Tab.

But Jim was much more than a career non-Commissioned Officer. He was also a husband, a father, and a grandfather. Jim and his bride Mrs. Julie Smith were married for 60 years. Theirs was a romance that spanned well over half a century. This says something about the character of this man, as well as, the unyielding devotion of his wife.

¹⁹ Psalm 30:5, NKJV

Jim loved the Army, and he loved his family. Jim could be a hard man, but he always sought to better the lives of those around him, especially his children. He was dearly loved, and I know he will be dearly missed.

Jim leaves in the wake of his life a legacy that includes his Bride, five children, three grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He also remains one of the last of those considered the Great Generation this country has ever known, and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life and military service with you this afternoon.

But Friends, not only have we come together today to reflect upon the life and sacrifices of a great American, more importantly, we gather today to celebrate the sacrifice that was made for him so that he might have the gift of eternal life.

In Ephesians 2:8-9²⁰, the Apostle Paul writes, “We are saved by grace through faith and not by works so no man or woman may ever boast before the presence of the living God.” Rather, by placing our trust, not in a religion, but in a person – Jesus – believing that He died for our sins and rose again from the dead, we have the promise of eternal life. And, in this place where the fullness of this life is experienced - Heaven - the Bible tells us, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.”²¹ And for those of us who are in Christ, who have yielded our lives to this Person, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day, we too will be reunited with all those that we have both loved and lost.

The Psalm we pray now, we do not pray for Jim but for ourselves – Psalm 23.

The LORD *is* my shepherd;

I shall not want.

² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

³ He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name’s sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil;

For You *are* with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

²⁰ Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” NKJV

²¹ 1 Corinthians 2:9

All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever. Amen.

I just want to encourage you. If Jim is in Christ and Christ is in you, then Jim can't be far.

Please join me in prayer.

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother Jim and we commit his body to the ground.

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.

For our comrade in arms Command Sergeant Major Smith our nation bestows military honors. In life he honored the flag, and in death the flag will honor him.

This is essentially the graveside service minus the flag presentation.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. What are your questions?
2. What do you like about this approach to the graveside service? What do you dislike about this approach to the graveside service?

PART 2
THE CHAPEL SERVICE

THE CHAPEL ORDER OF SERVICE

Often times we're called upon to perform Chapel Services. Again, our standard time limit for a Chapel Service is no longer than 20 minutes. Below is a sample order of service:

PRELUDE

At Arlington National Cemetery we meet the Honor Guard with the casket or urn at the rear of the chapel. Once the rear doors of the chapel are opened, I ask those present to, "Please rise and face the rear of the chapel." Once the transfer is made from the Honor Guard element to the bearers on detail in the back of the chapel, I step into the aisle and conduct a scriptural reading. To view the readings we most often use in our chapel services, see Appendix 4: Processional Readings (p. 87).

PROCESSIONAL

After the reading, I say "Amen" which signals the organist to begin playing the processional hymn. I then proceed to the front of the chapel.

WELCOME

The chapel welcome is distinguished from the cemetery welcome as they are in fact two different locations. So, my chapel welcome may include a quote like the On Combat quote cited below followed by an opening prayer. I begins like this:

It's been written: We could go for a generation without doctors, and it would get ugly if you were injured or sick, but civilization would survive. We could go for a generation without engineers and mechanics, and things would break down, but civilization would continue. We could even go a generation without school teachers. But if we ever went a single generation without the warrior who is willing to confront human aggression every day, then within the span of that one generation, life as we know it would simply cease to exist.²²

(Decedent's rank and name) was one such warrior and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life and military service with you this morning.

My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I invite you to please join me in prayer...

Or I sometimes use a simpler welcome like the one below:

Good afternoon. My name is Chaplain Fisher, and I want to welcome you to Ft. Myers' Memorial Chapel. Please join me in prayer.

²² Grossman, Dave and Loren W. Christensen, On Combat, Warrior Science Publications; 3rd edition (October 1, 2008).

PRAYER

I use my go to graveside opening prayer for chapel services:

Lord Jesus, draw us closer to Yourself; bless us with the comfort and peace that only Your presence can provide.

Your Word tells us that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”²³ So Lord, bring the morning, and with it the joy You’ve promised to those who love You and eagerly await Your second coming. Amen.

When we move from the chapel to the graveside, I will *not* conduct another opening prayer. Instead, I’ll welcome those present to the cemetery itself then transition into the committal prayer followed by military honors. For instance:

Friends, I want to welcome you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our nation. There are over 400,000 Americans buried here. As you look out on the rows upon rows of headstones, each stone a brick in the foundation of freedom upon which we stand today, I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned.

I just want to encourage you. If **(decendent’s name)** is in Christ and Christ is in you, then **(decendent’s name)** can’t be far.

Please join me in prayer.

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother **(decendent’s name)** and we commit his body to the ground.

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.

For our comrade in arms **(decendent’s rank and name)** our nation bestows military honors. In life honored the flag, and in death the flag will honor him.

When performing a chapel service, I make a point to say all that I have to say in the chapel versus conducting a second service at the graveside. Therefore, my typical graveside service following a chapel service is only a few minutes long.

EULOGY

While we encourage family and friends to speak on behalf of their loved one, we never just open the floor inviting those present to speak. If someone speaks on behalf of the family or Unit, I will not provide a eulogy but will instead introduce the speaker(s). If there is only one speaker,

²³ Psalm 30:5, NKJV

we request that her remarks not exceed five minutes. If there are multiple speakers, we request their remarks be limited to two minutes each. Sometimes the family will draft a letter, and we will read that letter on their behalf. You just need to be sensitive as to what approach best meets the family's expectation and pastoral need.

HYMN OF MEDITATION

If speakers have spoken long and are now pushing the time fixed for our service to the edge of what's been allotted to us, we simply bypass the hymn of meditation and move directly into the homily. If not, the organist plays an instrumental piece. I often use "Amazing Grace" for this hymn so I can tie it into the homily. I used this same format for a civilian chapel service not long ago. The funeral director played "Amazing Grace" over the sound system after the eulogy. It provided a time of reflection and a much needed break between the two major speaking elements of the service.

HOMILY

There are a number of sample homilies below, as well as, in Appendix 3: Sample Chapel Services and Homilies (p. 72).

CLOSING PRAYER

My closing prayer of choice is Psalm 23. Sometimes though I invite those present to pray the Lord's Prayer with me as well.

RECESSIONAL

After saying "Amen" I exit the platform and stand four feet behind the decedent's remains in the center of the chapel's aisle. When the bearers position themselves, I mirror their about face and slowly proceed to the entrance of the chapel while the organist plays the recessional hymn.

When conducting a memorial ceremony as distinguished from a funeral service, the Chain-of-Command will inform you as to what right looks like. If tasked to "come up with a memorial ceremony", after leaving your Commander's office, I encourage you to immediately consult with your Command Sergeant Major and Brigade Chaplain for guidance. Regarding civilian services, call the funeral director ahead of time and talk through the order of service. The important thing is to ensure all the players are on the same page. Make certain you are communicating with all those involved, and be certain to follow your individual unit's SOP (Standing Operating Procedure) for memorial ceremonies.

Now let's examine a number of chapel homilies.

SPREAD YOUR SORROWS BEFORE CHRIST²⁴

by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher (Chapel Homily for a Christian)

Though **(decedent's name)** lived to be **(age at death)**, when you lose someone you love, no amount of years ever seems quite long enough to fill the void created by a loved one's absence. So, what will you do now with you grief?

When the disciples of John the Baptist learn of his death, they are overcome with grief. After all, this was John. This wasn't the way the story was supposed to end. You might recall from the biblical narrative that John the Baptist was beheaded by a weak tyrant at the whim of a young girl. And John stood for truth. He represented Christ. If there was ever a "good person", it was John the Baptist. And yet, we see John imprisoned and subsequently murdered. It doesn't make sense to us. And, where is God?

The disciples of John, as you can imagine, are crushed by their grief. They are angry. They are confused. They are overcome with despair. They feel helpless. They have questions that I suspect they knew they might not ever have answers for in their lifetime. Their faith and confidence are shaken. These are men who shared life with John. They listened to his teachings. They laughed together. They celebrated life together. They served together. They sought God together. But now, they just don't know what to believe anymore. But, they do something significant in the midst of their grief. In Matthew 14:12, we discover these words:

¹² Then John's disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

First, we see the care they exhibit for John's body. "They took away the body and buried it". Like you, they paid the proper respect for their loved one's body.²⁵

Since the dedication of this Chapel in late April 1935 by then MAJ George S. Patton, Jr., nearly every American President and persons of influence from around the world have attended services here and have literally sat in the seats where you are now seated and did so to pay tribute to our Nation's heroes. There is *no higher way* to honor the memory of any Soldier than to hold a service here within these walls and outside through the gates into Arlington National Cemetery. There is not a more sacred or fitting resting place in the world for any Soldier than this place you have chosen for **(decedent's name)**.

You have done well to come to Arlington, but there's more. You must now to go to Jesus.

After "John's disciples came and took away his body and buried it, they went and told Jesus."

²⁴ This sermon was inspired by Jonathan Edwards' funeral sermon titled "The Sorrows of the Bereaved Spread Before Jesus" taken from THE WORKS OF JONATHAN EDWARDS, VOL 2, published by Banner of Truth in 1976 and included in Warren Wiersbe's Classic Sermons on Death and Dying, Hendrickson Publishers, 2000, pp. 59-72.

²⁵ I intentionally refrain from using the term "remains" even though it might read better. The term for me is too sanitized and may perhaps be heard and experienced as insensitive.

That small community of grieving men took their questions, their doubts, their complaints, and their fears to Christ. They sought comfort and help from Jesus, and in doing so, and perhaps unwittingly, they sought their highest good.

I encourage you to go and to spread your sorrows before the Lord as well. Jesus has compassion on the afflicted. When our hearts are full of grief and yearn for release, we need a compassionate friend to pour them out to. And, Jesus is such a friend, above all others.

When a man named Lazarus died, and his sister Mary came to Jesus in her grief, she was confident that she would find comfort in the midst of her sorrow. We are told that “when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.”²⁶ And when He came to the grave, the Bible tells us, “Jesus wept.”²⁷ Jesus is one who weeps with those who weep. In fact, it was this compassion that brought Him into the world and motivated Him to shed not only His tears but also His own blood on our account.

You honor **(decedent’s name)** life, service, and family by being present today, but what mainly concerns you now is between Christ and your own souls.

God, in His own time, in accordance with His own will, and for His own purposes has taken **(decedent’s name)** from you. I don’t know why. What I do know is this - when trusting in God’s way is difficult, we must then trust in God’s heart. God loves **(decedent’s name)**. He loves him so much that He sent His one and only Son to die in His place so that **(decedent’s name)** might live eternally with God in Heaven. And in this place there is no sickness. There is no weeping. There is no death. In this place, we are told, “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.” And for those of us who are in Christ, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day we too will be reunited with all those we have both loved and lost. This is the hope we have in Christ. Death is not the end for us.

Go to Jesus and tell Him what’s happened to you. If you do, you will find the comfort you require.

But perhaps you are like the disciples of John in that you don’t know what to make of Jesus. When Andrew, who was first a disciple of John, saw John point to Jesus and heard him say, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”, Andrew left John and became a disciple of Christ. But there were others present there that day as well. If you are like these others who were uncertain of what to make of Jesus, then I encourage you to do what they did at the passing of their loved one, and that is to go to Christ yourself.

If you do, I believe you’ll find **(decedent’s name)** there with Him.

²⁶ John 11:33

²⁷ John 11:35

The Psalm we pray now, we do not pray for **(decedent's name)**, but for ourselves – Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd...

Or:

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, thank you for **(decedent's name)** and for his family. Please go before us now as we continue to honor his life and service to our Nation. And while he is honored, may You be glorified in all that is said and done. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

I have a number of versions of this homily. No homily in and of itself perfectly fits every occasion. Instead, I encourage you to view this homily as a shell or structure awaiting your inspiration and pastoral edits. For instance, if the deceased lived to be 90 years of age, I remove the following in italics:

God, in His own time, in accordance with His own will, and for His own purposes has taken **(decedent's name)** from you. *I don't know why. What I do know is this - when trusting in God's way is difficult, we must then trust in God's heart.* God loves **(decedent's name)**. He loves him so much that He sent His one and only Son to die in His place so that **(decedent's name)** might live eternally with God in Heaven. And in this place there is no sickness. There is no weeping. There is no death. In this place, we are told, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him." And for those of us who are in Christ, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day we too will be reunited with all those we have both loved and lost. This is the hope we have in Christ. Death is not the end for us.

By removing these two sentences, I change the entire tenor of the homily. If, however, the decedent was a young man who died in a motorcycle accident or was a young father killed in action during a combat deployment, I leave these remarks in place as the family may be dealing with the question "Why?" and struggling with accepting what grief counselors call "the new normal".

I have also used this homily for agnostics as it focuses on the response of John's disciples instead of on the faith of John. Again, his disciples "do something *significant* in the midst of their grief." The significance lies in their taking their grief to Christ.

If my decedent lived a long life but struggled with cancer and chemotherapy or Alzheimer's disease, I modify the above in such a way to emphasize the reality of the decedent no longer suffering as he or she was prior to death. See the italicized portion of this text below:

God, in His own time, in accordance with His own will, and for His own purposes has taken **(decedent's name)** from you. God loves **(decedent's name)**. He loves him so

much that He sent His one and only Son to die in His place so that **(decedent's name)** might live eternally with God in Heaven. *And in this place there is no sickness. There is no cancer. There is no old age. There is no weeping. There is no death.* In this place, we are told, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him." And for those of us who are in Christ, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day we too will be reunited with all those we have both loved and lost. This is the hope we have in Christ. Death is not the end for us.

"And in this place there is no sickness. There is no cancer. There is no old age. There is no weeping. There is no death." These statements acknowledge the reality of the situation. Growing old for many is a terrible ordeal. At the same time, however, we really do have a hope in Christ that transcends the pangs of old age and death. Dealing truthfully and respectfully with the reality of another's suffering enables us to speak life and truth *into* the situation versus merely offering "pretty words" that seem to have no real relevance.

HOME

by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher (Chapel Homily for Active Duty KIA)

On his death bed, John Newton, the author of “Amazing Grace” said, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great Savior.”

While it remains a tremendous honor to officiate this ceremony for you, it also grieves me to know that **(decedent’s name)** was so young. I suspect our time together would in fact be altogether overwhelming if not for this one truth: **(decedent’s name)** was a Christian, and his being in Christ is what makes this ceremony a celebration of life instead of a funeral. It is this fact that makes your time with his memory a “I’ll see you again” instead of a permanent goodbye.

This poem by Sir Walter Raleigh was found in his Bible in the Gate-House at Westminster, England. It is said to have been written the night before his death:

Even such is time, that takes in trust our youth, our joys, our
all we have
And pays us but with earth and dust, who in the dark and
silent grave
When we have wandered all our ways
Shuts up the story of our days
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
My God shall raise me up, I trust.

In 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, the Apostle Paul writes:

So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at *home* with the Lord. For we live by believing and not by seeing. Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at *home* with the Lord.²⁸

Elsewhere Paul writes that “we are citizens of heaven...”²⁹

It is this word “home” that I want you to hear again and again as you reflect upon these truths and **(decedent’s name)** life. This world was never his home; it’s not our home either.

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples in John 14:

¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. ² 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? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, NLT

²⁹ Philippians 3:20, NKJV

come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am...⁶for I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

(Decedent's name) is now at home. There will never come a day when he will return to meet us here, but through faith in Jesus, there will come a day when we will go to meet **(decedent's name)** in Heaven.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Apostle writes, "We are saved by grace through faith and not by works so no man or woman may ever boast before the presence of the living God." Rather, by placing our trust in Jesus, believing that He died for our sins and rose again from the dead, we have the promise of eternal life. And, in this place where the fullness of this life is experienced – Heaven - the Bible tells us, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."³⁰ And for those of us who are in Christ, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day we too will be reunited with all those we have both loved and lost.

Just as you waited for **(decedent's name)** to return from his deployment, I submit to you, that **(decedent's name)** now waits for you.

If our hope in Christ is only for this life, then I'll be the first to admit that we Christians are to be more pitied than anyone else in the world.³¹ But through Christ, temporal death *always* gives way to eternal life.

(Decedent's name) has died, but he has not ceased to live. Death was not the end for him anymore than death is the end for us.

There is no higher way to honor the memory of any Soldier than to hold a service here within these walls and outside through the gates into Arlington National Cemetery. There is not a more sacred or fitting resting place in the world for any Soldier than this place you have chosen for **(decedent's name)**.

You have done well to come to Arlington, but what mainly concerns you now is between Christ and your own souls.

I encourage you to go to Jesus and to spread your sorrows there before Him. If you do, I believe you'll find **(decedent's name)** there with Him.

The Psalm we pray now, we do not pray for **(decedent's name)** but for ourselves - Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd...

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:9

³¹ 1 Corinthians 15:19, NLT

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

This homily follows the hymn “Amazing Grace”. It’s a familiar melody and serves to not only separate the eulogy from the homily, but also provides a platform to actually transition into the message:

On his death bed, John Newton, the author of “Amazing Grace” said, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great Savior.”

As a minister I am seeking opportunities in the chapel service to point those in attendance to Jesus. I know of no better way to minister to them in their time of need than to point them to Christ. Consider tying the hymn of meditation into your homily like the example above.

Also, you can likely identify portions of the Ephesians 2 Flip and the Matthew 14:12 Flip, as well as, the columbarium meditation in this homily. If we were interring this Soldier’s ashes in the columbarium, I would remove the following:

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples in John 14:

¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. ² 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? ³ 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...⁶for I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Instead, I would save the above for when the family was gathered around the niche. Again, notice how everything we’ve discussed to this point ties in together.

Consider the following:

There is no higher way to honor the memory of any Soldier than to hold a service here within these walls and outside through the gates into Arlington National Cemetery. There is not a more sacred or fitting resting place in the world for any Soldier than this place you have chosen for **(decendent’s name)**.

If applied to a dependent, we might write:

There is no higher way to honor the memory of any Soldier or Soldier’s spouse than to hold a service here within these walls and outside through the gates into Arlington National Cemetery. There is not a more sacred or fitting resting place in the world for any Soldier’s *bride* than this place you have chosen for **(decendent’s name)**.

Also, could we not apply some form of this statement to military veterans who are not being interred at Arlington National Cemetery? Perhaps we could say:

There is no higher way to honor the memory of any Soldier than to come together as we have today, to: acknowledge, remember, and celebrate the life and sacrifices of one of our nation's heroes. There is not a more sacred or fitting resting place in the world than this place you have chosen for **(decedent's name)**.

This last sentence might be debatable, but the family needs to hear that they've done well, that they made the right decision, that they too are playing a vital role in honoring the life, service, and memory of their loved one. This statement affirms their choice.

We can also modify the statement below as follows:

You have done well to come to **(name of cemetery, installation, or city)**, but what mainly concerns you now is between Christ and your own souls.

Then, what would you like for those in attendance to do after hearing your homily? What is the application?

I encourage you to go to Jesus and to spread your sorrows there before Him. If you do, I believe you'll find **(decedent's name)** there with Him.

Or:

I encourage you to go to Jesus and to spread your sorrows there before Him. If you do, you may just find **(decedent's name)** there with Him.

Or:

I encourage you to go to Jesus and to spread your sorrows there before Him. If you do, you will find the comfort you are seeking.

Again, this homily borrows from the first homily we discussed earlier titled "Spread Your Sorrows Before Christ." Once you develop a repertoire of homilies that rightly fit your unique personality, you'll find yourself better able to modify these works to fit your unique situation.

LITURGICAL CHAPEL ORDER OF SERVICE

by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh

INVOCATION

Eternal God, maker of heaven and earth: You formed us from the dust of the earth, and by Your breath You gave us life. We glorify You.

Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life: You tasted death for all humanity, and by rising from the grave You opened the way to eternal life. We praise You.

Holy Spirit, author and giver of life: You are the comforter of all who sorrow, our sure confidence and everlasting hope. We worship You.

To you, O blessed Trinity, be glory and honor, forever and ever. Amen.

WELCOME

Good *morning/afternoon* Ladies and Gentlemen.

I'm Chaplain Scott Kennaugh, and it is a privilege for me to welcome you here to the Old Post Chapel at Fort Myer as we gather to remember the life and service of our *brother/sister* **(decedent's name)** to commend *him/her* to God who is our merciful redeemer and judge; to commit *his/her* body to rest until the Day of Resurrection; and to comfort one another in our time of grief.

(Decedent's name) is a *man/woman* who has offered *his/her* strength, his skills, and indeed his very life to the service - not only of our country, but also to his family and to his community. Truly, we measure a life not by the accumulation of wealth, nor by the earning of rank or accolades or awards, but we weigh a life by the touch it has on the lives of the people loved and served. Your presence with us today speaks volumes about the impact **(decedent's name)** has had on your lives. We are truly blessed to have had such a man live and serve among us.

EULOGY

Family Member (3 minutes)

SCRIPTURE READING

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep as Christians...For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

MEDITATION HYMN

Instrumental Music/Hymn of family's choice

HOMILY/MEDITATION

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Almighty God, our creator and redeemer, You are our comfort and strength. You have given us our *brother/sister* (**decedent's name**) to know and to love during our pilgrimage on earth. Uphold us now as we entrust *him/her* to Your boundless love and eternal care. Assure us that not even death can separate us from Your boundless mercy. Deal graciously with us in our grief, that we may know Your sure consolation, and learn to live in confident hope in the resurrection through Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OR

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ You promised many rooms within Your house. Give us faith to see, beyond touch and sight, some sure sign of Your kingdom, and where vision fails, to trust in Your love which never fails. Lift heavy sorrow, and give us good hope in Jesus, so we may bravely walk our earthly way, and look forward to glad reunion in the life to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OR

God of life, there are days when the burdens we carry are heavy on our shoulders and weigh us down, when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies grey and threatening, when our lives have no music in them, and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, Lord, turn our eyes to where the skies are full of promise; tune our hearts to brave music, give us the sense of comradeship with those saints before us, and so quicken our spirits that we may be able to encourage the souls of all who journey with us on this road of life, to the honor and glory of Your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God; and the blessing of God almighty: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain with you always. Amen.

OR

May God, who is our refuge and strength, be to you a very present help in trouble. May the river that streams from the throne of God be your help when the morning dawns. Be still and know that He is God! He is exalted among the nations. He is exalted in all the earth! Amen.

RECESSIONAL

Stand facing the casket and urn until military bearers make facing movement.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

While I am not a liturgical pastor per se, there have been times when I've been called upon to perform chapel services that are more liturgical in nature. For those in attendance with a highly liturgical background, the liturgy itself has the power to convey comfort. We should be sensitive to this and willing to accommodate families when appropriate.

CONCLUSION

This manual wasn't written for profit. It was written to be used. So study it, write in it, take what's written here, and make it your own. Make it better then pass it forward to those on your right and left. And leave something behind for those who will one day walk in your footsteps as we together continue to glorify God through serving our country, our nation's military, veterans, and their families. *Pro Deo et Patria!*

APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE FLIPS

In addition to the Ephesians 2 Flip and the Matthew 14:12 Flip, please find below a number of scriptural transitions developed and used by U.S. Army Arlington National Cemetery Chaplains. These are to be placed after the eulogy.

CH (CPT) Matt Madison developed and sometimes uses the following:

The John 14:1-4 Flip

Jesus told his disciples shortly before His death, “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In my father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself. That where I am, there you may be also.” This promise Christ made to His disciples was true for **(decedent’s name)**, and it remains true for us as well. So the Psalm we pray now we do not pray for **(decedent’s name)** but for ourselves. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd...

The John 15:13 Flip (Active Duty Hostile Fire)

Jesus spoke about sacrificial love, and we read about it in John 15. He said, “My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” We are surrounded today by great men and women who did just that. We are surrounded by others and bury one today who was willing to do just that if called upon. **(Decedent’s name)** demonstrated sacrificial, Christ-like love during his life and service to his family, our country, and our Lord. So the Psalm we pray now we do not pray for **(decedent’s name)** but for ourselves. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd...

The Romans 8:35-39 Flip

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage tells us that not even his death can separate **(decedent’s name)** from the love of Christ. That promise remains true for us today. And so the Psalm we pray now we do not pray for **(decedent’s name)** but for ourselves. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd...

The 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 Flip

“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 imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

(Decedent's name) has traded the perishable body for an imperishable one. He is now with Christ where his mind and body have found true healing. And so the Psalm we pray now we do not pray for **(decedent's name)** but for ourselves. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd...

The 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 Flip

Today as you grieve and suffer the loss of **(decedent's name)** in your life, be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13-5:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."

Jesus is able to comfort us because He can relate to each circumstance we experience. But more importantly, He is able to comfort us because He conquered sin and death, rose from the grave, and has prepared a place for all those who trust in Him for eternity.

And so today I encourage you to turn to God for comfort. Seek Him and bless His name even if the midst of your troubles. Allow God to comfort you through His Son Jesus Christ. Believe in Him and in His promises. Be encouraged today that you are not alone. The God of the Universe loves you and wants nothing more than to wrap His loving arms around you. In that spirit we pray the 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd...

CH (CPT) John Scott created and often uses the following:

The Mathew 7:7-8 Flip

When we lose one as beloved and as full of life as **(decedent's name)**, we often ask the question "Why?" We don't have answers and are often unsure of what to do next. In these times Jesus encourages us to seek answers from Him. In Matthew 7, verses 7-8, Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." I encourage each one of you here today to take your cares to the Lord and to seek His comfort in this difficult time knowing that if you ask, seek, and knock, He will respond.

The psalmist David found comfort in the Lord. This is reflected in the verses of his now famous 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd...

The John 3:16-18 Flip

No one looks forward to sitting where you are today saying goodbye to a loved one. However, God does not intend death to be a goodbye, rather He intends for us to see one another again in a different place. Listen to these words from John's Gospel, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned." Therefore, I encourage each of you to seek comfort in God's promise and to take hold of it through faith in His Son.

The Psalmist David did this and penned these words. The Lord is my shepherd...

CH (CPT) Andy Jenks wrote and often uses the following two flips:

The Psalm 118:24 Flip

(Decedent's name) lived a life that taught two simple truths: First, live life with no regrets. Second, make the best of every situation.

I am reminded of the words of the Psalmist who reminds us that "This is the day that the Lord has made, and we will rejoice and be glad in it." Today is the day that God has made. It is like no other day in the history of our world. There has never been a day like today, nor will this particular day ever be repeated again. Even in the midst of your sorrow you have great reason to rejoice. Today you can rejoice that you knew a man like **(decedent's name)**. Together, we celebrate his life and the impact his life had on yours. And we can rejoice that **(decedent's name)** was known by Christ.

In Christ there is no death but eternal life. John 3:16, perhaps the most widely known Bible verse in the world says, "For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." And by placing our trust in Jesus, believing that He both died for our sins and rose again from the dead, we have the promise of eternal life. And for those of us in Christ who have yielded our lives to Him, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day we too will be reunited with all those we have both loved and lost. For truly, ours is a living hope. This was **(decedent's name)** hope; may it be your hope as well. The Psalm that we pray now, we do not pray for **(decedent's name)** but for ourselves. "The Lord is my shepherd..."

The 2 Timothy 4:7-9 Flip

In 2 Timothy 4:7-9, the Apostle Paul writes: "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." **(Decedent's name)**

has indeed fought the good fight, and he finished the most important race any of us will ever run. Through his faith in Jesus Christ, **(decedent's name)** now wears the crown of righteousness bestowed upon him by the Lord in Heaven. And, in this place - Heaven - the Bible tells us, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."³² And for those of us who are in Christ, who have yielded our lives to Him, we have the promise and the assurance of knowing that one day we too will be reunited with all those we have both loved and lost. For truly, ours is a living hope.

I pray that you find comfort in the words of the Psalmist David who reminds us, "The Lord is my shepherd..."

I have also used the following when performing a graveside funeral service for a dependent:

The 2 Timothy 4:7-8 Flip (Dependent)

In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 the Apostle Paul tells his young protégé Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."⁸ 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."

(Decedent's name) could have written these words. She also fought a good fight. Death has in fact claimed her body but not her life or legacy. **(Decedent's name)** finished the race the Lord assigned her to run. And, most importantly, like the Apostle Paul, **(decedent's name)** kept the faith.

The Bible assures us that **(decedent's name)** is right now in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. She is receiving the award of faith. The promises of Jesus in her life are now being fully realized. And, the knowledge of this truth and the hope it provides should temper the grief you're experiencing and encourage you to move closer to Christ yourself.

Friends, you have come to Arlington, but what mainly concerns you now is between Christ and your own souls. I encourage you to go to the Lord and to spread your sorrows there before Him. If you do, I believe you'll find **(decedent's name)** there with Him.

The Psalm we pray now, we do not pray for **(decedent's name)** but for ourselves – Psalm 23. "The Lord is my shepherd..."

³² 1 Corinthians 2:9

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE GRAVESIDE SERVICES AND HOMILIES

SAMPLE LITURGICAL GRAVESIDE ORDER OF SERVICE

by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh

Welcome

Eulogy

Scripture Reading

Pastoral Prayer

Committal

Benediction

Let's discuss each in detail:

WELCOME

Welcome to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen patriots. These grounds are distinguished by the hallowed stones and granite walls which stand as a lasting tribute to the men and women who have answered the call of their country. Buried here are more than 400,000 American patriots who have stepped forward in times of war and peace to defend our nation and our constitution both at home and around the world. These men and women have given of themselves so that you and I might continue to enjoy the freedoms and liberties that our forefathers envisioned for this great nation. Such is the life and legacy of our brother/sister **(decendent's name)** whom we lay to rest today.

EULOGY

We use the term "Patriots" intentionally when we speak of those who are honored here at Arlington National Cemetery. **(Decedent's name)** was...

SCRIPTURE READING

(Psalm 16:8-11) I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.

(1 Corinthians 15:51ff.) Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

PASTORAL PRAYER

Jesus said, “Come unto Me, all who labor, and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.” Receive, O Lord, Your servant **(decedent’s name)**, for he/she returns to You. May he/she hear Your words of welcome, “Come, you blessed of my Father,” and receive the unfading crown of glory. May the angels surround him/her, and the saints welcome him/her in peace. Gracious God, in whose presence live all who die in the Lord, receive our brother/sister **(decedent’s name)** into Your merciful arms, and into the joys of Your heavenly home. May he/she and all the departed rest in Your peace. Amen.

COMMITTAL

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our brother/sister **(decedent’s name)** and we commit his/her body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.

“Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord,” says the Spirit. “They rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”

BENEDICTION

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God; and the blessing of God almighty: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain with you always. Amen.

Or:

May God, who is our refuge and strength, be to you a very present help in trouble. May the river that streams from the throne of God be your help when the morning dawns. Be still and know that He is God! He is exalted among the nations; He is exalted in all the earth! Amen.

NON-CHURCHGOER GRAVESIDE HOMILY

by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher

Following the eulogy, I might say something to the effect of:

My favorite title for Jesus in the Bible is not, “Son of God” but “Friend of Sinners.” I understand **(decedent’s rank and name)** was not a man who spoke about spiritual matters. And, he rarely ever attended church. I was told he wasn’t particularly religious, but that he was in fact a believer. Fortunately for him and us, church attendance is not what saves a soul, but rather our faith and response to the revelation of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As an Infantry Chaplain who spent 14 months in combat with many hardened men who expressed little or no interest in church, I know God has a way of revealing Himself through war; He has a way of breaking into the history of our lives. And while those times may not translate into our attending a local church, they do have a way of transforming our thinking about Him and our heart’s response towards Him. You don’t forget combat; you don’t forget who you were with, who you killed, who you lost, or who you cried out to when you thought your life was going to end.

I believe God broke into the history of **(decedent’s name)** life and that **(decedent’s name)** is in fact at peace in Christ’s presence now. Salvation is not what man does. Salvation rests solely upon the initiative of God and our heart’s response to Jesus.

I’m uncertain what passages of Scripture really inspired **(decedent’s name)** either. I am, however, aware of a hymn that held special meaning for him with lyrics that resonated with his soul. I’d like to simply read this hymn to you now.

**Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.**

**T’was Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.**

**Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
’Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home.**

**The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.**

**Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.**

**When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.**

What was it about “Amazing Grace” that **(decedent’s name)** appreciated so much? The melody isn’t all that catchy. Could it be that perhaps this hymn expressed a truth that **(decedent’s name)** experienced but simply lacked the religious vocabulary to articulate himself? The Psalm we pray now we do not pray for **(decedent’s name)** but for ourselves – Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd...

WORLD WAR II REPATRIATION GRAVESIDE SERVICE

by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher

It's been written: We could go for a generation without doctors, and it would get ugly if you were injured or sick, but civilization would survive. We could go for a generation without engineers and mechanics, and things would break down, but civilization would continue. We could even go for a generation without school teachers. But if we ever went a single generation without the warrior who is willing to confront human aggression every day, then within the span of that one generation, life as we know it would simply cease to exist.³³

(Decedent's rank and last name) was one such warrior, and we in uniform are honored to celebrate his life, military service, and repatriation with you this morning.

Please join me in prayer.

Lord Jesus, draw us closer to Yourself; bless us with the comfort and peace that only Your presence can provide.

Your Word tells us that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."³⁴ So, Lord, bring the morning, and with it the joy You've promised to those who love You and eagerly await Your second coming. Amen.

My name is CH Fisher, and I'd like to begin by welcoming you to Arlington National Cemetery where for nearly 150 years our nation has honored her fallen warriors and patriots. These sacred grounds are a lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our nation. There are over 400,000 Americans buried here. As you look out on the rows upon rows of headstones, each stone a brick in the foundation of freedom upon which we stand today, I encourage you to remember this: No plot in Arlington National Cemetery can be purchased. Each must be earned.

(Decedent's rank and last name) earned his place here among us some 69 years ago.

(Decedent's rank and full name) was born on May 04, 1922. He is remembered as being a great guy and a great dancer. When a ballerina calls you a great dancer, you know there's some measure of truth in what's being said about you. **(Decedent's nick name)**, as his family and friends knew him, was handsome, charming, and daring.

At 21 years of age, **(decendent's rank and last name)** was flying C-87's, a modified B-24 Liberator, for the Army Air Force as part of the war effort against the Japanese. He was responsible for airlifting critical supplies from North Eastern India over the high mountain ranges and snowcapped peaks that comprise the Himalaya Mountains (then known as "The Hump") into China. **(Decedent's rank and last name)** flew at dizzying altitudes and in doing so was a part of a logistical and historical achievement unparalleled at that time.

³³ Taken from Lt. Col. Dave Grossman's On Combat.

³⁴ Psalm 30:5

It is recorded that, “The tonnage flown over the Hump supplied Soldiers with the essentials needed to tie up a million and a half Japanese that otherwise would have been battling our troops in the Pacific.”³⁵

Air crews literally flew into unmapped territory. Japanese fighter planes, the towering mountain ranges, and the unpredictable weather made flying over the Hump particularly hazardous. The severe cold could freeze engines midflight, and the incredible turbulence caused by fast changing high velocity winds tossed these enormous aircrafts in the sky like feathers.³⁶

It is believed 416,800 U.S. Service Members lost their lives in World War II. Today, due in large part to the faith of a family and the persistence of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii, we celebrate the homecoming of one of our own.

(Decedent’s name) was killed in action on the afternoon of **(date and year)** en route to India to deliver his cargo of critical supplies to forces on the ground. His aircraft **(aircraft number)** was discovered on **(date and year)**, in the mountainous region between India and Burma at an elevation of over 13,000 feet.

The word “repatriate” – to return to one’s own country - has a very special meaning for American Service members. We have been promised that should we lose our lives in combat on foreign soil, America will honor that sacrifice, keep faith with our fellow warriors and families, and bring us back home. This morning, we are keeping that promise.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the “Lost Sheep” which both illustrates the determination of our Nation to our honor **(decendent’s name)** sacrifice while also depicting God’s heart and passion for those who remain far from Him.

Jesus says, “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”

This is not to say that Jesus is in any way American, but rather - that which we are a part of today is very Christ-like. Like the man in Christ’s parable we have gone after the one. That which was lost 69 years ago has been found. Today, we welcome **(decendent’s name)** home. And, we too have cause to rejoice.

At this time, I’d like to introduce you to one of **(decendent’s name)** nephews – Mr. **(name of nephew who spoke briefly on behalf of the family)**.

Please pray with me.

³⁵ Particular details were taken from the special report chronicling the history of this repatriated Soldier comprised by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii.

³⁶ Ibid.

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother **(decendent's name)**, and we commit his body to the ground. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Amen.

For our comrade in arms **(decendent's rank and last name)**, our nation bestows military honors. In life, he honored the flag. And, in death, the flag will honor him.

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE CHAPEL SERVICES AND HOMILIES

THE INEVITABLE WORD³⁷

by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher (Dependent Chapel Ceremony)

There is an inevitable word...a word that to each woman seems unnatural when applied to herself but natural when applied to others. It is a word that reduces all men to the same grade and rank, a word that none is too young to mutter and none too old or too tired to whisper, a word that frustrates ambition and disappoints hope. It's a word people fear, and yet the word that if we will listen to its voice, can teach us the meaning of all other words in life. God never intended for us to pronounce this word, and yet today we must. The word is "death".

In the New Testament letter of Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 27 we read: "It is appointed for men to die once..."³⁸

Towards the end of her life, **(decedent's name)** was in incredible pain. She was just ready to go home. She knew her time had come.

In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon, the King of Israel, writes:

To everything there is a season. A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die...

There is in fact a time to die. This is an appointment each of us will one day keep. It's so easy to think of others having to keep this appointment with death, but difficult for us to remember that we too must keep our appointment as well. Death is appointed for us all, and the question of its occurrence is merely a matter of time. Other appointments in life, the appointments of business or pleasure, we can disregard or break. But here is an appointment that no man or woman can neglect or ever break. She can meet it only once, but she must meet it once. **(Decedent's name)** kept her appointment with death. She knew it was time.

But now what?

This poem by Sir Walter Raleigh was found in his Bible in the Gate-House at Westminster, England. It is said to have been written the night before his death:

Even such is time, that takes in trust our youth, our joys, our
all we have
And pays us but with earth and dust, who in the dark and
silent grave
When we have wandered all our ways
Shuts up the story of our days
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,

³⁷ This sermon, including the title, is inspired by Clarence Edward Noble Macartney's (1879-1957) sermon taken from The Greatest Words in the Bible and in Human Speech published in 1938 by Cokesbury Press and included in Warren Wiersbe's Classic Sermons on Death and Dying, Hendrickson Publishers, 2000, pp. 114-122.

³⁸ NKJV

My God shall raise me up, I trust.

In 1 Corinthians 15:19, The Apostle Paul writes, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

But we have a hope that transcends the issues of this life, that transcends sickness and old age, and that transcends death itself.

By turning away from the things we know displease God and placing our trust in Jesus, believing He both died for our sins and rose again from the dead, we have the promise of eternal life.

This was the Apostle Paul’s hope, and as a Christian, this was **(decedent’s name)** hope as well.

In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 the Apostle Paul tells his young protégé Timothy:

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ 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.”

(Decedent’s name) also fought a good fight. Death has claimed **(decedent’s name)** body but not her life or legacy. **(Decedent’s name)** finished the race the Lord assigned her to run. And, most importantly, **(decedent’s name)** kept the faith.

The Bible assures us that **(decedent’s name)** is right now in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. She is receiving the award of faith. The promises of Jesus in her life are now being fully realized. And, the knowledge of this truth and the hope it provides should temper the grief you’re experiencing and encourage you to move closer to Christ yourself.

The Bible tells us “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.”³⁹ This is where **(decedent’s name)** now resides, and one day through faith in Jesus Christ we will join her there.

Since the dedication of this Chapel in late April 1935 by then MAJ George S. Patton, Jr., nearly every American President and persons of influence from around the world have attended services here to honor our Nation’s heroes. There is no higher way to honor the service of any Soldier or Soldier’s spouse than to hold a service here within these walls and outside through the gates into Arlington National Cemetery. There is not a more sacred or fitting resting place in the world for any Soldier’s bride than this place you have chosen for **(decedent’s name)**.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:9

You have done well to come to Arlington, but there's more. You must now to go to Christ. Our days are also numbered. **(Decedent's name)** kept her appointment with death. We too will keep our appointments with death as well.

Friends, it's not too late for you to prepare to meet the inevitable word with the Eternal Word, to meet death with life, to face death with Christ. The Psalm we pray now we do not pray for **(decedent's name)** but for ourselves – Psalm 23. “The Lord is my shepherd...”

CHAPEL SERVICE FOR DEPENDENT

by CH (CPT) John Scott

Very few citizens will ever wear a United States military uniform, currently less than one-percent of our population. Those who don a uniform to defend freedom across the globe are part of an elite few. However, there is another group even smaller whose service is not as apparent, but just as important, the military wife. She takes on challenges each day that other wives could never imagine facing. She serves her husband, family, other Soldiers and friends in such a way as to make it possible for her husband to fight. These women are less than half a percent of our nation's population and yet they are truly cornerstones in American society. **(Decedent's name)** exemplified such service and sacrifice for her husband, her family, and our country.

Good afternoon, I am Chaplain John Scott, and I want to welcome you to Fort Myer's Memorial Chapel. It is an honor to be with you today to celebrate **(decedent's name)** life.

Let us pray.

Father God, Your word says "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." I pray that Your Spirit will come and bring comfort to those who mourn **(decedent's name)** here today. Please bless this time as we remember the life of one of Your very own children. I pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - Amen.

BRIEF EULOGY OFFERED BY FAMILY MEMBER

(CH Scott continues) And now be encouraged by the great hymn "Amazing Grace."

INSTRUMENTAL HYMN OF MEDITATION

HOMILY

No matter the circumstance, it is never easy to say goodbye to a wife and a mom. She is the one who is there when we are sick. She is the one who picks us up when we are down. She is the one at home taking care of *all* business while her Soldier is someplace far away. In our minds we begin to believe she will always be there, almost immortal. Though **(decedent's name)** was not immortal, she has received the gift of eternal life through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(Decedent's name) is now with Christ in His eternal dwelling place. She now looks forward, with Christ, to the day when all believers will be with Him as envisioned by the Apostle John in Revelation 21:1-4:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

(Decedent's name) is in this place without pain and tears, rejoicing in the glory of her Savior. Therefore today is a celebration of everlasting life, not a funeral.

Those of us who have trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have received the gift of eternal life and will see **(decedent's name)** again in another place, Heaven. Listen to these words from John's Gospel:

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned.

Therefore, I encourage each of you to seek comfort in God's promise and take hold of it by faith in His Son. Through faith in Jesus, there will come a day when we will go to meet **(decedent's name)** in Heaven.

Please stand and join me in prayer.

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your sacrifice that we may have eternal life. I ask for Your blessing to rest upon each one here today in their time of need. Help each of us to make the most of each day that we may serve You and the family and friends You have put in our lives - in Jesus' name, Amen.

RECESSIONAL HYMN

RECONCILED

by CH (CPT) Ronny D. Fisher (Estranged Family Member Homily)

In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the “Lost Sheep”. He says, “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost *until he finds it*? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, *rejoicing*. And when he *comes home*, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”

Like the lost sheep in Christ’s parable, towards the end of his life (**decedent’s name**) was able to experience a measure of reconciliation with his family. This measure though foreshadowed the reconciliation he is now enjoying with Christ in Heaven. It was a microcosm of the reality that is now his. Like the Prodigal Son who comes to his senses and returns home to find his Father rushing out to meet him, to find his Father’s arms wrapped around him welcoming him home, who hears his Father say, “...this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found”, (**decedent’s name**) in time found his way home as well.

Ours is not to speculate where (**decedent’s name**) is now, or what life might have looked like if things had been different earlier on in his life. Rather, ours is to believe and accept by faith that (**decedent’s name**) is now with Jesus and to rejoice in the knowledge of the truth that the reconciliation that was begun with his family here on earth will one day be completed in Heaven.

The Psalm we pray now, we do not pray for (**decedent’s name**) but for ourselves – Psalm 23.
The Lord is my shepherd...

LAMENTATIONS 3:19-26 CHAPEL HOMILY

by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh

We are honoring the life and service of **(decedent's name)**, an American Patriot, a combat veteran, our brother-in-arms, and one dearly loved by all of you gathered here. At such a time as this, at a ceremony like ours today, we come together to find comfort in our grief and to find hope despite our confusion. **(Decedent's name)** served our country as a Non-Commissioned Officer, deployed in combat with his fellow Soldiers, and then followed the call to earn an Officer's commission as he continued serving our nation. Yet now we are gathered to pay him honors at Arlington National Cemetery. It just doesn't seem fair! Our hearts can't justify it; our minds struggle to make sense of it. We want to know why – God why? Times like this remind us that life is not as it should be. But even still, I want to remind you that we can have hope in the face of a painful world.

The book of Lamentations, ancient as it is, authored by the Prophet Jeremiah, continues to affirm for us that the LORD is our only source of real hope.

The prophet says:

I remember my affliction, the bitterness and the gall. I remember them and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

God is the giver of life, and He sets the number of our days. Even in difficult times, the LORD is near to us. He knows our grief and our sorrows, and He comforts our souls. He knows our struggles and our fears, and He strengthens us for the days ahead.

Lamentations goes on to say:

I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

God watches over His people in love, no matter what happens. Not hardship, not trouble, nothing in heaven, nothing on earth, neither death, nor life in this imperfect world, nothing that has already happened, nothing that is yet to come, can separate us from God's love for us.

At times like this, we can weather crises which shake us to our very souls secure in the relentless grip of God's compassion. We overcome the unjustifiable hardships of life by the strength of the Spirit of God who sustains us. We look beyond the brokenness of this world with eyes of hope that see everything already put right on the promised day of God's redemption.

As we honor **(decedent's name)** today, let us continue to seek the Lord for strength in the days ahead. May the Lord indeed bless us with faith at such a time as this. Amen.

ACTIVE DUTY – MOTOR CYCLE FATALITY

By CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh

We are honoring the life and service of (decedent's name) – an American Patriot, a combat veteran, our brother-in-arms, and dearly loved by all of you gathered here. At such a time as this, at a ceremony like ours today, we come together to find comfort in our grief, and to find hope despite our confusion. **(Decedent's name, unit affiliation, and military/combat history followed by...)** yet now we find ourselves gathered together at Arlington National Cemetery to commemorate his life and service because he was stolen from us in a motorcycle wreck. It just doesn't seem fair. Our hearts can't justify it; our minds struggle to make sense of it. We want to know why – God, why? Times like this remind us that life is not as it should be. But even still, I want to remind you that we can have hope in the face of a painful world.

The book of Lamentations, ancient as it is, written by the Prophet Jeremiah continues to affirm for us that the LORD remains our only source of real hope. The prophet says:

I remember my affliction, the bitterness and the gall. I remember them and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

God is the giver of life, and He sets the number of our days. Even in difficult times, the LORD is near to us. He knows our grief and our sorrows, and He comforts our souls. He knows our struggles and our fears, and He strengthens us for the days ahead.

Lamentations goes on to state:

I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

God watches over his people in love, no matter what happens. Not hardship, not trouble, nothing in heaven, nothing on earth, neither death, nor life in this imperfect world, nothing that has already happened, nothing that is yet to come, can separate us from God's love for us.

At times like this, we can weather crises which shake us to our very souls secure in the relentless grip of God's compassion. We overcome the unjustifiable hardships of life by the strength of the Spirit of God who sustains us. We look beyond the brokenness of this world with eyes of hope that see everything already put right on the promised day of God's redemption.

As we honor **(decedent's name)** today, let us continue to seek the Lord for strength in the days ahead. May the Lord indeed bless us with faith at such a time as this. Amen.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-55 CHAPEL HOMILY

by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh

When we swear the oath to serve our country, we offer our strength, our skills, our very lives to defend this great land we love and call home. This is just what **(decedent's name)** has done as an officer in the United States Army. At every level of rank, and in every phase of his military career, **(decedent's name)** became a leader of Soldiers. And his leadership was tested and proven in not just one but two of our nation's wars.

The Apostle Paul writes:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"⁴⁰

At such a ceremony as ours today, I think we feel this sting of death more acutely, more personally. Yet the Apostle Paul would have us cast our vision forward, and upward, in hope at the promises of God. He calls this a "mystery," something that was hidden and is now revealed in Christ, that death is not the end for us just as death is not the end for **(decedent's first name)**; rather, it is a time of passing from our company here into the Lord's presence. The Apostle assures us that at the last trumpet, when the Lord Himself returns, the dead will be raised imperishable. What was mortal will be changed and become immortal. That which was perishable will become imperishable. You can be sure that when you see **(decedent's first name)** again on that great day, he will indeed be changed – no longer handicapped by his mortal body, no longer subject to pain or illness or grief or death. You will see him in the new body which the Lord promises to all of his children.

This is a great hope for us! And this is not a "wishful thinking" sort of hope, the kind we held out around here for the Redskins football season last fall – *wouldn't it be nice if...* This is a hope that eagerly expects God to fulfill His promises to us, the confident expectation that God will make His Word our reality. We can even say this afternoon that this is not **(decedent's full name)** laid to rest here, but the remains of the tent he lived in while among us. The scriptures testify that **(decedent's first name)** is in God's presence, face to face with the Lord who loves him.

In another place, the Apostle Paul urges us to "encourage each other with these words." So I encourage you to remember the wonderful times you had with **(decedent's first name)**. I also encourage you to think long on the Apostle's vision of seeing **(decedent's first name)** again renewed in the Lord's presence, immortal, imperishable, on that great day when death is finally and fully swallowed up in victory.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:51-55

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18 CHAPEL HOMILY

by CH (CPT) Scott Kennaugh

Today we have come together to honor the life and service of **(decedent's name)** and although *he/she* has reached their full measure of this life here on earth, we are all gathered as a testimony that **(decedent's name)** has invested *his/her* life in the service of others. He lived his life fully committed to the service of our country, the love of his units, the love of his family, and his faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. **(Decedent's name)** lived his life based on what he couldn't see, with the intention of bringing what he envisioned into reality. He could give of himself because he saw his life and other people with a vision for what they could become, regardless of how they looked at the time. He lived in pursuit of that vision of attaining what lies ahead, and his life was contagious.

The Scripture passage found in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 says:

We do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

(Decedent's name) understood what it meant to live a life of temporary affliction on earth with the eager expectation of “glory beyond all comparison.”

Today we face again the reality that the things we see are transient, and it strikes us more bitterly when it is the loss of someone so close to us. Yet we are not without hope. The Scripture reminds us that even though the things we see on the outside are wasting away, God renews our hearts and spirits with the hope, with the eager expectation, that the trials we face today will not even compare to the glory God has promised to those who persevere in faith. There is an eternal glory that is beyond the brokenness we see around us. Let us live as men and women who have the hope that when God's promises are fulfilled they will far outweigh the troubles we experience in these short and sometimes dark days of our lives here on earth.

(Decedent's name) lived believing that what lies ahead was worth fighting for, worth believing for, and worth dying for. As we honor him today, let us follow the example he set. Let us face every trial secure in our vision of the glory that God has promised to those who persevere while trusting Christ. This is **(decedent's name)** legacy; may it be ours as well.

JOHN 14:1-6 CHAPEL HOMILY

by CH (CPT) Dave Dice

Good afternoon, it is an honor to welcome you to the Old Post Chapel, just across the low stone wall from Arlington National Cemetery. Our mission today is to honor the sacrifice, service, and dedication of **(decedent's rank and full name)**. Born on **(decedent's date of birth)**, he went home to be with the Lord on **(decedent's date of death)**.

Harry Truman once said, "America was not built on fear. America was built on courage, on imagination, and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand." Today we honor a hero of our nation, a man who displayed great courage, great imagination, and an incredible determination to serve his nation.

(Decedent's name) demonstrated these characteristics across **(number of years decedent served)** of service to the United States of America. It can certainly be said that **(decedent's name)** didn't just possess the academic knowledge necessary to make a great officer, he also had the boots on the ground experience needed to propel him to excellence in his chosen field.

Today we celebrate the life of a man who represented America well. During his years spent abroad, **(decedent's name)** demonstrated the strength of America and her people—because he believed in it. A representative of any kind fails because they do not believe in their "product." **(Decedent's name)** believed in the nation he loved and served. He truly cared for the men and women on his left and his right, and it caused him to be truly great at what he did.

(Decedent's name) was an optimist. He lived life always seeing what *could be* rather than what simply is. The things that so many in this world don't ever stop to ponder or enjoy, **(decedent's name)** learned, loved, and passed along to others. Whether it was jogging on a crisp spring day, learning a new piece of history, spending time with his family, enjoying a cup of coffee, or facing the deadly disease that invaded his body, **(decedent's name)** faced life with gusto, a smile, and a grateful heart.

May it be said of us that in our lives we changed the world, not in ways that can't be counted, but by looking at our family, friends, those we knew in this life and seeing in them a better person because of the relationship we shared with one another. That was true of **(decedent's name)** and so today we honor him, we celebrate him, and we thank the Lord for the place he held in our lives.

In the same way **(decedent's name)** stood guard over our nation as a Soldier and officer, so Christ stands guard over our souls. We are reminded of this in Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." I challenge you today to seek out this peace that Christ promises, this peace that **(decedent's name)** is right now experiencing in the presence of our Lord.

It is a peace that you cannot find outside of the arms of Christ, and it is a peace that reaches beyond the body and touches our souls.

Death brings us to an intersection where there are found many roads converging into one: there is human sadness, there is inspiration for future living inspired by those who have died, there is anger, there is joy at thoughts of past days shared, there is confusion, wonder, reflection, and there is hope. We look to a Savior who understands; Jesus became man and put on flesh the New Testament says. Perhaps you have wondered what Christ would be thinking or feeling if He were in your shoes today. Well you know, He has been here—His circumstance is recorded in John 14:1-7.

We know that Christ poured His life specifically into twelve men, one of which betrayed him. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke these words to His disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” I imagine He was on the verge of tears as He said this. You know, like a child sucking in air to try to stifle a cry, saying they’re alright when you can tell that all they really want to do is cry. And so Jesus tells the disciples not to be troubled even though He is saying “Goodbye”. And there’s a reason He’s able to say this. Jesus could say, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” because He knew He was going to see them again. He was going to prepare a place for them because they had believed in Him. God in his sovereignty has prepared a place for **(decedent’s name)** and for those of us like **(decedent’s name)** who have placed our trust in Jesus.

We too can join **(decedent’s name)** on that future day when it is our time to leave this earth. We must only believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He promises that He will be our way, our truth, and our life. I close with this passage from the Gospel of John, the fourteenth chapter:

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. I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”⁴¹

Let us pray.

⁴¹ John 14:1-6

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5 CHAPEL HOMILY

by CH (CPT) Matt Madison

Experiencing the death of someone you love is never easy. The pain is immense, our hearts feel broken and many times we cry out to God. In those times of grief, inevitably there are those well-meaning friends and acquaintances who try to offer words of comfort. The subject of death is awkward for most however and many times their words and actions, while given with the best of intentions, fall short.

Truth be told, there is only One who can bring true comfort in the midst of our troubles. I want to read you a passage that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in order to encourage them in their sufferings. My prayer is that it will encourage you today as well.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”⁴²

Paul was a man who knew what it meant to suffer for Jesus. He was beaten, thrown in jail, shipwrecked, and ultimately died serving the Lord. And yet, look at what he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” When we are in pain and experience loss, such as death, who do we turn to? We must turn somewhere and look to someone to find meaning in it all. Paul recognizes that our God is the One who gives mercy, who brings comfort, and so it should be to Him that we turn in our hour of need.

And look what happens when we allow God to comfort us during our afflictions: we are then able to comfort others who walk that same road. God is able to redeem our situation and use it for good. Instead of holding our pain and sorrow inside, becoming bitter and angry, God comforts us, brings healing, turns our mourning into dancing, our sorrow into joy, and then uses us as instruments of His mercy.

Now how can God do this? How can God relate to our pain and sorrow? It is because He allowed His Son Jesus Christ to die a terrible death on the cross for us – for our sins. He is able to relate to us because God came to earth and experienced life as we live it. He knows what it means to suffer, to feel pain, and even to die. Our God is able to comfort us like no one else can. He doesn’t promise that we won’t ever suffer; He doesn’t promise that we won’t experience pain and sadness in this life. In fact Paul says, “For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”

Jesus is able to comfort us because He can relate to each circumstance we experience. But more importantly, He is able to comfort us because He conquered sin and death, rose from the grave,

⁴² 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

and has prepared a place for all those who trust in Him for eternity. In fact, Jesus told His disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself. That where I am, there you may be also.”⁴³

This promise Christ made to His disciples was true for **(decedent’s name)** and it remains true for us as well.

And so today I encourage you to turn to God for comfort. Seek Him and bless His name even in the midst of your troubles. Allow God to comfort you through His Son Jesus Christ. Believe in Him and in His promises. Be encouraged today that you are not alone. The God of the Universe loves you and wants nothing more than to wrap His loving arms around you. In that spirit we pray the 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd...

⁴³ John 14:3

APPENDIX 4: PROCESSIONAL READINGS

If the casket or urn is brought in from the rear of the chapel, lead the procession to the front of the chapel. Announce to those in attendance, “Please rise and face the rear of the chapel.”

When the Honor Guard brings the casket or urn inside the chapel, step out in front of them and face the congregation. Then read one of the following scriptural texts below. Afterwards, say “Amen” and step forward leading the procession to the front of the chapel. Your “Amen” will cue the organist or sound technician to play the processional hymn.

Regardless of which reading you decide to use, it’s important to introduce the text. You can do this any number of ways:

“A reading from the Gospel of John...” or “The Apostle Paul writes in Romans, chapter 8...”, or “Solomon, the son of King David, writes in Ecclesiastes 3...” Below are a number of readings our team has used during Chapel Services:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 (NLT)

For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under heaven.
² A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.
³ A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
⁴ A time to cry and a time to laugh.
(And there is) A time to grieve...

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

John 14: 1-3, 6

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. ²My 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? ³And 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...⁶I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Romans 8:38-39

³⁸For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14; 18

¹³But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even

so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus...¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ 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.

Though longer, the below reading is often a meaningful tribute to a spouse (and mother if applicable):

Proverbs 31:10-31, The Message

¹⁰⁻³¹ A good woman is hard to find,
and worth far more than diamonds.
Her husband trusts her without reserve,
and never has reason to regret it.
Never spiteful, she treats him generously
all her life long ...
She senses the worth of her work,
is in no hurry to call it quits for the day.
She's skilled in the crafts of home and hearth,
diligent in homemaking.
She's quick to assist anyone in need,
reaches out to help the poor...
Her husband is greatly respected
when he deliberates with the city fathers...
Her clothes are well-made and elegant,
and she always faces tomorrow with a smile.
When she speaks she has something worthwhile to say,
and she always says it kindly.
She keeps an eye on everyone in her household,
and keeps them all busy and productive.
Her children respect and bless her;
her husband joins in with words of praise:
"Many women have done wonderful things,
but you've outclassed them all!"
Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades.
The woman to be admired and praised
is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-GOD.
Give her everything she deserves!
Festoon her life with praises!

The highlighted portions may not apply to your decedent if she wasn't a homemaker and didn't have any children. If this is the case, I simply exclude the highlighted portions.

APPENDIX 5: FINAL THOUGHTS

Here are some parting thoughts for you to consider as you continue to discover and develop your own unique voice for performing funeral services:

1. If in uniform, always salute the flag when it's moving.
2. If in civilian attire, always place your hand over your heart when the flag is moving.
3. You're never saluting the casket or urn. You're always saluting the flag.
4. When in doubt, salute.
5. Always move and speak with confidence. Even if you're wrong, be wrong while being confident.
6. Never turn your back to the family.
7. While being pastoral, remain professional. Always address the next-of-kin as "Mr.," "Sir" and "Mrs." and "Ma'am". I once asked permission from an elderly woman to address her by her first name. She agreed. Moments later into our conversation she said, "You know, you can't be too much older than one of my boys. You had better call me Mrs. _____." I made a mental note after this to just always address my seniors as seniors.
8. Be likable. Likability covers a multitude of foibles. While referring to the decedent by another person's name is an unforgivable sin, minor mistakes and verbal missteps are forgivable as long as you're likable. The old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression" remains true.
9. Never ask someone of a higher rank to return your phone call. When calling families and forced to leave a message, say, "Good afternoon. This is _____ from _____ calling for Mr. _____. Sir, I am the chaplain/minister who will be officiating the ceremony for your wife (**decedent's name**). I just wanted to call to introduce myself, extend my personal condolences to you and your family, visit with you about (**decedent's name**), and then to address any questions that you might have about the service. I will certainly attempt to phone you again, but *if it's more convenient for you to call me, my number is _____*. That's (**repeat phone number**). Again, this is _____ from _____. Thank you for your time, Sir. God bless you." You're not asking the next-of-kin to return your call; you're simply making your number available to him if he'd like to.
10. Buy a black medium sized daily planner. Remove the calendar and whatever else is inside. Fill it with transparent sleeves, and use this as your "Funeral Book". When I first started performing funerals, I would size my remarks down, cut them out, then paper clip them to the inside of a black Bible I used for weddings and funeral services. The daily planner approach works much better.
11. Look right. Arriving to meet the family in a wrinkled uniform or suit is inexcusable. You should have a fresh haircut. If you're a military chaplain, ensure that you have a senior non-Commissioned Officer inspect your uniform. Are your shoes shined? Do the edges of your shoes need dressed? Exceed the standard. Does your appearance communicate honor?
12. Remember, everything you do either communicates honor or something else. When you stand at attention, stand tall and erect. When you march, don't strut – march. When you salute, make certain your thumb is aligned with your hand forming a blade.
13. Finally, be yourself. God can't use who you're not, and He won't use who you're trying to be. So, just be you.

APPENDIX 6: QUICK KEY WORD REFERENCE GUIDE

Agnostic	49
Children	27
Comfort	19, 48
Dependent	24, 26, 53, 63, 73, 76
Ephesians 2 Flip	30
Matthew 14:12 Flip	30-31
Memorial Ceremony	46
Purple Heart	21
Reconciled	78
Remember	15-16
Repatriation	69
Roosevelt	15-16
Suicide	15
Two Classes of Citizens	24
Warrior/Warrior Leader	22, 24, 44

APPENDIX 7: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. Long, Thomas G., Accompany Them With Singing – The Christian Funeral, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2009.
2. Osgood, Judy. Meditations for the Widowed, Gilgal Publications, Sunriver, Oregon, 1985.
3. Osgood, Judy. Meditations for Bereaved Parents, Gilgal Publications, Sunriver, Oregon, 1983.