

Lay Reader Training Course

Session V: Responding to a Death in the Parish

The Anglican Diocese of Edmonton

**Session held on January 17, 2009 at St. David's Anglican Church
Presented by Rev. Michael Rolph**

Last Revised February 11, 2009

Instructions for Clergy/Supervisors

The Lay Reader training course has been compiled into modules to allow those who missed a session or two to complete it in their local parish, under the supervision and teaching of the rector, and the guidance of the course curriculum. It is the responsibility of the Lay Reader candidate to contact the rector and to arrange time to meet and work through the material. It is the responsibility of the rector to ensure that the course material is **fully** covered and understood, as well as to contact the program co-ordinator to report the completion of any modules.

This module's layout is designed to be printed double-sided. Sections are arranged individually so you can print out the specific pages you need.

Set aside a significant portion of time with your Lay Reader candidate to go through the material. The original sessions provided four hours of discussion and instruction, broken up by time for breaks. Depending on the candidate, you may need to schedule several shorter sessions to complete the material in question.

Spend time on demonstration. Make sure that the candidate is walked through the experience of organizing, planning, and leading services. Provide tips and practical hints as they occur to you.

Each session begins with a discussion related to the candidate's prior experiences or understanding of the topic covered. Do not skip this step to move directly into instruction. Spending time in general discussion at the beginning makes deeper learning and discussion possible later in the session.

Expect and encourage questions. Be prepared to discuss your answers.

The Diocesan expectation of Lay Readers is that they will be trained to plan and lead liturgies using both the *Book of Common Prayer* and *Book of Alternative Services*. At the same time, it is understood that Lay Readers function in the context of the practice of their local parish. Therefore, Lay Reader candidates will be expected to learn and gain competence in the full range of authorized liturgies, rubrics, and practices, while **also** learning the rector's guidelines for the liturgical practice appropriate to the parish. Do not sacrifice one for the other.

Last, remember that you are equipping a minister. Take time to pray together.

**** If you have any questions, contact Rev. Cameron Burns, Program Co-ordinator ****

Session Learning Goals

At the end of this session, the candidates will:

1. Be able to plan and lead a funeral liturgy from both the *BCP* and *BAS*
 - a. By learning the funeral liturgies from both books
 - b. By discussing the logistics of funeral services
 - c. By discussing the practical aspects of leading a funeral
2. Be able to be present to others in the context of grief and death
 - a. By discussing one's own reaction to death
 - b. By considering death and resurrection theologically

Session Plan

The following is the agenda from the last presentation of this session:

9:30 am	Doors Open, Coffee/Tea Available
10:00 am	Morning Prayer
10:30 am	What about Death? Sharing Our Experiences
11:00 am	God, Death, Grief, and Hope
11:30 am	Break (15 minutes)
11:45 am	Being Present in the Presence of Death and Grief
12:45 pm	Lunch (45 minutes)
1:30 pm	The Funeral Liturgies of the <i>BCP</i> and <i>BAS</i>
2:30 pm	Break (15 minutes)
2:45 pm	Closing / Questions
4:00 pm	Evening Prayer

Session Instruction

Session Preparation

Read over the lesson materials. Make sure that you have a *BCP*, a *BAS*, and a Bible on hand (the Bible marked if necessary). Get some tea/coffee ready.

Greeting and Prayer

It is helpful to begin the session with a time of prayer. Consider using Morning Prayer, as it helps the candidate(s) to become familiar with the liturgy. Having the candidate(s) lead the prayer time is also beneficial.

Considering our Experiences: What About Death? (~30 minutes)

Ask the candidate(s) to relay an experience with death. Encourage the candidate(s) to describe the “feel” of grief and death. What is the “environment” of death and grief like?

Ask the candidate(s) to discuss the experience of having attended a funeral. What is the “feel” there? Is it similar to the “feel” of death? In what way did the funeral speak to the candidate(s)? Was it a positive experience? Was it a negative experience?

Ask the candidate(s) how they feel about leading a funeral service. What feelings are triggered?

Make sure to take notes (ask the candidate(s) for permission first) of important feelings, images, concepts, or thoughts. These will greatly help you to assess how best to work through the remaining material, as well as any additional conversation that you may wish to have. As you wrap up the discussion, it is important to normalize any concerns, doubts, or fears that the candidate(s) may express in relation to leading a funeral (since it is a scary environment to get into).

Theological Considerations: God, Death, Grief, and Hope (~45 minutes)

Begin by suggesting that since liturgy has a point, the funeral service is designed to speak to the context of death and grief. Therefore, to better understand the purpose of the service, it is helpful to have some understanding of what the Gospel has to say to the topic of dying and grieving.

A helpful question to consider at the outset is, “What happens after death?” Scripture seems to suggest either a period of “soul sleep” followed by a general day of resurrection, or the immediate assumption of the believer into heaven. Look at

some relevant passages of scripture together and discuss the implications of taking up either viewpoint.

Next, consider how the Gospel provides hope to those who grieve. There are two basic points to be made here: first, that the dead are received into the mercy of God; second, that the power of God transforms death itself by Christ's resurrection. Therefore, the end result of death is the transformation of the believer into Christ-likeness in the resurrection of the body. Ask the candidate(s) to consider how these truths might provide hope in the context of grief.

If the funeral service is to speak to those who are grieving, it must, then, speak the hope of the Gospel into the context of death and loss. This means that at the same time, a funeral service is focused both on addressing the legitimate grief felt by mourners and on directing mourners to find hope in the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

Ask the candidate(s) to revisit the story they shared involving a funeral they attended. In what way(s) were these twin emphases evident that day? In what way(s) were they obscured?

One final point is that while a funeral *points* to the hope found in Jesus Christ by articulating its theology through its liturgy, the funeral service never *creates* hope in and of itself. This is an important point: it is not the role of the liturgical leader to *make* people hopeful, but rather simply to speak the truth regarding God's promises of resurrection with compassion and clarity. The Holy Spirit takes care of the rest.

Being There: Being Present in the Presence of Death and Grief (~45 minutes)

The prior discussions concerning experiences with death and funerals demonstrates that this is an environment filled with emotion. In fact, people's emotions are involved in a way more complex and operative than in most other forms of ministry. Complex, because of dynamics and triggers, and operative due to their sheer power.

It is possible that the candidate(s) will be present in a number of different ways, but there are always *two* factors in play in terms of being present to those who grieve: the candidate him/herself; and the environment of those around him/her.

1. Here is the place to enter into a deeper discussion concerning the candidate(s) experiences of death and/or grief. Turn to the notes you've made, and discuss any specific reactions the candidate(s) has expressed. Do these represent a fear? A trigger of some sort?
2. In a funeral service, others are looking to the liturgical leader for direction. This means that the leader must be "in control" (of his/her emotions, of the liturgy, and of the environment). Discuss ways of finding that "control" (e.g., prayer before and during services; knowing one's reactions and triggers).

3. Those who grieve will also be exhibiting various emotions and behaviours. These range from helpful (e.g., someone comforting another) to harmful (e.g., people fighting or arguing). The liturgical leader must be observant and pay careful attention to others (to listen, to watch, to notice). This is just as true during the planning stages of a funeral as in the service itself. Emotions which are often seen, and lend themselves to harmful behaviour, are anger and despair. Ask the candidate(s) how they feel the Gospel hope provides respite for these emotional outpourings.
4. Often, the environment is clouded by various dynamics including family disputes or disagreements, broken or strained relationships, the burden of hidden secrets, or simmering envy and jealousy. These represent a potential minefield for the liturgical leader. Here is a place for practical tips regarding dealing with triangulation or erupting dynamics; discuss possible strategies for remaining present while in the midst of a shifting environment.
5. Last, a word on self-care: this course does not presume to teach conflict resolution skills. Make sure the candidate(s) understand that these strategies are to help the candidate(s) fulfill their role: to be present as a *liturgical leader*, and to lead a funeral service that will be meaningful. To step outside of that role (e.g., to try to “fix things”) is dangerous, and **not** part of the role of a Lay Reader. Resist the temptation to “solve problems”!

The Funeral Liturgy of the BCP (~25 minutes)

Work through the “Order for the Burial of the Dead” (pg. 591) in the *Book of Common Prayer* together, being careful to note the rubrics and options available. Some interesting points to consider:

1. The liturgy of the *BCP* makes no provision for a eulogy.
2. The third and fourth rubrics (pg. 591) provide an alternative service for the unbaptized, excommunicate, and those who have committed suicide. It is worth discussing the implications and appropriateness of these rubrics, in light of the theology of resurrection examined earlier.
3. Note the difference between mandated portions (“shall”) and optional ones (“may”). E.g., one of a group of psalms “shall” be read (pg. 593), while the Apostle’s Creed and a hymn “may” be used at certain points (pg. 597).
4. The committal prayer has three variations: for burial, for cremation, and for burial at sea (pg. 602). Note that it presumes that the body has already been lowered into the grave.
5. An order of service for the burial of a child is provided, on pages 604-608.

The Funeral Liturgy of the BAS (~25 minutes)

Work through the “Form II” liturgy found in the *Book of Alternative Services* together, being careful to note the rubrics and the various options available. Some interesting points to consider:

1. A helpful place to begin is with the general introduction to the funeral liturgies, found on pages 565-569.
2. Basic rubrics for all variations of the funeral liturgy can be found on page 570.
3. Form II of the funeral liturgy allows for the *celebrant* to offer words about the deceased, either in the greeting, or following the readings (pg. 589). There is no provision made in the liturgy for any other form of eulogy.
4. Note that there are more opportunities for variation in the *BAS* than in the *BCP*.
5. Note that a “brief sermon” is an option right before the optional Apostle’s Creed (pg. 592).
6. A unique litany is provided on pages 593-594. The rubrics suggest inviting a member of the family or friend of the deceased to lead these (or other optional) prayers.
7. Note the rubrics involving body posture attached to the commendation (pg. 595).
8. The section describing the committal also contains a wording to allow for the disposition of ashes, for a body to be sent for cremation, or for a burial at sea (pg. 596, bottom).
9. Some additional prayers are found on pages 596-597.
10. Some suggestions for suitable readings are made on pages 604-605

Closing and Questions

At this point, wrap up the session by going over any questions that the candidate(s) may have regarding the material for the session. This is also the appropriate time to walk through the local funeral service with the candidate(s), to give them a sense of what a funeral at your parish looks like—as well as how they might expect to be of service in the case of a death in your parish.

In regards to the question of eulogies, the Bishop has provided this direction: that eulogies should be delivered by one person (written by one or two), and ought to take place at the beginning of the service (in order not to conflict with the flow of the rest of the service).

Last, close in prayer. You may wish to share Evening Prayer. If this is the case, consider using a different prayer book than the one used for Morning Prayer; it will help to broaden your candidate(s) familiarity with both books.