

A Pastor's Perspective on Grief – Session with Pastor Glen Schlecht – April 30th, 2023
Class on Grief and Grieving – Immanuel Lutheran Church
Adult Education Ministry – Spring 2023

1. Pastor Glen began by sharing some personal experiences – over the course of his ministry, he has performed almost 295 funerals: never less than 4 per year and as many as 17 one year (average funerals – 9 a year). He made the comment, “I loved doing funerals more than weddings” because of the opportunity to speak into the lives of people that are hurting on a deep level of the hope we have in Christ and the promises of God.
2. Observation – With the onset of the COVID pandemic, there was a marked change in attitude in our culture regarding funerals. Many people opted (and are currently doing so) for no services, not even a “celebration of life.” It is one of the worse realities that came out of COVID.
3. Why have a funeral service?
 - We need it.
 - Part of the grieving process.
 - It is an opportunity to say, “goodbye.”
 - Relationally, it is important to cry with friends and family, laugh about memories and funny moments in our loved one's life.
 - And it is vital to honor God for the blessing of that person's life and gifts and to hear from Jesus His words of comfort and love.
 - We want to encourage, even urge people, when they experience the loss of a loved one, to celebrate their life with a funeral service.
4. Cremation questions – cremation has become very “popular,” more and more people/families are opting for cremation when making decisions regarding the death of a loved one. Questions regarding cremation are the most common questions that Pastor Glen receives when counseling a family through the death process. Many people have questions given the history of cremation and misunderstandings of the church's teaching or viewpoint.
 - Pastor Glen mention that ILC has a columbarium which should be indicative of our support of people making that decision regarding the final disposition of a loved one's physical remains.
 - He also pointed out, “whatever remains of the body after death will eventually return to dust.”
 - Pastor Glen did state his personal preference – he supports people seeing the body after death. Viewing is important psychologically and emotionally in sensing death's finality and saying, “goodbye.”
 - Cremation could be seen by some as an offshoot of a culture of convenience as well as simply an option being made for economic reasons (since cremation is the least expensive of funeral options at Funeral Homes/Mortuaries.
5. Viewing of the body of the deceased. As hard as it is, it is important to see the body of a loved one before they are buried or cremated. Pastor Glen shared his perspectives of the differences he's witnessed in “viewing traditions” coming from the Midwest of our country versus Colorado and the Western states. Some other comments Pastor Glen shared:

- “Yes, the one you love is not going to ‘look like themselves’ but there is a need to see the finality of life.”
 - Some people struggle through the grieving process if they don't see the body of the deceased.
 - There is power in seeing death.
 - Pastor Glen encouraged parents to consider allowing their children to see the bodies of deceased loved ones. It is important for children to know about death, to see that their family member has died. It is important to give them an opportunity to ask questions as well as the fact that the experience gives parents the opportunity to share with them the truths of the resurrection and Christian teaching about death and new life.
 - There are options these days that are available for a combination of viewing the casket and cremation that you can talk about with a funeral director.
6. Where do you have a funeral service - “Church vs graveside vs funeral home” - should the size of the funeral service gathering matter in making the decision on where you have the service? Pastor Glen believes that the most appropriate place for a funeral service is the sanctuary of our church at Immanuel. “It does matter if there is only 20 people...do the service here!” The sanctuary is filled with powerful symbols of God’s truth; it’s a place where we have proclaimed Jesus, worshipped the victory of Jesus over sin and death. Simply walking into the sanctuary can remind people of glorious, life-changing truths.
7. Pastor Glen reviewed the ministry we have at Immanuel in offering families who are planning funerals a Luncheon and/or reception. He shared the history of how Immanuel figured out funeral receptions over the years as well as how we do it now. At Immanuel, Pastor Glen asks the family for an estimate of how many people they would anticipate would attend the service. There is a small cost per person (\$4) to cover the food that will be prepared. Kathy Schlecht has a CCB mailing list of funeral group volunteers who can sign up to bring desserts, help with the serving of food and clean up after the reception.
8. Questions asked:
- a) How do you handle funerals for people who are not Christians (who don’t know the Lord Jesus)? Pastor Glen remarked that during the funeral service he is upfront about the fact that he doesn’t know the person. “I can’t pretend to know the person but through things like slide shows, life stories and eulogies, we can share about the person’s life journey. I can get to know the person through stories but then I try to speak the truth of the Gospel. I speak Jesus and share with people that Jesus is calling them to come to Him; to trust in God.”
 - b) There was question about funeral “palls.” Immanuel has two funeral palls available for funeral use. One that is used with a casket and one for a cremation urn. A Pall is put on a casket after the viewing and is left on during the funeral service of worship. A Pall is a symbol of the “covering of the love and grace of Jesus” as well as the fact that the New Testament proclaims that those in Christ are “clothed” by Him.
 - c) Pastor Glen addressed the grieving process remarking that people need ministry long after losing a loved one. Never rush the grieving process. There is NO set time to grieve. Don’t have the expectation that you are going to “get over it.” It is not that cut and dry. Good resources include the “Good Grief” book that Pastor Glen makes available to every family after the loss of a loved one as well as the four Stephen Ministries booklets that are sent to families during the first year after a loved one’s death. When it comes to working through

the grieving process always be ready for special dates in your deceased loved one's life. On those dates, grief might be more intense.

9. At the end of the session, Pastor Glen made available the Funeral Preferences worksheet. That sheet is available for you to fill out. Pastor Robin will have copies of the Funeral Preferences Worksheet at the upcoming Grief classes as well as the fact that they are always available from the church office. Once filled out, one copy you can keep with your important papers (wills, finances, other personal plans) and one copy will be at the church office. The worksheet will help you think through what you are thinking about when putting together your funeral service. Remember, a funeral service is not about you! It is an opportunity for witness and ministry to your family and friends. It will give you an opportunity to write down important and personal scripture passages as well as address musical preferences for your service. It is a GREAT help to a family who is in crisis after a loved one dies. It is one way to love your family as they begin to grieve.