

Note: The following article on Funeral Pre-planning is an ongoing part of the Stewardship Education and Awareness Program here at St. Paul's

PRE-PLANNING YOUR FUNERAL – A SELFLESS ACT OF STEWARDSHIP

In our series on Leaving a Legacy: Faithful Stewardship, we have already examined financial stewardship and the tax situations that result from it. We are now moving on to being faithful stewards even in our passing.

Death is a reality that each of us must face, but it is often the topic we avoid discussing. Mr. McGorium from the movie Mr. McGorium's Wonder Emporium eloquently sets out our passing with the help of Shakespeare. "When King Lear dies in Act V, do you know what Shakespeare has written? He's written "He dies." That's all, nothing more. No fanfare, no metaphor, no brilliant final words. The culmination of the most influential work of dramatic literature is "He dies." It takes Shakespeare, a genius, to come up with "He dies." And yet every time I read those two words, I find myself overwhelmed with dysphoria. And I know it's only natural to be sad, but not because of the words "He dies." but because of the life we saw prior to the words."

As Christians, we are called to live lives of stewardship — managing the resources and responsibilities entrusted to us by God. Stewardship extends beyond how we manage our time, talents, and finances during our lifetimes; it also involves preparing for our end of life and ensuring that our final wishes reflect our faith, values, and care for others. One significant yet often overlooked – or avoided -aspect of stewardship is pre-planning our funerals. In this article, we will explore the importance of pre-planning a funeral from a Christian perspective, focusing on how this act aligns with the biblical concept of stewardship.

Have you considered how pre-planning your funeral can be of benefit to you and your loved ones? Pre-planning a funeral offers numerous benefits, both practical and spiritual. For Christians, this act goes beyond merely choosing funeral details; it becomes a stewardship decision that ensures the wishes of the deceased are respected and that families are supported in a difficult time.

What is preplanning? Some of us by nature are planners. Most of us want to plan ahead for most things in our lives, grocery lists, vacations, and of course the dreaded to-do lists. Pre-planning a funeral may not be a topic that many like to discuss, but from a Christian stewardship perspective, it is a wise and loving decision that reflects our faith in God's sovereignty over life and death. It is a final act of care for our loved ones and an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to managing God's gifts responsibly. By planning your funeral, your loved ones are following your guide as to what your wishes are, and the process becomes less stressful on your family and friends.

Pre-planning your funeral is an important decision that can provide both practical and emotional benefits for you and your loved ones. While it may be uncomfortable to think about, there are several reasons why taking the time to preplan your funeral is a wise and thoughtful choice.

1. Financial Responsibility

One of the most immediate practical benefits of pre-planning a funeral is the ability to manage funeral costs. Funerals can be expensive, and without prior planning, family members may be left to cover the expenses unexpectedly. Pre-planning, with or without pre-paying, allows individuals to understand and make important decisions regarding service costs, set aside funds,

lock in prices, and avoid inflationary increases. From a Christian perspective, managing finances with foresight is an act of stewardship, relieving loved ones from financial burden and preventing unnecessary stress during an already difficult time.

2. **Alleviating the Burden on Loved Ones**

Death is a highly emotional event, and the process of making funeral arrangements can be overwhelming, especially for those who are grieving. By pre-planning, individuals can make difficult decisions about burial, service details, or other important matters in a calm and thoughtful manner thereby reducing stress at the time of death. This act of care for others reflects Christ's command to love our neighbors (Mark 12:31). It also ensures that family members can focus on mourning and celebrating the life of the deceased, rather than grappling with logistics.

3. **Aligning Funeral Plans with Christian Faith**

For Christians, a funeral is more than just a ceremony; it is a final opportunity to reflect on the hope we have in Christ and to testify to His resurrection. Pre-planning allows individuals to make choices that reflect their faith, such as selecting hymns, Bible readings, and prayers that honor Christ's life, death, and resurrection. This can serve as a testimony to family and friends, encouraging them to focus on the hope of eternal life rather than the sorrow of death.

4. **Ensuring Peace of Mind**

There is a profound sense of peace that comes from knowing that one's final wishes are clearly documented and that arrangements are in place. The Bible speaks about the importance of peace in our hearts (Philippians 4:6-7), and making funeral plans in advance can bring emotional and spiritual comfort. By knowing that we have thoughtfully and prayerfully made decisions about our end-of-life care, we can face death with courage and assurance, leaving behind a legacy of good stewardship.

How Funeral Pre-Planning Reflects Christian Stewardship

The Bible teaches that death is not something to be feared but is instead a transition to something greater: eternal life with God. However, while Christians believe in the hope of resurrection, they are also called to live wisely and with care for others. Pre-planning a funeral is an extension of this wisdom and care, ensuring that we are not leaving a burden for others to carry but rather an example of thoughtful stewardship.

1. **Stewardship of Time**

Time is one of God's most precious gifts, and we are called to use it wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16). By pre-planning a funeral, we honor our time and the time of those around us. We spare our loved ones from the added stress of last-minute decisions, enabling them to focus on their grief and healing while celebrating a life well-lived. This careful use of time aligns with Christian values and helps others navigate their mourning with a sense of peace.

2. **Stewardship of Resources**

Pre-planning is also a way to manage the resources God has entrusted to us. Financially, it helps ensure that your family will not be strained by unexpected expenses in the midst of loss.

Furthermore, it allows for a more intentional distribution of resources, which could include charitable donations or specific requests regarding how funds should be used after our death.

3. **Stewardship of Relationships**

Ultimately, pre-planning a funeral is a way of caring for others. It's an expression of love for our family, friends, and community, as we provide them with a clear, manageable process during a challenging time. By making decisions ahead of time, we reduce confusion, conflict, and burden, fostering an environment where relationships can be strengthened through shared grief rather than strained by logistical challenges.

Pre-planning your funeral is a thoughtful and considerate act that provides peace of mind, relieves the emotional and unexpected financial burden on your loved ones, and ensures that your final wishes are honored. While it may be a difficult topic to face, taking the time to make arrangements in advance can bring comfort to both you and your family.

Submitted by Mark Stalter

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The stewardship team wish to thank the staff at Hulse, Playfair & McGarry for their time and resources in constructing this article. Most funeral home establishments offer pre-planning resources and expertise. Should you have questions relating to preplanning, please avail yourself of the resources at hpmcgarry.ca/preplanning, or another funeral home of your choosing, or contact the Stewardship Team at stewardship@stpaulshk.org