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Funeral Ministry Starter Kit

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Check every name, pronoun and detail before you use this.

Before you use a template

Replace every [Name] and [family names] placeholder. Check pronouns, relationships and names against the family's approved details. Choose one faith track, then remove unused alternatives. Only use personal testimony you can honestly give.

RESOURCE 1 OF 5

Preparing to Lead Your First Funeral

Start here

> Funerals are a great time to reflect on the past and respond to eternity.

That sentence is the whole job. You help people remember a life, and you point them to hope.

> Funerals are sacred spaces. They remind us of how fragile life is, how deep love goes, and how real grief feels.

Ten things to know

1. **Be present and available.** Your presence carries more weight than your words. Stand near the person closest to the one who passed. Don't hover, but be close enough that they can find you easily. Often, they'll want to talk, introduce you, or ask for prayer.
2. **Meet with the funeral director.** Arrive early, connect with the director or coordinator, and walk through the service flow, mic setup, and timing. Be the calm, collected leader they can lean on to bring peace and clarity.
3. **Set the tone.** You carry the spiritual authority in the room. Be steady, grounded, and gracious. People will mirror your posture. If you carry peace, they'll feel peace. If you hold space for both tears and laughter, others will feel permission to grieve and remember.
4. **Learn names and lean into stories.** Before the service, walk around. Put a hand on someone's shoulder, ask "How did you know [Name]?" and listen. Don't just fill silence. Create space for stories to surface. It helps the room connect and honor the life lived.
5. **Come prepared.** Bring a printed order of service, your notes, and a few extra Scriptures or songs, just in case. Don't rely on Wi-Fi. Know what's planned, but also be ready to pivot if something shifts last minute.
6. **Memorize key Scriptures.** Be ready for "Why did God allow this?" or "They left too soon." Memorizing a few Scriptures like 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Psalm 34:18, or John 14:1-3 allows you to respond with truth and compassion, not cliche.
7. **Balance joy and grief.** It's okay to laugh at a funeral. Don't force it, but if they're in heaven, celebrate it. If there are funny stories, lean into them. And if there are tears, don't rush them. Both are holy. Both belong.
8. **Speak clearly and with compassion.** Check the mic. Speak loud enough for the back row. Slow down when reading Scripture or sharing a heartfelt moment. Your words bring comfort, so don't rush

through them.

9. **Minister after the message.** Stick around. The most meaningful conversations often happen after the service. Be available for prayer, hugs, or even just sitting quietly with someone. Follow up with the family a few days later.
10. **You don't need to fix anything.** This isn't a moment to solve theological mysteries or tie up grief with a bow. Be present. Be loving. Point to Jesus. That's enough.

Three notes on the ten

- *Touch (4 and 9).* Read the person first. A hand on the shoulder or a hug comforts some people and not others. When you are unsure, stand near and let them move toward you.
- *Humor (7).* Follow the family's lead. Tell funny stories they have told you and cleared you to share.
- *"If they're in heaven" (7).* When you do not know where the person stood with God, you can still celebrate the life and the stories. See "Speaking about faith" below.

The week before: a simple path

1. **Call the family as soon as you hear.** Keep it short. Optional first words: "I'm so sorry. I'm here, and I'd be honored to help. Can I come sit with you tomorrow?"
2. **Meet the family.** Use Resource 2.
3. **Talk to the funeral director.** Confirm date, place, the order of service, and who does what.
4. **Settle the order of service.** Resource 3 has three sample orders.
5. **Write the message.** Use the template below.
6. **Print everything.** Order of service, notes, extra Scriptures. Don't rely on Wi-Fi.

Build the message

Plan for about 15 minutes.

Part	What goes here
Title	Name of deceased: title of message
Welcome	Thank people on the family's behalf
Opening prayer	A passage, then pray. Pause 2–4 seconds after the prayer
Big idea	One sentence
Point 1	[Name]'s testimony, with a text that supports it
Point 2	Addressing the spouse and children, with a text

Part	What goes here
Point 3	Our response to a life well lived, with a text
Closing	Invitation and prayer

Using it

- Point 1 is their story. Use what the family gave you and cleared you to share.
- Point 2 speaks to the people hurting most. Say their names. Speak to them, not about them.
- Speak to the people grieving most: a spouse, children, parents, siblings, friends, or others the family identifies. Use the names and relationships the family has confirmed.
- Point 3 turns to everyone in the room. What does this life ask of us?

Optional alternate outline. Ask what [Name] would tell us if they could speak today: life is short (Psalm 90:10, 12); relationships matter more than anything else (Luke 10:27); our most important relationship is with Jesus (John 3:16).

Sample wording

Welcome, option A

> On behalf of the [Name] family I would like to thank you for joining us today as we celebrate the life of [Name].

Welcome, option B

> Welcome to [Name]'s celebration of life. We are here to honor his memory, grieve together, and look to the hope that anchors us in moments like this.

Making room for mixed feelings

> Some of you come here today with good memories. Others carry heartbreak and questions. And some of you may feel both: gratitude for moments shared and grief over moments missed. All of it is welcome in this room. God is big enough to hold the whole story.

> To those of you carrying pain or unanswered questions, I want to say: I see you. God sees you. And it's okay to hold both grief and grace in the same hand.

A life well lived

> A life well lived is not found in your accomplishments or accolades, it's not found in your network or your net worth. A life well lived is found in the legacy of faith you leave for others to follow.

Speaking about faith: two tracks

Say what you know. Do not state as fact what you cannot know.

Track A: you know the person followed Jesus

> [Name] was a follower of Jesus Christ. Having placed his faith and trust in Jesus, we have the hope and full assurance that he is more alive than he's ever been, at home for now and ever more.

> And as much as we miss her today, I don't wish her back. She's experiencing a healing, a joy, and a freedom that surpass anything this world can offer.

These lines are personal testimony about people whose faith the speaker knew. Use words like them only when you can say them honestly.

Track B: you do not know, or the family is unsure

We can speak clearly about the hope Christ offers without claiming to know a part of [Name]'s story we do not know.

> [Name]'s story reminds us that none of us are too far gone. That Jesus came for the hurting, the searching, the addicted, the ambitious, the misunderstood. He came for all of us.

> We will remember [Name]. We will say his name. We will grieve his absence. But we will not grieve without hope. Because one day, for all who trust in Christ, there will be a reunion.

On Track B:

- Honor the life. Preach the hope of the Gospel to the living.
- Report what the family told you as theirs: "His family told me he prayed with his mother last spring."
- Avoid "He's in a better place" unless you know it.

The invitation

Parker's manuscripts give an invitation at every funeral. Keep it clear, short and free of pressure.

Naming the response

Name one response for believers and one for those who have not yet trusted Christ. From the source:

> May the example that [Name] leaves lead you to believe. You cannot be found faithful apart from faith.

A gentle lead-in

> If you're here today and you don't know Jesus personally, or maybe you've been running, searching, longing for something more, this could be the moment everything changes. God is not asking you to get your act together first. He's not waiting for you to be perfect. He's just inviting you to come.

Leading the prayer

> If you want to make a decision to follow Jesus, then join me and everyone else in the building as we pray out loud together. It's not the prayer that saves you, but your faith, making Jesus Lord of your life. We don't let anyone go on the journey alone.

Prayer

> Jesus, I acknowledge that I need you.
> I confess that I have sinned against you.
> I believe that God raised you from the dead,
> and right now, by faith, I say "Jesus is Lord."
> Thank you for forgiving me.
> By your grace I am saved,
> and by your power I am set free.

After the prayer

> If you prayed that and meant it, trusting Jesus with your life, your eternity just changed.

Afterward, tell people how to find you or someone on your team. "We don't let anyone go on the journey alone" is a promise you now have to keep.

Scriptures to have ready

Passage	Good for	Track
Psalm 34:18	God near the brokenhearted	Either
Psalm 23	Comfort, reading aloud	Either

Passage	Good for	Track
John 14:1-4, 27	Peace; a place prepared	Either
John 11:25-26	Jesus as resurrection and life	Either
2 Corinthians 1:3-5	The God of all comfort	Either
Matthew 5:4	Those who mourn	Either
Philippians 4:7; 1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 61:1-2	Peace and care	Either
Ecclesiastes 7:2; Psalm 90:10, 12	Numbering our days	Either
Hebrews 13:14-16	This world is not our home	Either
1 Corinthians 15:54-57	Victory over death	A
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	Grieving with hope	A ("if they are a follower of Christ")
2 Timothy 4:7	Finishing the race	A

Going deeper: what John 11 teaches a pastor

From Parker's sermon notes on John 11. Three observations worth carrying into a funeral home:

- **People grieve differently.** "Notice how different the two sisters handle the coming of Jesus. One runs to the gate, the other sits in the chair. They are both dealing with significant loss, grief, and disappointment, and we all handle it so differently." Expect both in the same family, and treat neither as the right way.
- **Honest prayer is still faith.** Martha says, "Lord, if you had been here," and then, "Yet even now." "We see both frustration and faith."
- **Presence before power.** "Before Jesus exercised authority, He demonstrated empathy and He entered fully into the human experience." He wept before he raised Lazarus. Sit with people before you speak to them.

Last word

> You don't need to fix anything. Be present. Be loving. Point to Jesus. That's enough.

> Cling to the Word of God. Rest in the Spirit of God. Depend upon the grace of God.

RESOURCE 2 OF 5

Family Meeting Guide and Questions

What this meeting is for

You are there to listen first and plan second.

> You don't have to rush through these. Sometimes just asking one or two opens up a whole well of what you'll need for the message.

Before you go

- Meet where the family is comfortable, usually their home.
- Allow about an hour. Leave earlier if they are worn out.
- Bring a notebook, this sheet and a pen. Leave the laptop in the car.
- Ask who should be there. Let the family decide.
- Pray before you walk in.

How to open

Sample wording

> I know there are no words that can touch the depth of your loss, but I want to be here with you: to listen, to honor [Name], and to help tell [Name]'s story in a way that reflects the love and pain you're holding. When you're ready, I'd love to hear more about who [Name] was to you.

Then say these two things out loud

> You can skip any question. If something is too hard today, we leave it.

> Nothing you tell me will be shared at the service unless you say it's okay. Before I leave, I'll read back what I'm planning to share so you can tell me yes or no.

The questions

Every question is optional. Questions marked ◆ are sensitive: ask only if the family seems ready, and take "I'd rather not" as a full answer.

1. Presence and comfort

Start here. These are more relational than informational.

- How are you doing right now, really?
- What's been the hardest part these last few days?
- How would you describe the relationship you had with [Name]?
- ◆ Is there anything about these last days that you want me to know?

2. Story and identity

These help you tell the story of a life, beyond how it ended.

- What are some of your favorite memories of [Name]?
- How would you describe [Name]'s personality? What made [Name] who they were?
- What brought [Name] joy? What made [Name] laugh?
- What was [Name] passionate about: hobbies, causes, people?
- Were there people or places that were especially important to [Name]?

3. Faith

- Was [Name] someone of faith? Did [Name] ever talk about God, faith, or eternity?

Write down what they say in their words. Their answer tells you which track to use in Resource 1. If the answer is "I don't know," that is your answer too.

4. The full picture

These acknowledge struggle without shame and affirm dignity.

- ◆ Would you feel comfortable sharing about [Name]'s journey, including the struggles?
- How would you want people to remember [Name]: not just by how [Name] died, but how [Name] lived?
- Are there any things [Name] said recently (words, texts, moments) that felt meaningful?
- ◆ What do you think [Name] would want to say to the people sitting in that room?

5. The service

- Are there any Scriptures, songs, or readings that were meaningful to [Name], or to you, that you'd like included?
- Who do you feel will be attending: mostly people of faith, or a mix?
- What do you want people to walk away feeling or remembering?
- If I could say one thing clearly on your behalf, what would you want it to be?

- Who will give the eulogy? Does anyone else want to speak?
- Would you like an open time for people to share, or would you rather not?
- Will there be a graveside service? Who should be there?
- Will the service be recorded or streamed? Are you comfortable with that?

Tell them what you plan to do

> I'll share the hope we have in Jesus and give people a chance to respond. I'll do it with care for everyone in the room.

Confirm what can be shared

Before you leave, read back each story or detail you plan to use and mark one box.

Story or detail	OK to share at the service	Just for the pastor	Not sure, ask again
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐

Rules for the sheet:

- Being told something is not permission to repeat it.
- "Not sure" means no until they say yes.
- Ask a parent or guardian before naming a child or sharing anything about one.
- Be most careful with cause of death, health, addiction, family conflict and money.
- Permission for the service is not permission to post online. Ask separately.
- If another story or detail goes into the message later, check it with the family before using it. Confirm separately what may be included in a recording or stream.

After the meeting

- Write up your notes the same day.
- Send the family the order of service to confirm.
- Check name spellings and pronunciations.
- Keep your notes private and limit access to the people responsible for pastoral care. Record what the family has approved for sharing. Handle retention and disposal through your church's established records policy; permission to share and permission to retain are separate questions.

RESOURCE 3 OF 5

Funeral Service-Day Checklist

Bring

- ☐ Printed order of service
- ☐ Printed notes
- ☐ A few extra Scriptures or songs, just in case
- ☐ Nothing that depends on Wi-Fi
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Names of family and speakers, with pronunciations
- ☐ The family's permission sheet from Resource 2
- ☐ Water, tissues, a pen
- ☐ Phone on silent

Arrive early

- ☐ Find the funeral director or coordinator
- ☐ Agree with the coordinator how you will help if a speaker cannot continue or runs beyond the agreed time
- ☐ Get an alternate contact in case the coordinator is unavailable
- ☐ Walk through the service flow and timing
- ☐ Check the mic. Can the back row hear you?
- ☐ Confirm music cues and who runs them
- ☐ Confirm speakers, their order and a time limit for each
- ☐ Ask how the service ends: who dismisses, and how people get to the graveside

Before the service starts

- ☐ Stand near the person closest to the one who passed. Don't hover.
- ☐ Walk the room. Learn names. Ask, "How did you know [Name]?" and listen.
- ☐ Read people before you offer a hand or a hug.
- ☐ Pray with the family if they want it. Ask first.
- ☐ Settle yourself. "People will mirror your posture. If you carry peace, they'll feel peace."

During the service

- ☐ Read Scripture slowly
- ☐ Speak slowly in the message of hope
- ☐ Pause 2–4 seconds after you pray
- ☐ Let laughter and tears both happen. Don't rush either.
- ☐ Thank each speaker by name
- ☐ If there is open sharing, say how it will end before it starts ("We'll hear from a few people, and then I'll close us in prayer")
- ☐ Be ready to pivot if something shifts

Three sample orders of service

These are three real orders from the source manuscripts. Pick the one that fits the family, then adjust.

Simple

1. Welcome and opening prayer
2. Song (chosen by the family)
3. Message (about 15 minutes)
4. Song (chosen by the family)
5. Closing prayer

Full

1. Welcome
2. Opening prayer
3. Song
4. Eulogy
5. Song
6. Letter to [Name], read by a family member
7. Message, with invitation and prayer
8. Song
9. Closing prayer
10. Graveside service (separate; see Resource 4)

Scripture-centered

1. Greeting

2. Opening prayer
3. Eulogy
4. Scripture reading
5. Message of hope
6. A closing passage of comfort
7. Closing prayer

After the service

- ☐ Stick around. "The most meaningful conversations often happen after the service."
- ☐ Be available for prayer, or just sit quietly with someone
- ☐ Thank the funeral director and anyone who served
- ☐ Note anyone who responded to the invitation or asked to talk
- ☐ Put the follow-up dates you chose from Resource 5 in your calendar before you drive home

RESOURCE 4 OF 5

Adaptable Graveside Service Outline

Before you begin

- Keep it to 10–15 minutes. People are standing, often in weather.
- Ask the funeral director where to stand, when to start, and what happens with the casket or urn.
- Speak up. There is usually no microphone.
- If there are military or other honors, ask where they fall in the order.
- Decide your track before you arrive: **Track A** when you know the person followed Jesus, **Track B** when you do not know.
- Before printing, choose the faith track and the wording for a body or ashes. Remove the alternatives you will not read.

The flow

The order follows Parker's graveside manuscript: opening remarks, Scripture, words of comfort, invitation, committal, closing prayer and benediction.

1. Opening remarks

Track A

> Funerals, though filled with grief, offer us a moment to remember the past and respond to eternity. This world was never meant to be our permanent home, and today, we remember that our true home is with God.

Track B

> Funerals, though filled with grief, offer us a moment to remember the past and respond to eternity. We are here to lay [Name]'s body to rest, to give thanks for [Name]'s life, and to look to the God of all comfort.

2. Scripture

Read one or two. Read slowly.

- **Track A:** John 14:1-4 · 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 · Hebrews 13:14-16
- **Track B:** Psalm 23 · Psalm 34:18 · John 11:25-26 · 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

3. Words of comfort

Two or three sentences. This is not a second sermon.

Track A

> [Name] lived a life marked by love, faith, and the deep relationships she shared with each of us. As much as we miss her today, I don't wish her back. She is seen and loved beyond our understanding, and she's in the presence of the One who loves her most.

Track B

> It's okay to hold both grief and grace in the same hand. God is near to the brokenhearted.

4. The invitation

One or two sentences here. The fuller invitation belongs in the funeral service.

Either track

> Today we ask everyone here to respond to eternity by receiving God's gift of grace.

On Track A, add: "To share with [Name] in this confident hope."

5. The committal

Track A

> Now, as we prepare to say goodbye, we commit [Name]'s body to the earth. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life.

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" and "sure and certain hope" are traditional words from the Book of Common Prayer burial service.

Track B

> Now, as we prepare to say goodbye, we commit [Name]'s body to the earth. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. We entrust [Name] into God's eternal care, and we look to Jesus, who said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

For cremation: say "we commit [Name]'s ashes to their resting place."

6. Closing prayer

Track A, shorter

> Lord, we thank You for the promise of eternity. Today, as we say goodbye to [Name], we trust in Your promise that this is not the end. Comfort each heart, fill us with Your peace, and help us hold on to the hope that we, too, will one day join You in our eternal home. Amen.

Track A, longer

> Father, thank You for [Name]. Thank You for every year You gave us with her, and for the faith she placed in Jesus. We are sad today, and You are not far from us in it. You are near to the brokenhearted, and You are near to this family right now.
>
> Because Jesus died and rose again, we do not say goodbye without hope. We lay [Name]'s body in this ground, and we rejoice that she is home with You.
>
> Be close to [family names] in the days ahead. Give them rest when the house is quiet, people around them when the days are long, and the peace only You can give. Hold all of us steady until the day we are together again in Your presence.
>
> In Jesus' name, amen.

Track B

> God, we thank You for [Name]'s life, and we entrust him into Your eternal care. We pray that Your peace would rest on each heart gathered here. Walk with us in our grief, hold us in our hope, and remind us daily of Your love and grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

(At a graveside this prayer says "gathered here" in place of "in this room.")

7. Benediction

Either track: Numbers 6:24-26

Optional closing line, either track

> ...and may you find comfort in knowing that one day, for all who trust in Christ, there will be a reunion in our true home. Amen.

8. A last word (optional)

Parker's manuscript ends with a phrase his grandmother was known for. If the person had a saying everyone knew, and the family is glad for you to use it, let it be the last thing people hear.

After the committal

- Stay until the family leaves.
- Greet the family one by one. A few words are enough.
- Don't hurry anyone away from the grave.

RESOURCE 5 OF 5

Following Up With the Family

Why it matters

> Minister after the message. Stick around. The most meaningful conversations often happen after the service... Follow up with the family a few days later.

> We've always believed something bigger than convenience: it matters that we show up.

> Maybe they couldn't fix what you were walking through. Maybe they didn't have all the right words. But they were there, and you've never forgotten it.

The source material says to follow up but does not give a schedule. The checklist below is a suggested starting point.

Follow-up checklist

Ask how the family would like you to stay in touch. Choose the follow-up dates you can keep, and put those in your calendar.

- ☐ **Same day.** Stay after the service. Tell the family when you will call.
- ☐ **2–3 days later.** Call or visit. Ask how they are sleeping and eating. Ask what would help this week.
- ☐ **2 weeks.** Text or call. This is often when the visitors stop coming and the house goes quiet.
- ☐ **1 month.** Visit or share a meal. Ask about practical needs.
- ☐ **3 months.** Check in. Mention [Name] by name.
- ☐ **First holidays and [Name]'s birthday.** Send a short note.
- ☐ **One year.** Call or write on the anniversary.

Share the load. Ask one or two trusted people in your church to take some of these with you, with the family's permission.

What to say

- **Show up; you don't need a speech.** "Be available for prayer, hugs, or even just sitting quietly with someone."
- **Don't fix.** "This isn't a moment to solve theological mysteries or tie up grief with a bow."

- **Answer with truth and compassion, not cliche.** Keep Psalm 34:18 and John 14:1-3 close.
- **Expect different grief in the same house.** "One runs to the gate, the other sits in the chair... we all handle it so differently." Neither one is doing it wrong.
- **Say the name.** "We will remember [Name]. We will say his name."

Sample messages

> Thinking of you today. No need to reply. I'm praying for you, and I'm here.

> It's been a month. I'd love to bring lunch by this week and hear how you're really doing. Would Thursday work?

> I know today would have been [Name]'s birthday. I'm remembering [Name] with you.

People who responded to the invitation

> We don't let anyone go on the journey alone.

- ☐ Contact anyone who prayed or asked to talk within the week.
- ☐ Offer a next step: a conversation, a Bible, a seat with you on Sunday.

Protect what the family told you

- ☐ Don't retell their stories in sermons or online without asking again.
- ☐ Don't post photos or a recording of the service without permission.
- ☐ Keep your notes private.

Know when to bring in more help

You are a pastor, not the family's only support.

- ☐ If someone is struggling to function for weeks, encourage them to see a doctor or a licensed counselor, and offer to help find one.
- ☐ If someone talks about harming themselves, stay with them and help them reach emergency help right away.
- ☐ Know the grief support available in your area before you need it.

Look after yourself

Funerals take something out of you. Tell someone you trust how it went. Take a quiet hour afterward if you can.

Last word

> Be present. Be loving. Point to Jesus. That's enough.