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CELEBRATING THE PERSONAL LIFE

All societies have “rites of passage” to assist their members through times of growth and crisis. The church too has provided for liturgical celebration of various stages of human growth and maturation. This liturgical attention is more than merely taking notice of the stages of growth and life; it is a way of helping people pass the thresholds of human experience by giving them the support of the community which assists in the process of growth. The words dramatized in liturgy are powerful words.¹

Each life has many beginnings. In a Christian understanding, every celebration of the times of beginning in the personal life of faith should acknowledge God’s initiative and express our response. The two movements—God’s action and our response—are intertwined in such a way that although we can examine them separately, in our experience they run together.

CONFIRMATION: MEANINGS

The rite of Holy Baptism in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* has reintegrated the laying-on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal action. The washing in water and the sealing with the Spirit are one action, complete in itself, which is the foundation of the Christian life. Nothing can be added to Baptism, except a life of growth and maturation in the faith which flows the sacramental waters, the daily dying and rising that Luther speaks of in the *Small Catechism*.

Since the Reformation, the Lutheran Church has preserved the rite of

Confirmation, but the rite has been variously understood. Confirmation has been seen as a time of instruction in the essentials of the faith as set forth in the *Small Catechism*. It has been seen as a means of church discipline by which one surrenders oneself to Christ and submits to the church's rule. It has been seen as a quasi-sacrament which added to Baptism the fuller presence of the Holy Spirit and which bestowed church membership on the recipient who now was entitled to receive Holy Communion and enter upon the undefined "spiritual privileges" of the church. It has been seen as the subjective acceptance of Christ as personal Lord, a decisive conversion experience. It has been understood as the completion of an educational course, a kind of graduation ceremony. There was no one understanding which could be shown to be distinctively "Lutheran."

As theology and liturgy in the twentieth century came to rediscover and emphasize the importance of Baptism, a reexamination of Confirmation was required also. What, in fact, was the role of this rite in the modern church? In 1970 a Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation, representing the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, issued its report to the churches. It defined Confirmation as a process, a ministry:

Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.

Thus the Confirmation ministry is a continuing obligation of the church to each member.

In the past, the practice of many congregations tended to belie the official understanding of Baptism as the sacrament by which one enters the church. Baptisms were often done in a hasty way, either after the service when few but the family were present, or done half apologetically as an intrusion into the normal service. Baptism, it seemed, was for babies. Confirmation, on the other hand, was for young people who were about to enter adulthood, and the act could easily become a time of considerable emotional and spiritual importance. Then, when one was confirmed, one could receive Holy Communion and perhaps vote in the congregation.

In the practice of Confirmation, therefore, great care must be taken that Confirmation neither implies joining the church nor overshadows Baptism. It is an affirmation of Baptism, a way of saying "Yes" to Baptism. It is not therefore an unrepeatable, once-for-all act but something that can be

done at several points in one's life. The liturgy of Holy Baptism opens the way toward an increased awareness of the lifelong implications of the baptismal event, the daily dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ. Holy Baptism is a significant event not only for the candidates themselves but also for the whole baptized people of God. The members of the congregation are the real sponsors in Baptism, and therefore periodic baptismal services also serve as a reminder of their commitment and provide an opportunity for them to affirm the covenant which God made with them in Holy Baptism.

The service of Affirmation of Baptism draws together three occasions—confirmation, reception into membership of Christians from other denominations, and the restoration to membership of those who have lapsed from participation in the life of the church. These three occasions have a common point of reference in the affirmation of God's gift in Baptism. In each case, a public profession of baptismal faith in the presence of the congregation is appropriate, and in each case also instruction in the teachings of the Lutheran Church will have preceded the service.

The reception of members in good standing from other Lutheran congregations through letter of transfer is properly done in a simple ceremony which acknowledges the community of the total Lutheran family. Those who transfer membership from one Lutheran church to another do not need to make an Affirmation of Baptism every time they move. It is appropriate to read their names before the prayers of the Eucharist and to pray for them in the prayers, thanking God for his gifts and asking for the enrichment of the congregation through them. New members could appropriately present the bread and wine for the Eucharist that day and serve as assisting ministers or readers of the first and second lessons.

First communion is theologically and liturgically unrelated to Confirmation. No form is provided to mark the occasion, for the gift of Communion is the birthright of the baptized. First communion is the occasion when the privilege granted in Baptism is first exercised. Its essence is sharing the eucharistic bread and cup, and that experience must not be blurred by loading it down with embellishments such as public catechesis and examination, vows, white robes, or group songs. The introduction of such things suggests that the person is acquiring a new status in the congregation. Rather, those receiving Holy Communion for the first time are remembered in the prayers, and they come to the altar with their families at the appropriate time to share in the family meal of the people of God.

If the congregation permits children at a certain age or grade in school to

come to communion, several people will perhaps receive Holy Communion for the first time on one day. On that occasion, it is appropriate for the pastor to welcome them, either as part of the sermon or just before the Prayers in which a special section should be added for those who commune for the first time.

It is perhaps desirable for children to come to first Holy Communion not as a class but when they choose, when they, together with their families and the pastor, feel that they are ready to share in the sacrament. Admission to the Lord's Table should be as natural for the baptized as is coming to the dinner table in the family. No formal public notice of the event need be made at all, but an informal welcome by the pastor after the service is desirable and a family celebration, such as a dinner, is appropriate.

In most cases, children are baptized because they are born into families of the congregation. When this is not the case, as soon as children begin to participate in the life of the congregation, "foster families" should be found who will "adopt" the children of nonmembers.

CONFIRMATION: PREPARING FOR THE SERVICE

A traditional time of Confirmation in many parishes is Pentecost, which ties the rite to the festival of the Holy Spirit. (The older tradition was Confirmation on Palm Sunday in preparation for the Easter Communion.) Confirmation on Pentecost overshadows that great festival of God the Holy Spirit and makes the Confirmation itself a kind of graduation into the summer doldrums when most congregations curtail their activity and when many people vacation. Instead, a more suitable time for Confirmation is in the fall at the beginning of the activity year of the congregation. Then those who affirm their Baptism have immediate prospects of service and responsibility. They face an active church instead of one that is preparing to leave for vacation, and Confirmation seems less like a graduation.

The public examination of candidates has largely disappeared from Lutheran practice, although it was once common. It was often perfunctory and meaningless with questions and answers all carefully memorized beforehand. But the value of having a congregation listen to some questions and answers regarding the faith would be useful in teaching the congregation again the fundamentals of the faith. Some kind of public review of the fundamentals of Lutheran Christianity should be arranged at a time prior to the Affirmation. It need not be done at a service of the congregation and might be a presentation of the *Small Catechism* with comment and interpretation.

This public review of the faith of the church might be held on Holy Cross Day (September 14), or the Sunday nearest to Holy Cross Day, and the Affirmation on All Saints' Sunday.

Prayer vigils have been revived in recent years in various places. The Easter Vigil is the primary liturgical form that this takes, but the confirmation class with parents and sponsors might gather in the church the night before the confirmation service. A prayer chain might be set up so that each member of the class—supplemented by others, such as parents, sponsors, lay leaders—is assigned a period of time (perhaps a quarter-hour) for prayer. The chain is kept going for several hours or even through the night until the time of the service the following day. It is not unreasonable for an entire class to maintain a prayer vigil throughout the night, for young people enjoy staying up all night, as at high school graduation, and a carefully arranged program of prayer and refreshments could be maintained, beginning the evening before and continuing until the time of the service.

The class could make a banner with a motto or symbol on it to carry in the procession at the service of Affirmation.

AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM: THE SERVICE

Affirmation of Baptism follows the sermon and the Hymn of the Day in the Holy Communion. A hymn, especially a hymn related to Baptism and/or the Holy Spirit, is sung. It functions as the Hymn of the Day. As the hymn is sung the candidates gather before the congregation.

After the hymn, the congregation sits down; the candidates remain standing. A lay leader of the congregation, such as the president or vice president of the church council, presents the candidates to the presiding minister, who for this service should be the pastor of the congregation. If only one or two candidates are presented, their names may be read at the beginning of the statement: "Ann Watts and Lazlo Riley have been instructed in the Christian faith. . . ."

A lay leader of the congregation presents those from other denominations who are to be received into membership in the Lutheran Church. The pastor's welcome makes clear that they are already by Baptism members of the "One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church" and now are to become more particularly members of the Lutheran family.

A lay leader of the congregation presents those who desire again to participate actively in the life of the church. The pastor's welcome of them indicates that God is faithful to the covenant of Baptism and that these

people now return again to acceptance of that covenant. As Luther says in the *Large Catechism*, "Baptism remains forever. Even though we fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access to it."² Restoration to membership is often a delicate matter, and the leaders of the service must be careful not to embarrass those who are being restored.

When all the candidates have been presented, the service continues with the introduction to the renunciation of evil and the profession of faith, which is the same as that done in Holy Baptism. If there are only a few candidates, it may be desirable for the entire congregation to join them in the renunciation and profession. It is usually more desirable, however, for the candidates alone, in the hearing of the congregation, to profess their faith. The congregation must of course be told either by the minister or by the service bulletin, if they are to join the candidates.

The Prayers are said, which constitute the prayers of the service of Holy Communion. They are led by an assisting minister. After the petition "that they may be brought to the fullness of your peace and glory," other intercessions for the unity of the whole church, the nations, and those in need should be added. Each additional intercession ends with the formula "Lord, in your mercy" and the congregational response, "Hear our prayer." The presiding minister concludes the prayers and the congregation sits down.

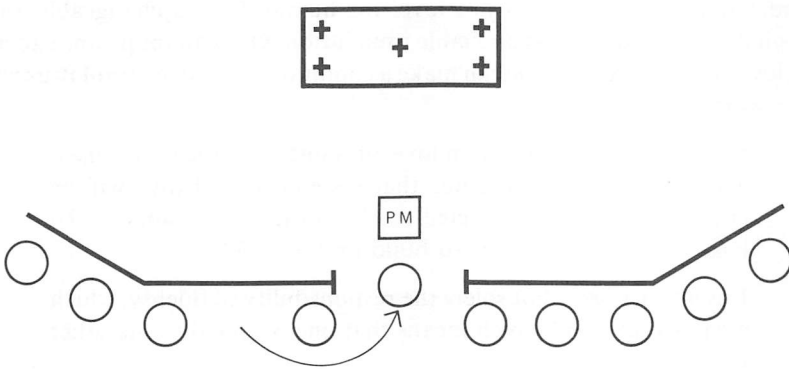
The candidates remain standing for the address and answer. The address is a suggested form of commitment. The candidates may prepare their own statement under the guidance of the pastor, and they may also formulate their own answer. The statement of commitment and response might be written by the candidates as a part of their instruction and preparation for the Affirmation of Baptism, a kind of final examination in which the candidates try to state concisely what the Christian faith and life mean and what the obligations of being a Christian are.

Those making Affirmation then kneel. Silence is kept so that the congregation can pray for them. Then the presiding minister prays in words that recall Baptism and its extension throughout life. The prayer is based on the confirmation prayer in Holy Baptism. The prayer in Baptism asks for the Spirit; this prayer asks a strengthening of the spiritual gifts bestowed in Baptism.

While all the candidates remain kneeling, the presiding minister lays both hands on the head of each person to be confirmed and says the prayer "Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake . . ." to which each one confirmed responds, "Amen." This prayer and the laying-on of hands is reserved for confirmation only. The presiding minister's hands will be free if an assisting

minister or server holds the book, but it is preferable to commit the prayer of blessing to memory. The minister calls each candidate by name, using only the Christian name: “. . . stir up in Mary the gift of your Holy Spirit. . . .”

Especially when there are only candidates for Confirmation, and none to be received or restored to membership, it is effective if after the prayer “Gracious Lord, through water and the Spirit” all the candidates for Confirmation stand. The presiding minister remains in one place before the altar, and the candidates come before the minister one by one and kneel for the laying-on of hands and the confirmation blessing instead of having the minister move down the line from person to person.



AT THE CONFIRMATION

As each one is confirmed and stands the peace is exchanged with the presiding minister. Or, after all have made Affirmation, the minister exchanges the peace with them and they with each other and then with other members of the congregation.

After the exchange of the peace, all return to their places, and the service continues with the Offering. It is appropriate for those who have affirmed their Baptism to present the bread and wine.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is a service of worship in which the invited guests are not mere spectators but participants in the service. They are there not simply to watch but to be a congregation of God's

people. Marriage is a glad occasion overflowing with joy, and those who celebrate it rejoice in the gifts of God—life, health, strength, sexuality, the family—all that the Creator declared from the beginning to be “very good.”

Marriage is not an exclusively Christian possession. It was known, practiced, and honored in the Old Testament. It is moreover a structure which belongs to all humanity. It is essentially a covenant of fidelity between a man and woman made with society’s sanction, grounded in the steadfast love of God. God’s abiding faithfulness is the model: as he is, so should we be.

Marriage is a social contract, the basis of which is the commitment that the man and the woman make to each other. Contrary to the popular understanding, the basis is not love, for human love is changeable and cannot be depended on as a reliable foundation. One cannot promise to be in love years hence, but one can make a commitment. Indeed Emil Brunner has warned:

When marriage is based on love all is lost from the very outset. The lover cannot guarantee that his emotion of love will be either permanent or directed solely to the one person. . . . To base marriage on love is to build on the sand.

It is not the *Eros*, but solely the responsibility of fidelity, which creates that bond which means that one is bound to the other person.³

For human beings, faithfulness and love need not go together. In God the two are joined, and it is in his “steadfast love” that we seek to root our covenant of fidelity as well as our emotions of love. In the flux of experience, one thing holds true—the vows of fidelity grounded in the love of God which abides forever.

Thus it is not the minister who performs the marriage but the wedding couple. Both church and state have an interest in marriage, and marriage is done in the presence of a representative of one or the other. But the marriage is concluded by the two partners. The couple marry each other, and the minister is the principal witness to their action. If the marriage is at its heart basically an exchange of vows of faithfulness and commitment, this is something that the minister cannot do for someone else.⁴ Nonetheless, the couple is not left on their own to fulfill the promises, for God’s blessing and support are asked.

A marriage service, if it is to be truly biblical, must take notice of the physical dimensions of marriage, specifically sexuality and the consum-

mation of marriage. Sex, John Macquarrie observes, "is the most obvious indicator of the fundamentally communal character of human existence," for no one person is complete in himself or herself.⁵

Those who plan to be married should discuss with the pastor the nature of marriage and the form of the service as well as the confirmation of the date and time of the wedding. The service is designed to present a variety of options, suggestions, and possibilities, not only to meet the various situations resulting from the interactions of a pluralistic society but also to encourage new thinking about what the marriage service could be and to open people's eyes to the vast number of possibilities that may be locally useful. The marriage service in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* should be regarded as a kind of workbook out of which a marriage service appropriate to the particular occasion might be constructed.

Announcements of weddings should be published in bulletins or congregational papers. The primary purpose is not so much to announce the wedding as to ask the prayers of the congregation. Thus an appropriate form is "_____ and _____ have announced their intention to marry on _____ and ask your prayers."

In the past both Advent and Lent have been regarded as "closed times" when marriages were not solemnized. North American society is not governed by the church year, and so it seems undesirable in most places to forbid marriage for ten weeks of the year. Holy Week is the one week of the year when marriages are out of place and especially the triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday when all of the attention of the church is directed toward the mystery of redemption.

The presiding minister must be ordained and authorized by the appropriate civil authority to perform marriages. Care should be taken that a record of marriages is kept in the congregation and that legal documents are executed properly.

Assisting ministers may be members of the families of the bride and groom or members of the wedding party.

MARRIAGE: MUSIC

The Marriage Service is a service of worship, and the music therefore must be carefully and discriminatingly chosen. It should embody high standards of quality and the texts should reflect the praise of God, the steadfast love of Christ for his church as the foundation and model for love and fidelity in marriage, the invocation of God's presence and blessing.

A number of musical options are possible before the entrance procession: solo, ensemble, or choral pieces; organ or other instrumental music; music using a combination of these media. Organ music may be based on hymn tunes used within the marriage service. A printed folder helps to establish such themes and relationships for the congregation. Instrumental music may be selected from chamber music literature or similar sources and should reflect the mood of joy and celebration in the service. Voice(s) and instruments could be joined in solo or choral cantatas.

Whenever music is employed in the service and by whatever instruments or voices, it should be of high quality and not cloud the mood of the service with triteness or sentimentality. It should moreover be within the ability of the performers at hand to play or sing with assurance.

When organ processional music is desired, it might be in the form of a hymn- or chorale-prelude based upon a hymn to be sung immediately after. This plan also serves the function of introducing the hymn tune to the congregation.

MARRIAGE: APART FROM THE HOLY COMMUNION

The Marriage Service on pp. 328-330 of the Ministers Edition of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* may be used by itself without setting the service within the Holy Communion.

An entrance procession is common but not required. At small weddings, the bride, groom, and attendants simply gather in front of the minister. If there is to be an entrance procession it may be led by those bearing a cross and torches. The ministers (and the groom) may enter in the procession or directly from the sacristy. (The tradition that requires the groom not to see the bride on the day of the wedding until they meet at the altar apparently has its origin in a pagan prohibition of any contact between bride and groom for a length of time before the wedding to prevent the possibility of sexual intercourse.) When the ministers enter in the procession, they precede the wedding party and the bride and groom enter at the end of the procession, the place of honor. The order of the procession would be: cross, torches, assisting minister, presiding minister, attendants, parents, bride and groom.

It is appropriate that there be an entrance hymn.⁶ The entrance procession may instead be made to instrumental music. The congregation stands for the entrance as at other services.

No provision is made for giving the bride away. This custom has its roots in the Old Testament understanding that every woman must belong to

some man,⁷ and at marriage she is delivered by her father (or other male guardian) to the hand of the (male) minister who places her hand in the hand of the bridegroom. The giving of the bride is a recent innovation in the Lutheran marriage service. It was not part of Luther's order.⁸ Contemporary understanding of the individual suggests that neither the woman nor the man should be regarded as the property of another to be given or taken. Instead, therefore, the parents of both bride and groom should be encouraged to participate in the service in a more active way. They may accompany their children in the entrance procession and exchange the peace with them as the procession ends. They may read the lessons. They may stand behind their children as the vows are exchanged and participate in the blessing.

MARRIAGE: THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

The first part of the Marriage Service is an abbreviated service of the Word: Greeting, Prayer of the Day, Lessons, Sermon, Hymn.

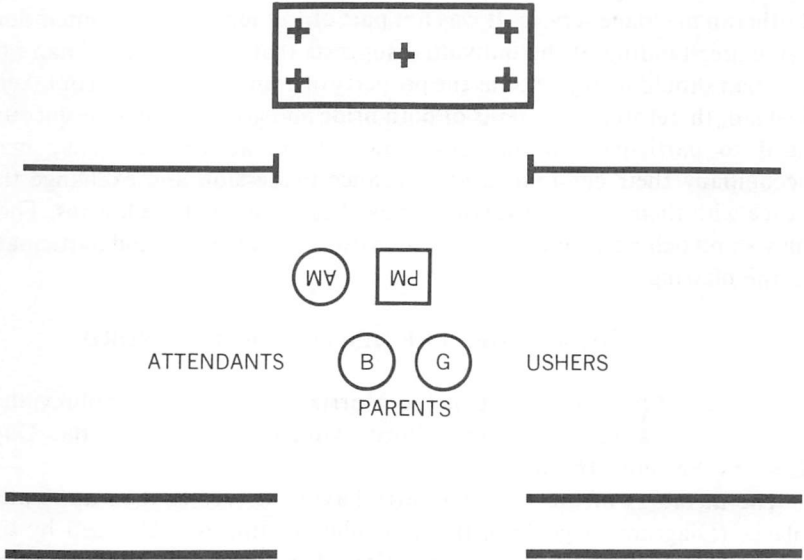
The members of the wedding party having arrived at their appointed places (Diagram, page 350), the apostolic greeting is exchanged by the presiding minister and the congregation. The Prayer of the Day, which gathers New Testament references to the joy of marriage in the context of the relationship of Christ the Bridegroom to the church his bride, is said by an assisting minister. Rubric (2) is permissive only because lessons may have been read already in the Eucharist. Otherwise, one or more lessons are read at this point. The Marriage Service ought clearly to be set in the biblical tradition and grounded upon the record of the love of the Creator for the whole human family. The Propers for Marriage (pp. 189-190) give suggestions for the readings. One or two readings (Old Testament and New Testament) are usually sufficient. A brief introduction to each lesson may be helpful to the congregation: For Song of Solomon 2:10-13: "A reading from the Song of Solomon. The poet sings of love in the spring."

A brief, appropriate, and theologically sound selection from a nonbiblical writer, especially from a contemporary source, may be read. It should ideally be chosen by the couple as important for their life together.

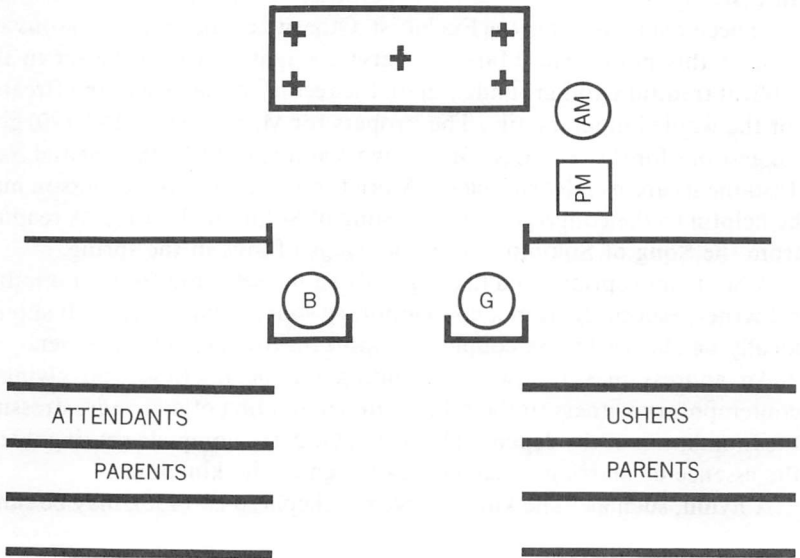
An address may follow, commenting on the readings and giving a contemporary witness to the biblical understanding of marriage, stressing the foundation of the dependable love of God, the complete sharing that is the essence of marriage, marriage as a sign of the kingdom.

A hymn, such as "The king of love my shepherd is" (456), may be sung.

AT THE MARRIAGE SERVICE



OR



Encouragement should be given to those who plan the service to include a hymn at this point to give the congregation an active part in the service of worship.

To mark the transition from the introductory service of the word to the central action of the Marriage Service, the minister(s) may lead the wedding party to a place closer to the altar for the exchange of vows. This movement may take place either following the hymn, or, if the hymn is not used, following the assisting minister's address and before the presiding minister's introduction of the vows, "_____ and _____, if it is your intention. . . ."

The assisting minister reads the address to the couple. It briefly sets forth a theology of marriage.⁹ First, marriage and sexuality are part of God's good creation and show the Creator's intention of community for his people. The joy that is found in life together is a sign of the eschatological fulfillment in the perfect joy of the kingdom of God. Second, there is a frank recognition of the destructive power of sin that can cloud the gladness of marriage and turn God's gift into a burden. Here in the Marriage Service we are reminded that marriage is not to be based on romantic illusion but on the solid facts of life—both good and bad. But, third, there is a statement of hope based on God's continuing support of those who share the gift of marriage which he gives. Like the history of salvation, the statement begins with "the Lord God in his goodness,"¹⁰ passes through "our age-old rebellion,"¹¹ and concludes with "our joy restored."¹² This summary statement can serve as the basis for the pastor's counseling with those who plan to marry.

MARRIAGE: THE EXCHANGE OF VOWS

The presiding minister then introduces the second part of the Marriage Service, the exchange of vows, with a form that reflects the former betrothal questions that were put to the bride and groom.¹³ There was once a clear distinction between the betrothal or engagement and marriage, although the former was as binding as the latter. Money was given as a pledge that the intended marriage would in fact take place. The two separate ceremonies of betrothal and marriage were joined in the service of the church. (It had not yet happened in Luther's time.) The introductory statement by the presiding minister makes clear the essence of marriage: "with your promises bind yourselves to each other as husband and wife." Marriage is the unqualified commitment of two people to each other through all that the years will bring. That commitment, enunciated in

the exchange of vows (and signified in the exchange of rings) is the heart of marriage and of the Marriage Service.

The bride and groom face each other and join hands, and each, in turn, promises faithfulness to the other. The promises are the bride and groom's own vows, and provision should be made for those who wish to write their own form. This must be done with careful guidance to insure that the vows indicate the complete sharing which marriage implies and make clear that the promises are a lifelong commitment. It is not a certain formula but the promise of fidelity that makes the marriage. Moreover those who write their own vows must be careful that they do not promise too much too specifically—for example, that their love will grow daily. One can hope and pray earnestly for certain gifts and yet not be in a position to promise that they will be given.

Other suggested forms of the wedding promises are:

I take you, _____, to be my wife/husband, and these things I promise you: I will be faithful to you and honest with you; I will [obey],¹⁴ respect, trust, help, and care for you; I will share my life with you; I will forgive you as we have been forgiven; and I will try with you better to understand ourselves, the world, and God; through the best and worst of what is to come until death parts us.

I take you, _____, to be my wife/husband. I promise before God and these witnesses to be your faithful husband/wife, to share with you in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to forgive and strengthen you, and to join with you so that together we may serve God and others as long as we both shall live.

_____, I take you to be my wife/husband from this time onward, to join with you and to share all that is to come, to give and to receive, to speak and to listen, to inspire and to respond, and in all circumstances of our life together to be loyal to you with my whole life and with all my being until death parts us.

As a sign of the vows that have been exchanged, the couple may exchange rings. In some cases only the woman receives a ring, and in that case only the man says "I give you this ring as a sign of my love and faithfulness." Giving a ring to the woman alone is the older practice and was a sign of her authority. The ring that was given was used for sealing household effects,

and the woman's possession of it showed that she was to be in charge of the home.

The hand of the presiding minister is placed over the joined hands of the bride and groom, and the minister announces the marriage. It is not this declaration that makes the marriage but the exchange of the vows. The minister is a witness to the marriage and here simply testifies to what has been done by the bride and groom who by their promises have bound themselves to each other as husband and wife. The congregation praises God the Holy Trinity and the presiding minister adds the words of Jesus from Matthew 19:6.

Other signs of the marriage may be appropriate also. In the Eastern Churches the bride and groom are crowned as the king and queen of the family, a small image of the kingdom of God and witness to that kingdom in the world.¹⁵ The crowns may be made of metal and remain the property of the congregation. They may be set in place by the minister, by the parents, or by attendants. They are removed when the couple leaves the church.

Crowns of flowers (chaplets) may be placed on the heads of the bride and groom by each other, by the parents, or by attendants after the minister has announced the marriage.

In places such as Hawaii, Mexico, and India, garlands are used for many happy occasions, including weddings. The garlands might be hung around the necks of the bride and groom—either one for each or several, each attendant adding one. Or a large circle of flowers might be made to be put over the shoulders of the bride and groom together as a sign of their being bound together by their vows.¹⁶

The custom that is popular in some places of the bride and groom each carrying a lighted candle with which they light a single candle that replaces the separate ones may be strong on sentiment but is weak on theology. The bride and groom do not extinguish their own lives to begin a new one. Rather marriage should enhance the individual life of each.

Whatever ceremonies symbolic of the marriage bond are used, they should be done following the presiding minister's announcement of the marriage so that they do not overshadow the primary actions of the marriage service: the exchange of promises and the giving of the ring(s).

The bride and groom kneel for the blessing. The parents, especially if they have been standing behind the bride and groom during the exchange of promises, may lay their hands on the heads of their children in blessing with the words of Psalm 61:7, "May you dwell in God's presence forever". Instead of this verse or added to it, Song of Songs 1:4 may be said:

Let us rejoice and be glad for you,
 let us praise your love more than wine
 and your caresses more than any song.

In Canadian churches where it is customary, the Register may be signed before the prayers begin.

MARRIAGE: THE PRAYERS

The bride and groom and the entire congregation stand for the concluding prayers. Silence should follow each bidding to pray. The first prayer gathers signs of God's desire for community in ever-narrowing circles: the human family, Israel, the church, this couple. The second prayer prays for the support of the couple within the community of the church. (The phrase, "as members with them of the body of Christ," should be omitted when one of the couple is not Christian or when the congregation is a religiously mixed group.) The third prayer continues the outward movement of the second prayer and prays that all families might be signs of the kingdom. The terminations of the three prayers build from no formal conclusion for the first, to a brief termination of the second, to the full doxology of the third. The prayers conclude with the Our Father.

The wedding party may leave the church during a hymn or suitable instrumental music. An especially appropriate hymn is "Now thank we all our God" (533 or 534). The order of the procession is the same as that of the entrance.

MARRIAGE: WITHIN THE HOLY COMMUNION

The Marriage Service may be placed within the context of the Holy Communion, and doing this enhances and makes vivid the wedding imagery of the Eucharist and the eucharistic intimacy of the marriage. When the Holy Communion is celebrated, however, it must be open to the congregation and not be limited to the bride and groom or the wedding party. The sacrament is always for the gathered congregation. If circumstances prevent including the congregation, the Marriage Service should be used by itself, and if the bride and groom wish to receive the sacrament they should receive it at a regularly scheduled service of the congregation.

When the Marriage Service is set within the Holy Communion, it, like all the occasional services,¹⁷ follows the sermon and the Hymn of the Day; it

begins with the address, "The Lord God in his goodness. . . ." The propers for the Holy Communion are those for Marriage (pp. 189-190). The proper hymn of praise is "I will sing the story of your love, O Lord," canticle 16,¹⁸ which joyfully relates the promises of fidelity in marriage to the steadfast love of God. The canticle can be sung in several ways: refrains by the congregation and verses by a soloist; refrains by the choir and verses by a soloist; sung in its entirety by a choir or soloist.

The Verse before the Gospel is 1 John 4:12; alternates are suggested. During Lent the Verse for Lent 4 (John 3:16) is sung.

After the Prayers of the Marriage Service (8), the Holy Communion continues with the Peace (an especially appropriate sign at a wedding; it is the time for the bride and groom to embrace and perhaps to kiss).

The Offering follows. The bread may be baked by a member of the wedding party, a friend, or relative. The offering of bread and wine may be brought to the altar by representatives of the wedding party. Offerings of money need not be gathered at this service, but if they are, the offering of money should be given to some worthy cause designated by the congregation. The bride and groom may make an appropriate thankoffering.

Except during the Marriage itself, the wedding party may occupy the front pews or be provided with special chairs in a convenient place before the altar.

The wedding reception may be understood as an extension of the banquet shared in the Lord's Supper.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD

The Christian funeral is a service of worship and should involve all those present. Funerals today are held in various places outside the church, but seldom should the location preclude congregational participation. The funerals of practicing Christians should be in their parish church, the place where their lives of worship have centered. Congregational singing should be encouraged and participation in the prayers should be taken for granted—certainly to the extent of saying "Amen" and joining in the Lord's Prayer.

If these goals are to be accomplished, the pastor and worship committee need to broaden and deepen the understanding of the congregation as part of the larger continuing education of the parish. Because of the emotional stress involved, the occasion of a funeral is not the time to press for changes in accepted practice.

The death of a member of the church should be reported as soon as possible to the pastor who will assist in all arrangements for the funeral.

Both the experience and the presence of the pastor can assist the bereaved. The pastor's ministry to them is to lead the bereaved into and through the rites of the church where the voice of the Gospel can be heard with healing power and clarity. In an effort to be positive and to emphasize the victory of the resurrection, the pain and loss of death must not be minimized or ignored. Both must be held in balance. The bereaved need to confront and accept the loss of the deceased as well as be given hope. Moreover, the congregation needs to be encouraged to support the bereaved not only at the time of the funeral but also as the bereaved return to the duties of their lives.

The service of the Burial of the Dead is intended primarily for use in the church with the body of the deceased present. But the service is easily modified for use in other locations—crematory chapel, private house, funeral parlor—where processions and other liturgical actions are not feasible. The service may be used as a memorial service, following interment or when the body has been destroyed in an accident or natural catastrophe by omitting those portions marked with a red line in the left margin.

Moreover, many pastors regard conducting funerals for people who have no connection with the church as part of their ministerial obligation. It is usually inappropriate to hold such a service in the church and not all the parts of the service may be appropriate. By certain omissions and choices of alternate selections this service may be adapted for such funerals.

Music selected for use at a funeral should embody high standards of quality, and in general reflect the spirit of Christian confidence, trust, and hope in the resurrection. The hymns should reflect such themes as the invocation of the Holy Spirit, comfort, the communion of saints, hope in the resurrection. Hymn versions of appropriate psalms may be sung also.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD: THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

The ministers, vested in alb or surplice and stole in the seasonal color (the presiding minister may wear a cope), meet the coffin,¹⁹ the pallbearers, and the bereaved at the entrance of the church. (The bereaved may arrive and go to their seats prior to the beginning of the service.) The location of the opening part of the service should be chosen so that the congregation is able to hear what is said.

The coffin remains closed throughout the service. When the service is in a funeral parlor or private house, the coffin is closed and in place before the liturgy begins.

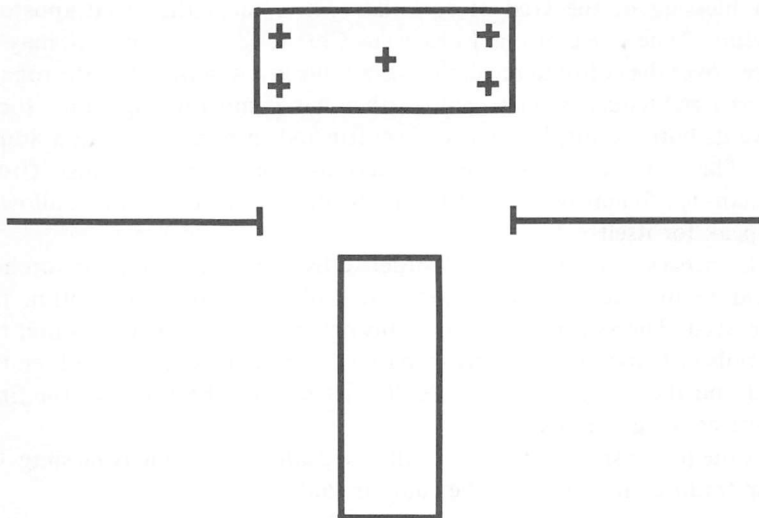
A blessing of the God of consolation²⁰ replaces the usual apostolic greeting, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . .” A white pall may be placed over the coffin to recall the white robe given in Baptism, the robe of Christ’s righteousness. The pall further has democratizing value, for it prevents both the display of a costly coffin and embarrassment at a simple one. The words accompanying the action—a baptismal reading—(from Romans 6:3-5) may be used, or the action of covering the coffin be allowed to speak for itself.

The procession forms in this order: cross, paschal candle or torches, presiding minister, assisting minister, pallbearers with the coffin, the bereaved. The symbolic intent of this order of the procession is that the symbols of Christ go first—cross, paschal candle, minister—and then the dead and the living follow where “Christ has led the way,” as the final prayer at the grave puts it.

As the procession moves to the altar, a psalm or hymn may be sung. Or these traditional verses may be sung or said:

In the midst of life we are in death;
from whom can we seek help?
From you alone, O Lord,
who by our sins are justly angered.
*Holy God, Holy and Mighty,
Holy and merciful Savior,
deliver us not into the bitterness of eternal death.*
Lord, you know the secrets of our hearts;
shut not your ears to our prayers,
but spare us, O Lord.
*Holy God, Holy and Mighty,
Holy and merciful Savior,
deliver us not into the bitterness of eternal death.*
O worthy and eternal Judge,
do not let the pains of death
turn us away from you at our last hour.
*Holy God, Holy and Mighty
Holy and merciful Savior,
deliver us not into the bitterness of eternal death.*²¹

Hymn 350, “Even as we live each day,” is a hymn version of this prayer.²² At the end of the procession the coffin is positioned before the altar thus:



THE COFFIN BEFORE THE ALTAR

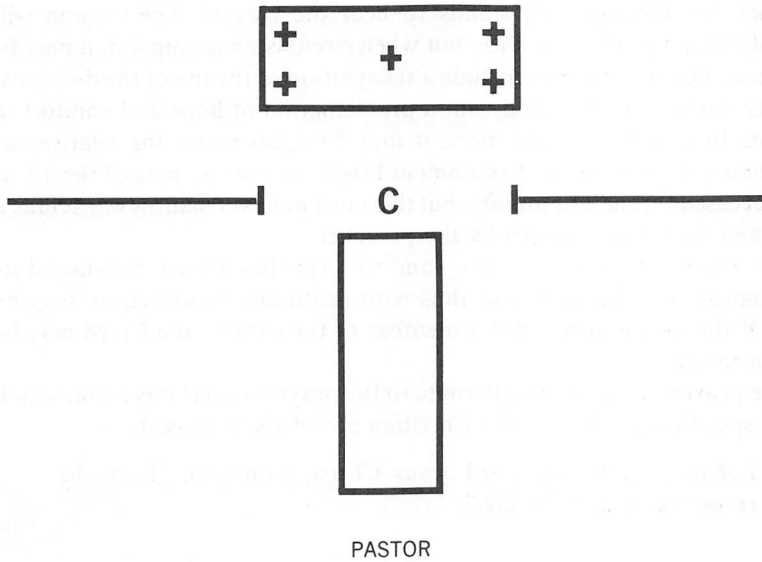
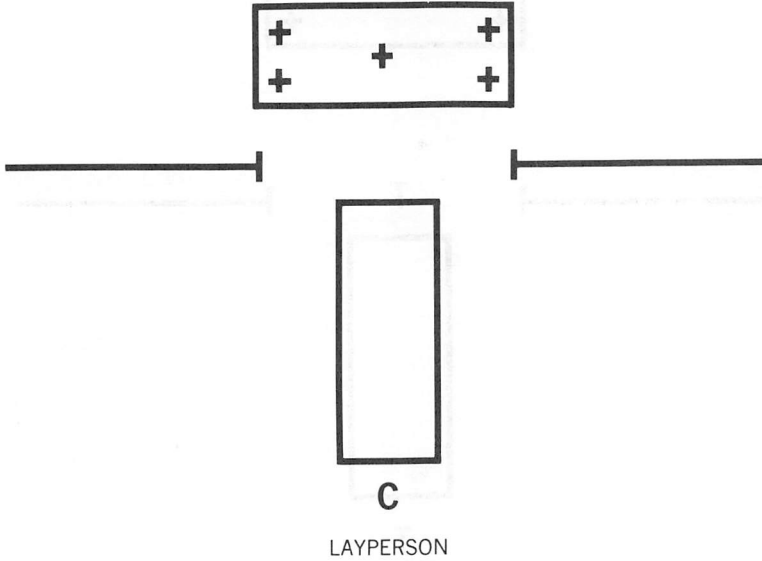
An old tradition, still observed in several places, is for the coffin to be positioned with the head toward the altar if the deceased was a pastor and with the feet toward the altar if the deceased was a layperson. The position reflects the accustomed role of the deceased in the church—facing the people as presiding minister or facing the altar as part of the congregation. The paschal candle is placed on its stand at the head of the coffin. When torches are used instead (the paschal candle, telling of the Easter promise of death and resurrection is preferable), they are placed one at the head and one at the foot of the coffin. (Diagrams, pages 359-360.) The cross is placed by the altar or by the reading desk.

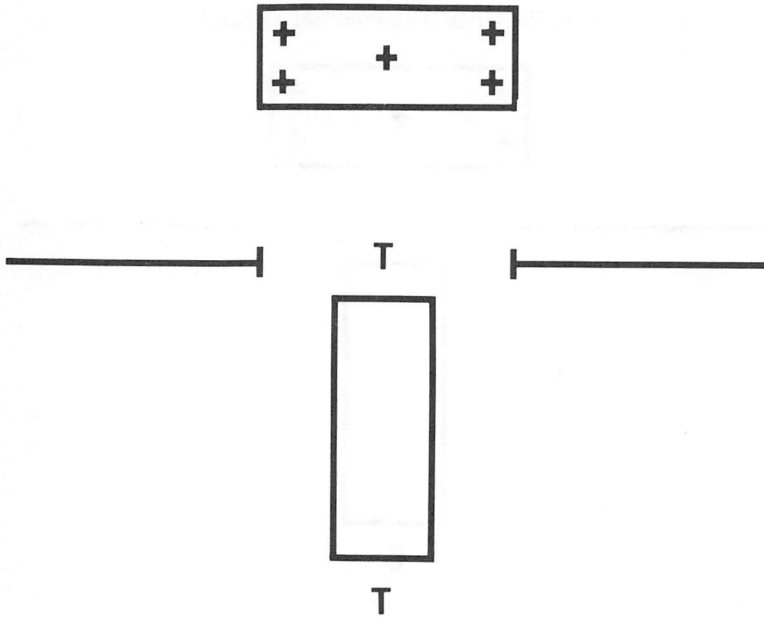
The ministers go to their places and, the congregation still standing, the presiding minister says one of the appointed prayers (7), which functions as the Prayer of the Day. When the deceased was not a member of the church, the prayer “Almighty God, source of all mercy” or the prayer “O God, your days are without end” is more appropriate than the others.

Suggested readings are listed in the Propers for the Burial of the Dead (Ministers Edition, p. 190). The selection of readings should be made to give full scope to the proclamation of hope and comfort and in view of the particular situation.

If two readings precede the Gospel, a psalm (listed in the Propers) or a hymn may be sung between them. After the Verse which introduces the

PLACEMENT OF THE PASCHAL CANDLE





PLACEMENT OF TORCHES

Gospel, the congregation stands to hear the Gospel. The sermon will usually be a part of the service, but when circumstances suggest, it may be omitted. The sermon may include a recognition of the life of the deceased, but its purpose is not eulogy but a proclamation of hope and comfort in Christ. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for relatives or associates of the deceased to comment briefly on the meaning of the life of the deceased for the community, but this must not overshadow or exclude a proclamation of the Gospel by the preacher.

The Hymn of the Day is sung, and the Apostles' Creed, because of its association with Baptism and thus with death and resurrection, may be said. If the deceased was not a member of the church, the Creed may be inappropriate.

The prayers are said. An alternate to the prayers (15) is this form, which more specifically refers to the Christian life of the deceased:

Let us pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Lord, you consoled Mary and Martha in their distress;
draw near to us, who mourn for _____, and dry the tears
of those who weep.

Hear us, Lord.

You wept at the grave of Lazarus, your friend;
comfort us in our sorrow.

Hear us, Lord.

You raised the dead to life;
give to our *brother/sister* eternal life.

Hear us, Lord.

You promise life to those who believe;
bring our *brother/sister* to the joys of heaven.

Hear us, Lord.

Our *brother/sister* was washed in Baptism and anointed with
the Holy Spirit;
give *him/her* fellowship with all your saints.

Hear us, Lord.

He/she was nourished with your body and blood;
grant *him/her* a place at the table in your heavenly kingdom.

Hear us, Lord.

Comfort us in our sorrows at the death of our *brother/sister*;
let our faith be our consolation, and eternal life our hope.

*Hear us, Lord.*²³

This kind of prayer that mentions the deceased is unusual for most Lutherans, but it is solidly evangelical. The deceased should not be forgotten at the time of the funeral, and it is not enough to assume that the funeral is for the living. A funeral, among other things, ritualizes the situation of death and the bereavement of the family and congregation. In the Burial Service we say what we would have said at the moment of death had we been present. Prayer that God will give the deceased eternal life, the joys of heaven, and fellowship with the saints, are an expression of the faith and hope of the community.²⁴

The Prayers are concluded by the assisting minister²⁵ with a prayer (15). The first of these prayers, "God of all grace," is from the *Book of Common Order* of the Church of Scotland and was in the *Service Book and Hymnal* (page 267); the second, "God, the generations rise and pass away before you," is from the *Service Book and Hymnal* (page 266). Neither of these prayers is appropriate for one who is not a member of the church, and other less specific prayers should be used. If there is no Communion, the Our

Father is prayed, introduced by the same phrase as at Morning and Evening Prayer.

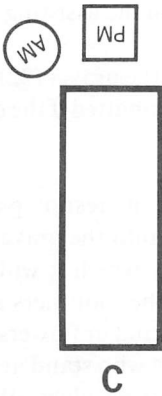
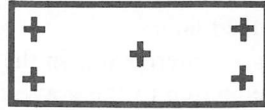
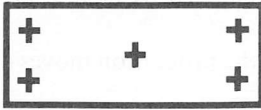
The service for the Burial of the Dead may be part of a celebration of the Holy Communion. The visual and active aspect of the Holy Communion can be helpful when words fail, and when silence and embraces and eating together are important. Moreover, the Preface, which joins our earthly praise with the praise of the hosts of heaven, has particular relevance to a funeral. When the Holy Communion is celebrated, the service continues after the prayers with the Peace. Under normal circumstances, gifts of money would not be gathered. The bread and wine are presented at the altar; the Offertory "Let the vineyards be fruitful" or a hymn or a psalm may be sung, and the offertory prayer is said. The Proper Preface for the Burial of the Dead is used. Under no circumstances should the bread and wine be received by the family of the deceased to the exclusion of the congregation. The sacrament is for the gathered congregation. After the Communion, the canticle "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace" is sung while the table is cleared, and the post-communion prayer (Ministers Edition, p. 191) is said.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD: THE COMMENDATION

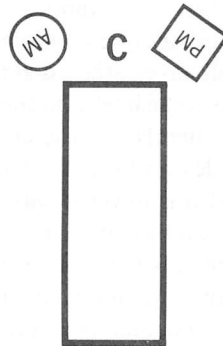
The Commendation is a prayer which asks God to receive the deceased in mercy. It recalls Jesus' last prayer from the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," and the antiphon to the Nunc Dimittis at Compline, "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." The prayer is a concluding statement of trust to console the living with God's care for the departed.

When the body is to be cremated, the service may be held in the church and the commendation in the crematory chapel. In that case, at the commendation the coffin should remain in its place until the mourners have left, rather than having it disappear by some mechanical device.

At the commendation, the ministers take their places at the coffin. The prayer commends the deceased to the mercy of God (18). The assisting minister says the traditional verse at the beginning of a procession, "Let us go forth in peace," which has particular meaning at the end of the funeral service. The procession forms in the same order as before: cross, paschal candle or torches, presiding minister, assisting minister, pallbearers and coffin, the bereaved. As the procession leaves the church, a psalm, hymn (especially an Easter hymn), or anthem may be sung.²⁶ If it has not been sung in the Holy Communion, "Lord, now you let your servant go in



OR



AT THE COMMENDATION

peace,” is appropriate. Or the Benedictus, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,” might be sung.

The pall is removed from the coffin in the narthex. The paschal candle remains at the church. The processional cross (and torches) may be taken to the place of interment.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD: THE COMMITTAL

When the body of the deceased is to be transported to a distant interment site, when it has been donated for medical use, or in other situations when those present at the funeral cannot be present at the interment, the commendation alone will suffice. The verse, “Rest eternal . . .” (25) and the blessing (26) from the Committal may be added after the prayer “Into your hands, O merciful Savior. . . .”

When the body has been willed for medical research or other scientific purposes, the committal service, with appropriate modifications, may be

used with the bereaved before the body is removed. A memorial service may be held later.

When the interment is in the churchyard, the procession moves directly from the church to the grave.

When feasible, the procession from the hearse to the grave follows the same order as before: cross, torches, presiding minister, assisting minister, pallbearers and coffin, the bereaved. Where this is not feasible, at least the presiding minister should precede the coffin to the place of interment. It should not be necessary for the mourners to have books or pamphlets to participate in the Committal. During the procession the assisting minister may sing or say one or more of the verses (21).

When all have gathered at the place of interment, the prayer (22) is said if the body is to be buried in the ground. The prayer is omitted if the deceased was not a member of the church.

A brief lesson may be read.

The coffin is lowered into the grave or placed in its resting place. It is important that the mourners see the body lowered into the grave and not simply remember it resting on top of the device by which it will later be lowered after the mourners have left, for it gives the mourners a clearer memory of what happened to the body. Earth (not sand or flowers) may be cast on the coffin by an assisting minister and those who stand around, as the presiding minister commits the body to its resting place. When the deceased was not a member of the church, the second formula, "Since almighty God . . .," is used and the verse, "Rest eternal . . .," (25) is omitted. The people pray the Lord's Prayer. Finally the presiding minister says the prayer for grace to die in faith, following Christ who leads the way into death and through it to life. The traditional verse, "Rest eternal . . .," is said and the minister blesses the people with the words from Hebrews 13:20-21.

The dismissal, "Let us go in peace," is said by the assisting minister. This makes a dismissal by the undertaker unnecessary.

The Burial of the Dead is an Easter liturgy. It has its focus in Baptism by which one is made a child of God forever and is dramatized in the Easter Vigil and its celebration of the passage through death to new life, where Christ has led the way. The mood of the Burial of the Dead is richer than the older practice that developed in medieval times and emphasized the loss, the sorrow, and the fear that death evokes. The fuller understanding of death recognizes these feelings of grief and desolation and gives them expression, but it also moves beyond them to a confident hope. Both the sadness and the joy must be seen together, one tempered by the other.

The events of the climax of Holy Week and indeed of the liturgical

year—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday—are central to the whole liturgy of the church. For in that three-day celebration the whole mystery of redemption is proclaimed, and that grand and moving and powerful proclamation is echoed in the other services of the church—Baptism, Holy Communion, and Burial. Even Marriage is an echo and sign of the self-sacrificing love of Christ. At the center of it all are the services of Holy Week, which deserve to be given full attention in study and in their celebration. The history of salvation—both general and personal—is the progress from loss and grief to an increasing acceptance of the victory of the cross.