**A Word from the Pastor**

[Forthcoming.]

This policy is prepared to clarify how funerals are conducted at Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church, specify the recommended procedures for planning one’s funeral, and outlining the criteria that determine eligibility for burial in the church cemetery/churchyard. If you are reading this for the first time during a time of loss, please accept our sympathy. On behalf of the entire church family, we at Calvary promise to do all that we can to help you in the love and spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christian Service,

Rev. Dominique I. Grate

Pastor of Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church

**Checklist for Those Requesting a Funeral**

* Whether to be cremated;
* In the case of cremation, whether to have the funeral before or after the cremation;
* Where the funeral is to take place;
* Where the burial is to take place;
* Which cemetery is to be used for the burial;
* What kind of plot should be bought;
* The day and Time of the Funeral;
* The day and Time of the Burial;
* Whether to have prayers in the home;
* Whether to have a visitation in a funeral home;
* What Hymns and music should be chosen;
* Whether to have flowers in the Church;
* What liturgical color should be used at the service;
* Whether any other group is to be present or partake before or after the service;
* Whether to give a memorial gift to the Church;
* Which tombstone is to be chosen;
* What inscription is to be used.
* Whether to have memorial flowers on the anniversary of death.

**Cost**

The Pastor does not charge anything for conducting funerals of members of the congregation. In addition, there is no facility rental fee for members of the congregation. However, an honorarium is expected for those who are not members of the church. A list of members of the church is maintained by the board of stewards and the names of all persons in good standing is updated quarterly by the board of stewards in conjunction with the Office of the Pastor.

**Commitment to Pastoral Care**

**The Ministry of the Pastor and Congregation**

The Pastor’s ministry 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. As a people of faith, we know that the pain and loss of death must not be minimized or ignored. We understand, the bereaved need to confront and accept the loss of the deceased as well as be given hope. Our Church promises to do our best to support the bereaved – not only at the time of the funeral, but also as the family and loved ones who sorrow, return to the duties of your lives.

**Pastoral Services to Members of Other Congregations**

Sometimes our clergy are asked to be involved at the funerals of people from other Churches. We affirm that the responsibility and authority for pastoral acts or services rests with the pastor of the congregation where the deceased held membership. If our Pastor is asked to provide pastoral services for members of other congregations, the Pastor will contact the clergy of the Church in which the person held membership before providing the service. Our goal is to aid other Churches in their ministry without interfering. It is hoped that this sign of respect would be returned to us from other clergy and Churches. If the request for pastoral service involves an individual who has had conflicts with his/her Pastor or congregation, the immediate family will be urged to resolve the difficulty prior to receiving pastoral service.

**Funeral Arrangements**

**How Mourners Worship in Our Tradition**

A Christian Funeral is a time when we pause before the mystery of death and life. Funerals are an expression of faith in our salvation, resurrection and eternal life. As such, we come to worship God and rejoice in the new life he has given us beyond death. We also gather to thank God for the gift given to us in the person of the deceased. Funerals also express the community support that is shown at a time of death as we pray, sing, laugh and cry together.

The Christian funeral is a service of worship and should involve all those present. The funeral serves a support function such that the religious, social, and emotional needs of the mourners are met.

**Worship Service Format**

At Calvary, we offer families the choice of a funeral service from *The Book of Worship of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* or special program planned in conjunction with the Office of the Pastor.

Sample Funeral Worship Service:

The Prelude

The Processional

The Hymn

The Prayer

The Scripture

The Choral Selection

The Eulogy

The Closing Prayer

**Note:** In the African Methodist Episcopal Church, prayer always proceeds the reading of scripture.

**Additional Notes**

To Fraternal Groups:

Such groups, upon the consent of the Pastor and following the guidelines outlined by the church are welcome to take their place in the celebration of the life of the deceased person.

Regarding Music:

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, the communion of saints, hope in the Resurrection.  All Music selected for use at a funeral must be approved by the Pastor.

To Visiting Clergy:

The Pastor or his or her designee is in charge of the service. If the family wishes to invite other clergy or have them participate in the worship service, they must obtain the permission of the Pastor. The role of all invited clergy at the service is assigned by the Rector.

On Cremation:
Cremation is becoming more common today. The ashes are the body of the deceased in a changed form. Therefore, we honor them as we honor the body.  A funeral can be held with the body present before cremation or with the cremated remains in an urn on a table near the chancel.

**Optional Services**

**Prayers at the Home**

It is recommended that the family of the deceased have prayers at the home of the deceased sometime before the funeral. For those who die with the rites of the Church these prayers will be performed at the time of death.

**The Committal**

When the body of the deceased is to be transported to a distant interment site, has been donated for medical use, or has been lost at sea, the commendation alone will suffice. The coffin is lowered into the grave. Urns are placed in their resting place. It is important that the mourners see the coffin 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. (The lowering of the casket in the presence of the family is optional and must be coordinated in conjunction with both the church and funeral home.) Earth is cast on the coffin by the Pastor or his or her designee as the body is committed to its resting place. The final blessing and dismissal, is said by the Pastor. Bodies are not interred after sunset or before sunrise.

If an internment service is being held in conjunction with the funeral worship service, either a member of Calvary’s ministerial team or other clergy designated by the Columbia Annual Conference’s representative must preside at the interment of any body in our cemetery.

**Bequest**

Although the Church will not pressure an individual or a family to make a bequest to the Church, it is encouraged. In our society memorials are often made to secular groups, such as the Cancer Society, and we condone this practice. However, sometimes we as Christians often overlook our duty to leave bequests to the local church for its future upkeep and ministry.  The Church will welcome any memorials that you choose to give in honor of your loved one with gratitude, and our Pastor will be glad to meet with you at any time to discuss your needs.

**Anniversaries**

The church marks the anniversary of all our ancestors who have transitioned on All Saints Day, which is normally celebrated on the last Sunday in October or on a date designated by the congregation. During this time, a representative from each family of the deceased will be given an opportunity to deliver brief remarks and light a candle in honor of their loved one. Also, flowers may be dedicated to the memory of a loved one on any Sunday.

An additional service that the church offers is a service of prayer and communion with the family of the deceased. Our experiences as a church family have taught us that sometimes the comfort of sharing in the Lord’s Supper can be an act of grace connecting the community and family of the deceased with God especially on the anniversaries of deaths when memories of the deceased are sometimes most difficult to cope. Please, see the pastor in order to make arrangements and for more details.

**Memorial Book**

All names of the deceased buried in the Churchyard are kept in a memorial book and are remembered annually at the time of death in congregational prayers.

**Preparing Your Funeral in Advance**

You are encouraged to think about your own funeral. With respect for the Church’s teaching, outlined in this policy and in dialogue with your family, you may want to leave directions as to how you wish your funeral to be celebrated. The Pastor in conjunction with local funeral homes have the resources and are prepared to offer help in this area. The Pastor is always willing to help you prepare your own funeral.

**Guidelines for Use of Cemetery Grounds**

**Tombstones and other Memorials**

Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church’s cemetery is consecrated ground. It is a common misunderstanding that Burial in a Churchyard gives rights to the relatives to erect memorials, plants or other things on the grave. A Church yard is very different to a municipal cemetery, and the rights of congregants are limited:

1. The strict right of a Parishioner in the Churchyard is simply the right to be buried. The erection of a tombstone or monument over a grave, though now customary, remains a privilege. It is an erection on consecrated ground and therefore in strictness requires the permission of the Pastor and official board of the church. (The Pastor and official board almost always give their permission for a particular monument or tombstone if it is deemed suitable.)
2. Inscriptions on monuments or tombstones must be approved by the Pastor and official board of the church.
3. If the right of a monument, tombstone, or the particular wording of an inscription is not granted. The Pastor will provide a written explanation to the family of the deceased. Additionally, a copy of this letter should be placed in the historical records of the church.

**Right of Burial**

In order to ensure for posterity that the members of Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church will have burial plots, it is not the practice of the church to sell burial plots. Instead, burial plots are reserved for members of the congregation in good standing.\* In addition, the church will not allow individuals to be buried on top of each other or urns to be placed in the same grave as another individual.

**What constitutes good standing?**

There is a distinction between being a member of Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church and being a member in good standing. As a local charge affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, no body within the local church has the ability to determine what constitutes membership in the church that is in conflict *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2012*. However, Calvary does reserve the right to determine whether or not an individual is in good standing.

Good standing shall be defined by a full member or affiliate member of the local charge who contributes at least $125 per quarter.

**All preparatory members will be classified as members in good standing.**

All previous or current clergy of Calvary, his/her spouse, and children are eligible to be buried in the church cemetery if they are members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In addition all members who are on the church’s official sick and shut-in list that is maintained by the Pastor in conjunction with the Stewardesses will be considered in good standing if at the time of them being placed on the list they were in good standing.

**Amendments Procedure & Special Circumstances**

Any amendment to the Funeral and Burial Policy must be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the church conference. If special provision for burial must be made that are in contrary to this policy, the Pastor should be notified immediately. Please note, that a notification of the pastor is not a guarantee that a request can be granted. However, the Pastor will work diligently to accommodate any possible special request.