

Humbercrest United Church Funeral, Memorial and Celebration of Life Guide for Families

1. Context and Purpose

Preparing for a funeral or a celebration of life for someone we love is never easy. In the midst of loss, we may experience a wide range of emotions. During this time, the support of a caring community gathering can be deeply meaningful as we grieve and plan a service that honours the life of the person who has died. It is a time to seek comfort, strength and courage, and to be reminded that we do not walk this journey alone.

A funeral or memorial service is a time of gathering, reflection and remembrance. Together, we give thanks for a life lived, even as we grieve. Many people find meaning in shared rituals, stories and quiet moments, which can help us hold both sorrow and gratitude, and sustain us as we face loss.

Humbercrest is an open and inclusive community that welcomes people of all backgrounds, beliefs, identities, and traditions. Services may be spiritual, secular or a blend of both, reflecting the values, beliefs and wishes of the person who has died and those who gather to remember them. Our sanctuary offers a warm and historic setting for a funeral or celebration of life, and our reception spaces are ideal for family gatherings. We uphold the dignity of every person. We ask that all who use our space value and respect this spirit of inclusivity.

The Worship Ministry of Humbercrest United Church has developed this guide to assist you in planning a service that reflects dignity for the deceased and compassion for those who mourn, in keeping with the United Church of Canada practices within the Greater Toronto Area. This guide includes elements of pastoral care, practical administrative logistics, facility use and honoraria to make your experience meaningful.

2. Principles

1. To create a meaningful and respectful gathering that honours the life of the person who has died and provides space for reflection, remembrance and gratitude, and to create space for moments of connection, meaning and quiet presence.
 2. To support families, friends and all who gather with compassion, flexibility, and respect for diverse needs, traditions and beliefs.
 3. To embody a spirit of openness, inclusion and care in both language and practice, welcoming people of all backgrounds and life experiences.
 4. To ensure transparency and consistency in suggested fees, while striving to remain accessible to all.
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3. Eligibility

Funeral and memorial services may be provided for members and adherents of the congregation, individuals with a pastoral or historical connection to the church, and members of the wider community (subject to availability and minister approval). Priority scheduling will be given to members and adherents.

4. Role of the Minister

The Minister will meet with the family to help to plan the service. They will provide pastoral care before the service and, where possible, afterward, and will lead the service itself. Services may be held at the church, funeral home, and/or interment site.

In keeping with the practices of the United Church of Canada, the Minister ensures that the service is respectful, meaningful and appropriate for a gathering in this community, while honouring the life of the person who has died. The Minister retains responsibility and decision-making for the content and flow of the service. However, within this framework, there is much flexibility and personal touches are welcome to reflect traditions, identities, beliefs and desire for inclusivity.

The Minister will invite the family to share stories and information about their loved one's life. You may be asked to consider music (sacred or secular), readings such as scripture, poetry or other meaningful texts, and whether family or friends would like to offer a eulogy or tribute. Practical details such as live-streaming/recording, visitations, approaches to the casket, arrangements at the interment site will be discussed with the family/funeral home as needed and in consultation with the Church Administrator.

Printed bulletins may be arranged through the church or funeral home (see Appendix for example of content)

If the family wishes to involve another Minister or Celebrant, this can be discussed with the current Minister. If greeters are requested at the entrance to the church this can be arranged by the Church.

There is no specific fee for the Minister although participants may wish to consider an honoraria. A range of honorariums for Ministers of \$800 - \$1,200 is reflective of common amounts across United Church congregations in the Toronto area. All amounts are suggested and may need to reflect scope and context.

5. Music

Music often plays an important role in a funeral or memorial service. Selections should be meaningful to those gathered and appropriate to the tone of the service, while respecting the reflective and communal nature of the space.

The church's Music Director is engaged via the Minister. Sacred or secular selections, recorded music, and solos are all appropriate and may be included in consultation with the Minister and Music Director. The Music Director is available to assist in this regard, as needed. If they are unavailable for the service, they can suggest an alternative option. The Music Director will also contact a soloist or the church choir, if requested. Guest musicians are welcome but require approval in discussion with the Minister. Permission is required to use the organ or the Steinway piano.

The ranges of honoraria below are reflective of common ranges across United Church congregations in the Toronto area. All amounts are suggested and may need to reflect scope and context.

- Organist/Pianist Honorarium: \$250 – \$400
- Soloist/Instrumentalist Honorarium: \$100 – \$400

6. Use of Church Facilities

The Church Administrator is responsible for booking and coordination. Available spaces for use may include the sanctuary (funeral or memorial service), a hall for a reception (e.g. Heritage Hall, Friendship Room) and a kitchen if required. The family will work with the Church Administrator to discuss availability and custodial care for the day (opening, closing, cleaning, etc.).

If the family is considering a reception, there are numerous options, logistics of which can be discussed with the Church Administrator.

All use is subject to availability and staff coordination. Fees will be discussed based on catering expenses. Custodial fee covers custodial services at the reception.

7. Facility Fees

- Sanctuary Rental: \$500 – \$750
- Reception Hall (not including food/refreshment): \$250 – \$500
- Custodial/Setup/Cleaning Fee/Garbage Removal: \$150 – \$300
- Bulletins/printing: \$75 - \$150

8. Pastoral Discretion and Accessibility

No funeral will be declined due to financial hardship. The Minister, in consultation with the Church Council or designated authority, may reduce or waive fees, adjust honoraria, or offer alternative arrangements.

This approach reflects the United Church's commitment to justice, compassion, and accessibility, ensuring a pastoral approach rather than a transactional engagement.

9. Payment

The church will provide a single consolidated invoice for facility fees only. Honorariums should be arranged directly with the individuals

Payment is typically requested prior to or on the day of the service. HST will be applied where required (e.g., facility rentals, depending on church practice and CRA requirement).

10. Donations to the Church

As part of a caring and supportive community, some family and friends may wish to make a donation to the Church to express gratitude and in memory of the deceased. If the family chooses to invite memorial donations, cards and envelopes can be made available during visitation and the service.¹

Importantly, donations are always voluntary and distinct from fees, ensuring that there is no expectation or misunderstanding of "paying for ministry". Humbercrest is committed to being accessible to all, regardless of financial means. Official tax receipts will be issued in accordance with Canada Revenue Agency regulations.

Suggested wording for obituary notices can be provided by the church office upon request.

11. Other Considerations

Accessibility. The building includes an elevator and accessible washroom. Please advise us of any special requirements.

Inclusivity. Humbercrest is an affirming and safe space, as we live in solidarity with many peoples (e.g. LGBTQ+, Indigenous). You may see flags or symbols to honour these peoples, please do not alter these expressions of support.

Recording or Livestreaming. Humbercrest is able to record or livestream a funeral service if desired. Please discuss with the Minister and Church Administrator.

Parking Arrangements: Parking is limited to street parking on neighbourhood streets

¹ [for internal use only] In memoriam donations are documented and coded by the regular Counters with noting for tax receipting. Counters also inform Church Trustees, who ensure the donation is directed to the correct fund and letter of appreciation sent to the donor.

Flowers and Memorials: Flowers and memorials can be placed in the church shortly before the service and removed following the service. The family is welcome to leave arrangements for the sanctuary. Appropriate memorial items are also welcomed, please alert the Minister and Church Administrator.

12. Approval

This guide will be reviewed periodically to reflect and respond to changes in practices and norms, congregational capacity, inflationary costs and guidance of the United Church of Canada.

Approved by Church Council on [date]

Appendix:

Sample Order of Service (United Church Funeral/Memorial)

A flexible template; all elements may be adapted in consultation with the Minister.

Funeral or Memorial Service for [Full Name]

Prelude Music offered as people gather

Words of Welcome and Acknowledgment of Territory

- Welcome to family and friends
- Land acknowledgment (as appropriate in United Church practice)

Opening Sentences or Scripture
(e.g., John 14:1–3, Psalm 23)

Opening Prayer or Reflection, Lighting of Candles

Music (e.g. hymn or other secular piece)

Remembering [Name]

- Words of remembrance (family or friends)
- Possible readings (poetry, scripture, or meaningful texts)

Scripture Readings or Other Readings

- Hebrew Bible / Old Testament
- Psalm (read or sung)
- New Testament (Epistle or Gospel)

Reflection / Homily

Given by the Minister

Music

- Solo, anthem, congregational hymn or secular selection

Prayers of the People or Shared Words of Caring and Hope

- Thanksgiving for the life of the deceased, prayers for family and community, The Lord's Prayer (optional, as appropriate)
Or if a more secular service, Thanksgiving for life of the deceased / reflections / shared intentions for the family

Commendation and Farewell

- Words of commendation
- Blessing

Closing Hymn

Benediction

Postlude

Music as people depart

Optional Elements

- Candle lighting or other ritual
 - Photo/video tribute (subject to facility capability and approval)
 - Graveside committal (may occur separately)
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