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Funeral Practices during COVID-19: Praying for Wisdom in Pastoral and Liturgical Adaptations

During the COVID-19 pandemic, pastors and churches preparing to conduct funerals face unique challenges, particularly restrictions on public gatherings even for those who grieve.

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Tags: [coronavirus](#), [covid-19](#), [death](#), [funerals](#)

Reflection posted on March 19, 2020

As the world changes all around us during this coronavirus pandemic, I continue to be grateful for the pastors and pastoral musicians who are responding creatively and thoughtfully, offering ample opportunities not only for weekly worship, but also for communal daily prayer. COVID-19 could be a source of renewal for the practice of daily communal prayer, albeit in very different forms.

One of the greatest pastoral concerns I'm noticing right now is funeral practices. There is something so powerful about being together in community at a funeral, especially funerals in church and especially (in my own view) funerals that feature scripture readings, a scripture-based sermon (and not just a eulogy), congregational singing, and public prayer—a liturgical funeral.

My prayer today is for all those pastors who are preparing to lead funerals that are much more private than anyone would choose, and for all those who grieve who will not be able to participate in person in these services. May God's grace abound in all the improvised decisions that must be made about these services.

I pray that, by God's grace, many communities rediscover the gift of a liturgical funeral even while we discern new modes of sharing corporate practices through the gift of technology when large public gatherings are not advisable.

Along with our prayers for healthcare workers, government leaders, and pastors (and countless others), let us also pray for funeral directors, who must minister to people making challenging decisions in this upside-down world.

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