



Greater Milwaukee Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rostered Minister Funerals

Suggested Guidance

The funeral of a pastor or deacon who is listed on the roster of the Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA, whether active, retired, or on leave from call, is a worship event for both the synod and the local congregation where the deceased minister held membership. In order to ensure that the rostered minister's desires are honored, we ask all rostered ministers to complete a [funeral planning form](#) and to share it with the synod office, with copies also going to their congregation of membership and their family members. The following notes are suggested for use in arranging the funeral service. Further details may be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Leaders Desk Edition*, 43-45, as well as in the rubrics for the Funeral in the ELW..

Notification of the Bishop

Upon the death of a rostered minister, the bishop of the synod should be notified immediately and consulted before final funeral arrangements are made. In addition, an official obituary should be provided to the synod office as soon as possible. Notifications may be communicated to Bishop Erickson at paul.erickson@gmselca.org or via Mary Romskog (Executive Assistant for Administration and Candidacy) at (414) 671-1212 or mary.romskog@gmselca.org

Location of Funeral Service

It is appropriate for the funeral service to be conducted in the congregation where the pastor was a member most recently. If the retired minister held the additional title Emeritus or Emerita, the service may be held at the congregation that bestowed the honor, though family desires, history and tradition may dictate other arrangements.

Role of the Bishop

As the synod's pastor, it is appropriate that the bishop be invited to participate in the service. The bishop may be asked to preach. Or, it may be more appropriate for the local pastor to preach, especially when the local pastor had been the primary caregiver to the retired pastor/deacon and family. If the bishop is not asked to preach, it would be appropriate for the bishop to be invited to share a brief greeting, words of gratitude on behalf of the church. If the bishop is unavailable, an assistant to the bishop may act in the bishop's stead and fulfill these roles.

Role of Other Ministers

Rostered ministers and their family members may have a variety of thoughts about who they would like to have serve in leadership roles in their funeral. Other ministers, minister friends, relatives, and associates may take part in the service as deemed appropriate by the congregation's pastor and the family of the deceased. All rostered ministers are encouraged to attend, and they may be invited to vest, process, and sit as a group. The season of the church year dictates the color for the service.

Burial Apparel

It is traditional, though not required, that the body of the deceased minister be vested for burial in an alb with a white stole appropriate to their office (pastor or deacon). If desired, a stole may be placed on top of the funeral pall after the casket is closed.

The Funeral Service

A full eucharistic liturgy that celebrates the new life in Christ is ideal. The rubrics for the funeral service are provided in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship Funeral service, which includes directions for including communion. In addition, the following items are traditional practice:

The casket may be covered by a white pall, if available.

The casket should be positioned at a right angle to the altar with the deceased pastor's head towards the altar or the deceased deacon's feet toward the altar. [1](#)

Ministers may form a line from the door of the church to the vehicle used to carry the coffin to the cemetery.

Memorial Service

A memorial service takes place with neither the body nor ashes present. The funeral service in Evangelical Lutheran Worship may be adapted for this purpose. It is most appropriate to include a eucharistic celebration as part of the service.

Synod staff members are available to answer questions concerning funeral preparations and worship service for rostered ministers.

¹ The coffin placement described follows the time-honored tradition of placing the deceased according to their accustomed role in the church. Clergy, as presiding ministers, face the people. Lay persons and deacons are positioned with their feet towards the altar as if facing it as part of the congregation.