

## **GOSPEL, ECUMENISM AND THEOLOGY**

### **FUNERAL OF MILITARY PERSONNEL**

For most people in a local congregation, it has been between one and four generations since Funerals of Military Personnel were experienced in the local United Church. Unfortunately, we must prepare ourselves and our congregations once again.

There are three ‘families’ for which we must care:

- the family of the deceased;
- the military family;
- and the Church Family.

Each has their distinctive and separate needs.

By the ‘family of the deceased’ we mean the spouse, children, parents, and siblings as well as the extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins and friends.

By the ‘military family’ we mean members of the unit of which the deceased was a member, the comrades on the base, and the larger military establishment that in its own manner mourns the lost of another.

By the ‘Church Family’ we mean the local congregation of which the deceased was a member or an adherent, the congregation in which the funeral is to be celebrated, and the congregation that may host the Funeral Service for the larger community.

In an ideal world, hopefully the local United Church Minister already will have an existing relationship, of varying strengths and degrees, with all three ‘families’. If you know of someone within your Pastoral Charge who is an Active Member of the Military or who has family (son/daughter/mother/father) in the Military hopefully a relationship with him or her would have been formed or is being formed.

Also, there may be people in your Pastoral Charge who have served previously in the Military and for whom the present situation is a potent reminder of not-so-forgotten realities. Veterans, retired military personnel and children of War Vets all carry their scars and loyalties.

In the Military, the normal flow of information around a war casualty is as follows:

- personnel dies;
- information is transferred by the Field Personnel to the Base;
- information is transferred to Canada and then to the local Base from which the Personnel was sent;
- the Commanding Officer and the Base Chaplain are sent to the home of the deceased and the immediate family is informed;
- the Commander and the Chaplain will stay with the family for as long as are needed.

Once the Base in Canada gets word of the death, the usual time elapsed before notification of Next of Kin may be as few as 30 minutes.

Military Personnel will accompany the body back to Canada.

The ‘Family of the Deceased’ may request a Military Funeral.

The attached Outline of a Military Funeral and the procedure surrounding it, were graciously prepared by Wendy Keen, former Military Chaplain, and I would recommend them for your insight and information.

Ultimately the conduct of all Worship Services is under the direction and discretion of the Session of the Pastoral Charge and such Services as are out-of-the-norm should involve discussion with the Session. In any situation where the use of the Church Building is requested, this should be brought before the Session for their deliberation and decision.

The Pastoral Care of the Family of the Deceased, the Church Family, and the Military Family must be all taken into consideration.

Within the boundaries of the Conference, Military Chaplains have said that they are planning to conduct information sessions to which all people in Pastoral Ministry and other forms of Ministry will be invited. However, it would be behoove us to make time and invite the local Base Chaplains to speak to our Presbytery to Ministerial. If time is available, it would be good to take the Chaplain out for a coffee or invite him or her to speak to your Session, Official Board or Congregation.

Respectively submitted

Ivan Gregan  
Gospel, Ecumenism and Theology  
Maritime Conference.

### ***Military Funerals***

*When a member of the Canadian Forces (CF) dies, they are entitled to a military funeral. The extent to which military tradition and ceremonial are included in the funeral, is determined by the deceased member's family, especially by the member's primary next of kin (NOK). While clergy try to respect the wishes of the family, the CF will take its direction from the primary NOK in the case of any conflict over funeral details.*

*By the time a civilian minister is engaged by the family, the NOK will have already met with a military chaplain and an assisting officer (AO) from the deceased's unit or branch of the CF. For every death of a CF member, an AO is appointed to help the primary NOK navigate the administration of the member's estate. The AO will also convey the wishes of the family back to the CF regarding funeral arrangements.*

*A military funeral may be held in either a civilian or military house of worship, and civilian clergy may officiate at either location. Recent history shows that where civilian clergy preside at a military funeral, a military chaplain co-presides at the family's request. The general rule of thumb for all military funerals is that the CF controls the ceremonial up to the church door. The presiding clergy controls everything within the church itself.*

*In addition to the military chaplain and the AO, a Public Affairs Officer (PAO) is usually assigned to the family to assist them in dealing with the media. This will include relaying the family's desire for media coverage (or not) to the media, and the coordination of any media at the visitation at the funeral home, the funeral itself, and the interment. In addition to the media, a military photographer may also be present to record the event for military historical purposes. It is up to the primary NOK to determine whether and to what extent media will be permitted in the church.*

*There are many different things of a military nature that may be part of a military funeral. Again, it is the primary NOK who has the final say on these matters. In general, clergy can expect the following:*

- *military pallbearers in full uniform (no weapons in the church)*
- *Canadian flag on the coffin with the member's headdress and medals*
- *Accompanying unit member in uniform*
- *Large representation of the military community in full uniform*
- *Veterans' groups may also be visibly present*
- *"buddy" of deceased or another representative from the unit may deliver a eulogy*
- *others may wish to do a reading*
- *military trumpeter/piper may be present to play "Last Post" or a lament*
- *military hymns and prayers associated with the deceased's unit or branch*
- *O Canada*
- *Other unit customs eg. presence of unit mascot*

*It is the primary NOK who will determine which of these elements will be part of the funeral service; they cannot be imposed by the military chain of command.*

*Once the casket has been processed out of the church, military ceremonial will continue. At the cemetery, this traditionally includes a volley fired at the graveside.*

*Because a military funeral has the same status as a full parade, military planning will be detailed down to the minute. Those uniformed members taking part will practice extensively ahead of time, and planners will likely request a tour of the church to help organize and arrange for the seating of military guests and participants. It should be possible to get a copy of the "parade state" ahead through the AO, the PAO or the military chaplain ahead of time to let the civilian minister know what will be happening at all phases of the funeral.*

*The family of a deceased CF member remains in contact with the AO until the member's estate is settled and all funds paid out. The family should not be out of pocket for funeral expenses. If there is an investigation into the events surrounding the death of the member, the AO remains available to the family to help them receive the final reports if desired.*

*The military chaplain assigned to the primary NOK at the time of notification of death also remains available to them for as long as they request it or it is deemed pastorally appropriate. The military chaplain will not remain on the case after the funeral if the family prefers to deal with their own civilian minister.*

*Finally, all members of the deceased's unit and all his or her friends in uniform will have access to military chaplains, social workers, and other support agencies for as long as they require.*

*Civilian clergy are welcome, and encouraged, to contact the military chaplains should they have any questions or concerns about the well being of any family member. They are also invited to discuss all aspects of the military funeral and to give feedback following the funeral, with military chaplains. The chaplains will pass on any concerns to the appropriate person in the military chain of command for action.*

*Maritime Conference is encouraged to make contact with either of the following senior chaplains for more information and to establish appropriate lines of communication at any time:*

*Padre Rick Durrett, Formation Chaplain – 721-8660/721-8662  
Padre Todd Meaker, Land Forces Area Atlantic Chaplain*