tributes that are most helpful are those that are informative, sensitive and honest. Many find meaning in having family and friends share either during the service or after a simple meal following the interment. Songs of faith bring comfort and strength to the family. Bible readings point to our Lord. In lieu of flowers, some families may choose to invite donations to be made to a Christian charity in memory of their departed loved one.

The graveside service underlines the fact that we are people of hope. The grave is not the last word. Together with those who left us, we look forward to the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, whose builder is God (Revelation 21:1-4).

Ministry to the Grieving Continues

The ministry to the grieving must continue after the funeral. A recognized authority on death and dying notes five stages a grieving person experiences: (1) denial and isolation, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression and (5) acceptance. It is healthy to grieve when a loved one is lost through death. People need to be encouraged to grieve. It is all right for a person to weep because of the loss of a spouse, child or someone else held dear. One-third of the Psalms have been classified as laments, as for example, Psalms 13 and 22. Reading the Psalms can help us in (1) squarely facing our loss and even complaining to God, (2) offering prayer, (3) recalling divine assurances and (4) eventually reaching for praise. After hearing of the death of his son Absalom, King David showed his grief in loud cries of deep sorrow. We read in 2 Samuel 18:33: “The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: ‘O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead you—O Absalom, my son, my son!’”

Although grieving often takes longer than we expect, the ultimate hope of one day being in the presence of Christ, who told us that he is preparing a place for us, should make us homesick for the future when God shall wipe away all tears.
Death and Dying: A Christian Perspective

The writer of the Time magazine article “On Death As a Constant Companion” was correct when he observed that facing our mortality is a constant challenge for us all. How do we cope when a fatal illness strikes a member of the family? How can life go on after a spouse dies? How does one prepare for the end of life’s journey?

Christians have a living hope that does not end with death but continues into an eternity with Jesus Christ our Lord. This hope is not wishful thinking; it is based on clear biblical teaching. After Lazarus had died, Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25-26). When Christ rose from the dead, this living hope was clearly demonstrated and firmly established. Indeed, the resurrection of the Lord’s return would be caught up together with the believers of the past and be with Jesus forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). That was a comforting message.

Connecting with the Community of Faith

Sharing suffering and grief makes it more bearable. The church family, the community of faith, is called upon to weep with the weeping (Romans 12:15). A warm greeting, an expression of sympathy, assurance of prayer support, a short visit, a hot meal, practical assistance, and a sympathy card are all ways to ease the pain of the bereaved. After the funeral, one frequently hears grieving people say, “We did not know that we had so many friends.” For the community of faith to come alongside a grieving person is a noble endeavour.

Preparations for the End of the Journey

Families need to talk about the kind of care and treatment a dying person should receive. Should the terminally ill be subjected to heroic measures or be allowed to die naturally and peacefully? A family is greatly helped when the dying family member clearly expresses personal preferences about dying long before death actually occurs. Some palliative care institutions explain up front that no heroic measures will be taken to keep a patient of theirs alive.

Preparations for the end of life here on earth include making a will to specify how one’s personal assets are to be distributed after death. In addition, a so-called Living Will may be used to indicate whether a person is willing to donate organs after death for the benefit of those needing organ transplants. Forms are available from funeral homes. When preparing for the end of life’s journey, it’s also good to write personal life and faith stories. Not only will this help the grieving family in planning the funeral service and the obituary, it will provide a positive message for family members and friends as a permanent memorial.

The funeral director seeks to serve the bereaved family by having a list of decisions to be made: whether the venue for the funeral shall be a church or a funeral chapel, whether the family wants a casket or cremation, a funeral service with the body present or a memorial service with the body absent, viewing for the family and relatives or viewing for all, flowers, guest registers, funeral bulletins, newspaper notices, limousine(s) and choice of cemetery.

When making preparations, the Christian family should be guided in their planning by their theology of death and by stewardship considerations. The family should be motivated to seek the glory of God in all things. A church building is a natural setting for a funeral service. Extravagant funerals may give impressions that do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God. Caskets are available in a wide range of prices and accents. High expenditures do not glorify God.