

Administrative Guidelines for Filing Death Certificates and Celebrating Memorial Services

TOPIC INDEX

Introduction	4-1
General Administrative Regulations.....	4-1
I. Authority	4-1
II. Forbidden Days	4-1
III. Celebration of the Funeral Outside an Orthodox Temple.....	4-1
IV. Burial Traditions and Customs.....	4-1
V. Celebration of the Funeral for the Non-Orthodox.....	4-2
VI. Cremation.....	4-3
VII. Suicide	4-3
VIII. Autopsies and Medical Research	4-3
IX. Memorial Services and the Trisagion for the Dead.....	4-4
Procedures for Submitting Death Certificates.....	4-4

GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

I. Authority

1. Since all authority to perform the sacred Mysteries and worship services issues from the Metropolitan, Funerals and Memorial Services must be celebrated by a Priest belonging to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese according to the Liturgical Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

II. Forbidden Days

1. Funerals are permitted on all days except Sundays, since all Sundays of the year, except those on which a major movable feast may fall, celebrates the resurrection of the Lord.
2. If a funeral must out of absolute necessity be celebrated on Sunday, the Priest shall request an exception from the Metropolitan.

III. Celebration of the Funeral Outside an Orthodox Temple

1. If the funeral can not be celebrated in an Orthodox church (temple), such as may occur in areas of the Metropolis where no Orthodox church exists, the Priest shall request an exception from the Metropolitan; if time constraints prevent contacting the Metropolitan prior to the funeral, the priest shall exercise his own judgment, and notify the Metropolitan after the fact.

IV. Burial Traditions and Customs

1. According to Orthodox tradition, following the example of the early Christians as evidenced by the catacombs and tombs of the saints – and indeed following the events associated with the burial of our Lord – the dead shall be buried in the ground or in a suitable tomb.

2. It is a pious custom that the dead be buried with their heads to the West and their feet toward the East; this is in accordance with belief that the dead will rise up on the Day of Judgment, the Second Glorious Coming of our Lord, facing the East.

3. Only the body of a Bishop, Priest, Deacon, or monastic may remain in the church overnight; this may sometimes be referred to as "laying in state."

a. The Trisagion Service for a layman is normally celebrated the evening before the funeral at the funeral home; it may also be held the previous evening as well at the "first wake."

b. If circumstances dictate that the last Trisagion Service be held at the church, it should take place one hour before the actual Funeral Service.

4. On the morning of the funeral, two practices may be followed:

a. The Priest may celebrate a Trisagion Service at the funeral home with the family, then proceed to the church with the deceased and the family. The Funeral Service will then take place upon arrival at the church.

b. The deceased may be brought to the church early on the same day, and the Priest may celebrate the Trisagion Service. Family and friends may then be afforded an opportunity to pay their respects for a period of time before the Funeral Service begins.

Note: These services must be in accordance with the guidelines established by the Holy Archdiocese.

V. Celebration of the Funeral for the Non-Orthodox

1. In accordance with the Encyclical of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, dated 20 October 1869, an Orthodox Priest may conduct the funeral for a non-Orthodox person if no clergyman of their denomination is available and if requested by the family of the deceased.

2. An appropriate service can be found in:

a. The "Book of Needs (Abridged)", printed by Saint Tikhon's Seminary Press, ©1987; it can be ordered from Saint Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania 18459, phone (717) 937-4411.

b. The "Mikron Evchologion e Agiasmatarion – The Priest's service Book", by Father Evagoras Constantinides ©1989; it can be ordered from Holy Cross Orthodox Bookstore, 50 Goddard Avenue, Brookline, Massachusetts 02146, phone (800) 245-0599.

Note

These services must be in accordance with the guidelines established by the Holy Archdiocese of America.

VI. Cremation

1. Mindful of the fact that the human body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, cremation is not permitted. In addition the body of the deceased must not be violated in any way but must be allowed to return to its natural elements in a normal way.

a. The Priest shall not conduct a funeral service if the body is cremated prior to, or will be cremated after, the funeral.

b. In the event that the family is insistent upon cremation, the following guidelines shall apply:

(1) No funeral service in the Church (Temple), nor in any other location, is permitted.

(2) With prior permission from the Metropolitan, the Trisagion Service for the dead may be recited at the funeral home or other appropriate location before the cremation takes place.

(3) The next of kin shall be instructed to bury the cremated remains in the ground to preserve the spirit of Christian burial.

(4) A Trisagion Service may be celebrated for the forty-day Memorial at the church.

VII. Suicide

1. Willfully committing suicide indicates loss of patience, faith, and hope in God; it is an unforgivable sin because it is basically a person's rejection of the life given to him by the Holy Spirit.

a. The Priest shall not celebrate a funeral service if the person committed suicide.

(1) The Trisagion Service for the dead may be recited, at the funeral home.

b. If a physician certifies in writing that the person had lost his/her sanity, the Metropolitan may authorize a funeral after this certificate has been received at the Metropolitan Office.

VIII. Autopsies and Medical Research

1. Whenever medical necessity requires an autopsy of the deceased, the Priest should verify wherever possible that due respect be accorded to the body, and that the body is not mutilated or vital parts missing.

2. A body shall not be given strictly for medical research or experimentation.

b. In the event that a body is given over for medical research or experimentation, the following guidelines shall apply:

(1) No funeral service is permitted.

(2) The Trisagion Service for the dead may be recited on the fortieth day.

IX. Memorial Services and the Trisagion for the Dead

1. The Trisagion for the Dead is customarily served on the following occasions:

- a. At the departure of the soul from the body.
- b. The evening of the "wake" before the funeral.
- c. On the morning prior to the funeral.
- d. On the eighth day after death.
- e. On the fortieth day after death; a Memorial Service (Mnymosynon) should, however, be served instead. (Boiled wheat – kolyva – always accompanies a Memorial Service).
- f. On the first-year anniversary of death; a Memorial Service (Mnymosynon) should, however, be served instead. (Boiled wheat – kolyva – always accompanies a Memorial Service).
- g. On the third-year anniversary of death.
- h. On all subsequent Saturdays of All Souls.

2. The Memorial Service (Mnymosynon) is normally served on the four Saturdays of all Souls (Psychosabbata); i.e.:

- a. The Saturday before Meatfare Sunday
- b. The Saturday before Cheesefare Sunday
- c. The Saturday before the First Sunday of Lent (which has evolved into a Psychosabbaton , although it is the day celebrating of the Feast of Saint Theodore of Tyre and the miracle of the wheat).
- d. The Saturday before Pentecost.

3. Although Saturdays throughout the year are normally designated for the commemoration of the departed souls, a Memorial Service (Mnymosynon) or a Trisagion for the Dead may be served whenever appropriate according to the judgment of the priest, in response to the expectations of the faithful.

4. When a Memorial (Mnymosynon) is served, – other than on the four Saturdays of all Souls – it begins with only four Evlogitaria for the Deceased ("The choir of saints has found the fountain of life ...," "Give rest, God, to Your *servant / servants* ...," "We praise the threefold radiance of the one God ...," and "Rejoice, gracious Lady, who for the salvation of all ...," followed by the Troparia commencing "Among the spirits of the righteous perfected in faith ..."

5. When a Memorial (Mnymosynon) is served on the four Saturdays of all Souls it begins with all six Evlogitaria for the Deceased and the Hymn "Among Your saints give rest, O Christ ...," followed by the Troparia commencing "Among the spirits of the righteous perfected in faith ..."
6. When a Trisagion is served it begins with the Troparion, "Among the spirits of the righteous perfected in faith ..." when it is held at the end of the Divine Liturgy; otherwise it begins with "Blessed is our God, ..."
7. Kolyva (boiled wheat) shall always be placed in front of the Icon of Christ at a Memorial Service (Mnymosynon).
 - a. If no Kolyva is prepared the Memorial Service (Mnymosynon) shall not be served, but rather a Trisagion Service.
 - b. If Kolyva is prepared the Trisagion Service shall not be served, but rather a Memorial Service (Mnymosynon).
8. The Memorial Service (Mnymosynon) is never permitted between Palm Sunday and the Sunday of Saint Thomas, inclusive. If necessary, the Trisagion for the dead may be recited at the cemetery or at the home of the deceased.

PROCEDURES FOR SUBMITTING DEATH CERTIFICATES

1. Whenever an individual dies, the Priest shall complete the Form "DEATH REPORT" and submit it to the Metropolis Office.
2. All deaths shall be recorded in the appropriate Parish Register.
3. The parish may wish to make a photostat copy of the DEATH REPORT for its local records.