Dear Oaklands Members

All peoples recognize that the end of life is inevitable. However, Christians affirm that “neither death, nor life… nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). Presbyterians are guided by the affirmation that “resurrection is a central doctrine of the Christian faith…” (**Book of Order**, w-4, 10001). Our belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us faith that we will also be raised to eternal life, and can be a time of celebration of the decedent’s life.

Yet trust in the love and power of God does not eliminate grief that comes with a loved one’s death. It is difficult to plan under emotional stress. Recognizing this, the Session of Oaklands Presbyterian Church encourages our members to discuss and plan in advance, arrangements which will be necessary at the time of death. Without such planning, surviving family members may have to make decisions at a time when they are shocked, confused and simply fighting to cope with grief.

When preparations are made and discussed with others, survivors are relieved of difficult questions of what is right and have the satisfaction of knowing that they are honoring what the deceased would have requested. Pre-planning also means that the arrangements and service will express the comfort and hope of the Christian faith fully and without compromise. This guide is intended to assist our members in such preparation in the hope that it will be helpful.

The pastor, elders, and other members of the Ministry of Caring and Compassion (MCC) are more than willing to discuss these matters and assist in completion of pre-planning forms with any member who wishes to do so. The Family will determine if they want more than one person involved. The family’s comfort level will always be respected.

**Planning for the Unexpected**

No matter the age or health of you or your loved one, Session encourages you to discuss with your family, arrangements that will be necessary at the time of death. Whether thinking ahead to arrangements for a family member or to those that will be made for you, preplanning will ease the burden of decision making during the time of grief.

**Making a Will** No matter the size of your estate, it is important to make a will if you want to determine the distribution of possessions you leave behind. If you die intestate (without a will) the state will appoint an administrator and your assets will be distributed according to State Statutes. Because handwritten wills can be easily challenged in court, the Session strongly recommends that you seek the services of a competent attorney. The cost of drawing up a will is not excessively high and documents involved are not complicated. The Session also asks that you consider the church when drawing up your will. (Kamala Miller-Lester is available to help you determine the necessary information you need to have available before consultation with an attorney). Documents relating to wills may be found on-line.

**Instructions Regarding a Funeral/Memorial Service and the Handling of the Body**   
If you have given thought to these issues and have specific wishes for services to be held   
in your memory or for the disposition of your body, it is important to make your wishes known. Whether you desire burial, cremation, organ donation, or the donation of your body to science, this preference should be written down and discussed with family members long before the need arises.   
If there are particular passages of scripture you would like read, particular hymns or other music which you would like included, or a person(s) to sing a specific song, it is important to make this   
known to your family and pastor. A form for such planning is available from the church office.

**Organ Donation** If you wish to donate your body or all or specific vital parts of your body for transplant or study, you should complete a Donor Card and carry it with you at all times (In Maryland you can make an organ donor designation at the time of acquiring or renewing your driver’s license and this will be reflected on your license). In the event of your death, the donor card will alert your doctors to your wish to be an organ donor; however, the doctor will still request a family member’s consent. Therefore, it is important to discuss your decision to be an organ donor with your family at the time you sign your card. A registry of potential donors does not exist; your signed donor card or license is the only record of your wish to donate. If you change your mind, simply destroy the card or contact the Maryland Department of Motor Vehicles to have the designation removed from your Driver’s License. Organ donor registry information can be found at OrganDonorRegistry/organdonor.gov. Information on what can be donated can be found at WhatOrgansCanBeDonatedandTransplanted/organdonor.gov.   
  
 If you want to donate your entire body, contact the Maryland Anatomy Board for instructions and assistance. They can help with how to do this and provide you with a card to carry with instructions of what to do upon your death. Once your body is finished at whatever institution receives it the body will be cremated and your family can receive the cremains if they want to.

**Living Wills** If you wish to have a voice in the medical care you receive should you become terminally ill and incapable of making decisions on your own, you may draw up a living will. A living will is a document that allows you to authorize in advance the withdrawal or withholding of medical treatment (i.e. artificial life support systems) should you become terminally ill or injured.  
 Information about living wills and living will forms may be attained at your local library or by contacting your doctor, local hospital or on-line. (Kamala Miller-Lester is available to help you complete a living will).

**When Death Approaches**

**Services of the Church** The church offers a ministry of love and hope. If you know the death of a loved one or your own death is near, the pastor, Elders and members of MCC are available to meet with you and your family or friends to talk and pray together. Funeral or memorial service plans may be discussed and made, fears addressed, and faith affirmed at this time.

**Selecting a Funeral Director and Burial Site** Funeral Directors are able and willing to meet with you   
and your family to make arrangements both in advance and at the time of death if advance planning has not taken place. If desired, a member of MCC will accompany you to the funeral home.

**Hospice** Hospice provides both in-facility care for the terminally ill and assistance for persons terminally ill who wish to spend their final days at home. A team of nurses, counselors and a pastor, elder, or other family/close friend can provide practical and emotional support for the patient and his or her family. Hospice receives third party payments. The services of Hospice are highly recommended.

**When Death Occurs**

When the death of your loved one occurs, you will need to contact…  
-Your pastor who will offer comfort, support and guidance in planning a service of worship. The pastor can be reached through the church’s telephone number (1-301-776-5833). A recorded message will be answered within 48 hours.  
-the funeral director (family’s choice) who will make arrangements for burial,  
-the attending physician (if death occurs at home), and  
-your lawyer, who will assist in legal and financial matters.

Again, preplanning will ease your burdens of making decisions and arrangements during this time of grief.

**Disposition of the Remains** Cremation, the donation of a body to a school, or burial are all acceptable choices for Presbyterians. Check with your funeral director as to embalming requirements in the case of immediate cremation or burial, or shipment to another state or country for burial. Your funeral director will assist you in this decision and in the selection of a burial site if one was not previously acquired.

**Selection of a Casket** Many people feel that the best way to honor the dead is by the selection of an expensive casket; however decent and respectful, burial does not necessitate such a choice. Those who mourn are encouraged to remember that caskets and burial are for disposing of the remains, not preserving them. The Christian belief in the resurrection makes a very expensive casket and elaborate attempts to preserve the body unnecessary. The Presbyterian Church suggests that the casket be simple to avoid ostentation. However, choice of a casket remains a personal decision.

**Visitation Hours** Attitudes and traditions vary greatly concerning visitation. For some mourners, the opportunity to view the body and greet family and friends is important and aid in accepting the reality   
of death. Yet, for many, viewing hours are exhausting. Families are advised to evaluate their own traditions, desires and stamina to determine what is best for them, recognizing that such time is not required.

**Flowers and Other Memorials** In more recent years, it has become quite common for families to ask that, in lieu of flowers, memorial gifts be given to organizations in memory of the deceased. Gifts of money may be made to any number of charitable organizations, including the church, as a way of honoring the memory of the deceased and rendering service to the living.

**Funeral or Memorial Service** When the casket is not present, the service is a memorial service; when the casket is present, the service is a funeral. Because the focus of the service is the worship of God and the comfort of the bereaved, it is not necessary that the casket be present. A funeral service precedes the committal; a memorial service may precede the committal, follow it immediately, or follow it at a later date as desired by the family. A Memorial Service may be planned for a certain date in the future to allow family and friends who live some distance away to travel and be present.

**Time, Place, and Participants in the Service** In the Presbyterian Church, the purpose of the funeral or memorial service is to give thanks to God for the life of the deceased, and to corporately proclaim and take comfort in God’s promises to be always with us and to raise us up to eternal life.  
 The service is a public expression of Christian faith and solidarity when death comes to a

member of the church. Therefore, the church is the proper place for the funeral or memorial service of one who has died in the faith. The church is where the faithful are baptized and married; it is where they worship and partake of the Lord’s Supper. It is there, with the familiar symbols of worship all around, that those who mourn are best able to take comfort in God’s presence and to be assured of the faithfulness of God’s promises.  
 The service may take place on any day of the week, although Sunday is typically avoided.  
 The worship shall be under the direction of the pastor. Others may be invited to participate   
as leaders at the discretion of the family and pastor. The pastor will arrange for the church pianist for services at the church. All arrangements for the service must be cleared with the pastor.  
 **Casket and Pall** Because the focus of the funeral service is the worship of God, the “Directory for Worship” and the Session recommends that the casket be closed during service. If viewing is requested, it should be done at some time prior to the worship.

The Directory also suggests that the casket be covered with a white pall. The plainness of the cloth helps to stress the equality of all before God. The white color reminds all present of the cleansing waters of baptism, when one “puts on Christ”. The journey which begins at baptism for all believers is now complete for the deceased who has joined the Church Triumphant.

**Elements of the Service** The focus of the service will be scripture, hymns and prayers for those who mourn. Emphasis is placed on the reading of scripture for the declaration of Christian hope, and any further readings should be consistent with the Biblical affirmations of God’s power over death. The pastor will meet with the family to discuss any particular music or scripture readings which they wish to have included in the service. The pastor and family should also respect any instructions the deceased may have left regarding the service and other arrangements.  
 The pastor will deliver a brief homily which bears witness to God’s love in Jesus Christ and the promise of the resurrection. The homily may include thanksgiving for the character and life of the deceased. Families may or may not elect inclusion of eulogies in the services, since these are optional elements of the service. In place of a eulogy, friends and family may be given an opportunity to share reflections about the deceased.  
 The Christian funeral is complete in and of itself, and shall not be blended with any civil or fraternal rite. Those rites should take place at some other time and location.

**Interment** The Interment Service takes place when the remains are committed to the earth or to the elements. This service is typically characterized by brevity and dignity. It normally includes only words of scripture, prayer, and a benediction. The pastor, the funeral director, and family members and friends who so desire are present.  
 The family may elect to have either a private interment or an interment service. Either option is appropriate and are expressions of farewell.  
 In the case of cremation, the urn containing the remains may be placed in a niche in a columbarium/mausoleum of a local cemetery or buried in the family plot of a cemetery. The family may elect to keep the remains, either to retain them at home or to dispose of at a place held dear by the deceased.

**A Word About Grieving**

The process of mourning the death of a loved one is a long one. The time necessary to feel some sense of recovery varies from person to person, and there is no proper time by which one ought to have gotten over the loss. Grief involves a number of different stages and emotions, some of which may surprise the mourner. Anger, denial, sadness, guilt, and lethargy can all be part of the normal grieving process. It is difficult to navigate this process alone, and sometimes friends avoid those in mourning, and these discussions because they are at a loss for what to say. Your pastor, and members of the MCC team are available and eager to assist you in this difficult time and encourage you to call on them for the help or for referral to support groups available within the community.

**Costs** Members of Oaklands Presbyterian Church Community are not charged for the use of the church for worship or the services of the pastor. A fee is necessary for the pianist and custodian. There are additional fees for non-members. A schedule of fees and policies are available in the church office.

**Memorial Garden** Should the family wish to make use of the Memorial Garden, an information form is available in the church office.

**Airline Bereavement Rates** Many airlines have special discount fares available for individuals travelling to the funeral of an immediate family member. When making travel arrangements, ask specifically about these rates. Amount of discount and availability requirements will vary from airline to airline.

**American Red Cross** The American Red Cross can assist in arranging leaves for servicemen and women who wish to return home when there is a death in the family. The Red Cross will verify the death and relay that information to the commanding officer at the base where the serviceman or woman is stationed.