

LIVING IN HOLY SATURDAY: KEEPING BALANCE
OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION IN UNITED
METHODIST FUNERALS

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Advisor: Dr. Kathleen Flood, OP

Matthew D. Stewart

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

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To Julia and Atalie
for your love, support, encouragement, and sacrifice that made this possible.

To The Reverend Robert Beckum
for the push without which I would have never done this.

To my Local Advisory Committee
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ABSTRACT

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METHODIST FUNERALS

Matthew D. Stewart

South Georgia Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church

The South Georgia Annual Conference has pastors of all ages, genders, degrees of education, and classifications serving churches of various sizes in various geographical locations. Yet one thing all such pastors hold in common is that when someone for whom they have pastoral care dies, they are usually called upon to conduct the funeral service. There is minimal time for gathering of information, handling of details, and planning of the service of worship. Therefore, advance thought is needed about one's theology of death and resurrection, what purpose the funeral service provides, and how to best embody one's theology in the midst of the service.

When little or no prior thought has been given to funerals, the purpose of our worship often becomes imbalanced with a focus on celebrating the life of the deceased and little to no resemblance of worship or with a focus on God and the hope of heaven with no mention of the deceased. The service can also become dismissive of the reality of the pain of death in exchange for a celebration of life everlasting with no mention of resurrection due to the fact that death is never acknowledged. Instead the celebration is merely one of immortality or the continuation of life as it is now.

The purpose of this project was to begin a conversation among the clergy of the South Georgia Annual Conference about funerals and specifically the topics of keeping the balance between worship and celebration of the deceased; our theology of death and resurrection to which we give witness; ways we can embody the celebration of the deceased; and how to live in Holy Saturday between the reality and pain of death and the hope of resurrection. To begin the conversation, clergy planned their own funeral services. Information on these topics was presented at a day apart for the participating clergy. Feedback was received at a second day apart and through interviews.

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CHAPTER ONE

GOOD FRIDAY: THE DEATH OF THE FUNERAL

The funeral procession turns and goes through the heart of the busy town making its way from the church to the place of burial. Although a member of this community has died and a family is deeply grieving, the town people keep rushing about their daily lives. Some are bothered that a funeral procession has held up their agendas for a minute or two. Others pay no attention to the procession and continue to place their orders at the fast food drive thru. There is a desire within me to scream so loud the entire community would pay attention, “Everyone stop! Someone has died! For heaven’s sake, take at least a moment to pause and acknowledge this life, this death, this pain, and this hurt. Stop at least long enough for the procession to pass.”

Why do we take death so lightly? Do we ignore death in reaction to our fear that death may come our way if we think of it, talk of it, or acknowledge it? Does this death ignite in us grief we failed to deal with when others have died? Or is our reaction to death an evident symptom to how trifling others have become to us? Why cannot every life and thus every death be acknowledged in such a way that we become more aware of the significance of each and every person?

The way we impact the secular community around us is through our witness as the body of Christ—the Church. Yet when one looks at most congregations one does not see something different, but much of the same. A member of the faith community dies

and many of the parishioners who were present to worship together on Sunday do not attend the worship service we call the funeral. Like the larger community, members of the faith community ignore this death in favor of their busy schedules.

For those who do prioritize a particular death and actually attend the funeral service, what is experienced? Many times what is experienced is not a facing of death and the pain it causes along with a Christian proclamation of faith in hope of the resurrection. Instead, the scene is often similar to the one described by Brant S. Copeland, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee, Florida, in *The Christian Century*. He describes his experience as follows:

I'm not sure when Christian funerals stopped being occasions to commend a brother or sister to the Triune God "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life" and started being "celebrations of life" replete with butterflies, balloons and Gnostic denials that the person has died.

At one funeral, a colleague presided at the church and I took over at the graveside. He spent 20 minutes leading the congregation in a meditation. Those present were to imagine the deceased boarding an old-fashioned schooner and sailing off over the horizon to his next port of call. "Our brother has not died," was the message. "He's merely sailed away."

That left me at the graveside with a body that, according to the meditation, had never been more than an embarrassing encumbrance to its temporary resident.¹

Copeland's experience is not the exception, but is becoming more and more the experience of the Christian community in many funeral services. It certainly has become the experience of many who attend funerals conducted by United Methodist clergy in South Georgia.

¹ Brant S. Copeland, "Living by the Word," *The Christian Century* (September 19, 2012), 20.

United Methodist Funerals in the South Georgia Annual Conference

As I have attended and heard of various funerals throughout United Methodist churches in the South Georgia Annual Conference, the service often proceeds in one of two directions. The service may focus very heavily upon the life of the one who has died with little mention of how the Christian faith addresses death and resurrection. Other services focus heavily upon the Christian faith with little mention of the deceased person. Even when the person is mentioned, the message proclaimed is often that this person is not dead but alive in heaven with other loved ones.

I attended a funeral at a funeral home chapel conducted by a United Methodist clergy member of the South Georgia Annual Conference. The service began with the funeral director instructing everyone to be seated. The United Methodist pastor stood, moved to the pulpit, opened *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, and read The Word of Grace:

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and I am life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I hold the keys of hell and death. Because I live, you shall live also.”²

He continued by reading the Greeting: “Friends, we have gathered here to praise God and to witness to our faith as we celebrate the life of *Name*. We come together in grief, acknowledging our human loss. May God grant us grace, that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, in death resurrection.”³

² Hoyt L. Hickman and Thomas Anderson Langford, III, eds., *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 141.

³ Hickman and Langford, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 142.

The pastor then prayed, read some scripture, and made remarks about the person. He told some humorous stories about the deceased and made a passionate declaration of what a fine individual the deceased was. Family members were encouraged to continue to live according to the example set by this fine person. He closed the funeral with a prayer for the family before exiting through a side door. Other than the liturgy used in the beginning, the scriptures, and the prayers, there was no mention of Jesus or the Gospel proclamation of death and resurrection.

There appeared to be as much ignoring death in this service as in the larger community's reaction to the funeral procession. Little to nothing was said about death, how we deal with death, the hope we have of resurrection, or anything else that addressed the reality that one had died and the pain of grief. Death was ignored and avoided. Even the location of the service was not in the place where the community gathers to worship God on a regular basis. It was in a strange place hardly ever attended prior to this service and not to be attended again on any regular basis. The location of the service was much like the way we treat death, out of sight and out of mind.

At another funeral the United Methodist pastor entered the sanctuary ahead of the funeral director and family. The casket was placed horizontal to the communion table hiding the communion table from view of the congregation. The Words of Grace from the United Methodist liturgy were used along with the Greeting. The pastor prayed a prayer and a soloist sang a hymn. Then the pastor read a verse of scripture and made some remarks, which included a few humorous stories of the person and words of what a fine person the deceased was. The pastor continued proclaiming that the deceased was not dead, but living in heaven with her loved ones who greeted her with a great reunion.

The body of the deceased was mostly ignored except when the pastor said that the body—gesturing toward the casket—was just a shell that the deceased no longer needed.

In this service, there was some theology. Yet the theology was not a theology of death and resurrection, but more a theology of immortality. Like the casket that hid the communion table, the theology of immortality hid death and the proclamation of resurrection. In essence the congregation was being invited to ignore death; to pretend it didn't happen; to pretend it is not a big deal; to pretend it is actually a desired thing. In some services death is made to sound so glorious and desirable, one wonders why we all do not pray for God to take us next. By ignoring death, there is no need for a Christian proclamation of the hope of resurrection.

There was little about either of these services that faced the reality of death in a serious manner and then proclaimed the Christian faith in the face of death and all its pain. Instead, it appears the church has joined the culture as Andy Langford describes when he says, “Today, some persons and families prefer to ignore death, or treat it as a simple passage from life, or create temporary collections of flowers and stuffed animals.”⁴

This is such a tragedy because for the Christian, death is what we know well. At the heart of our worship is a meal where “as often as [we] eat this bread and drink the cup, [we] proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”⁵ The Christian faith is about a crucified and dead Lord who was resurrected. As Luke Powery reminds us in his book,

⁴ Andy Langford, *Christian Funerals* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 2.

⁵ First Corinthians 12:26 (NRSV).

Dem Dry Bones, “Christian hope is not hope without death. Real hope is discovered in the midst of death.”⁶ Only the dead are in need of resurrection.

The United Methodist liturgy for A Service of Death and Resurrection includes a Greeting that exemplifies the balance that is needed. It begins by saying, “Friends, we have gathered here to praise God and to witness to our faith as we celebrate the life of *Name*. We come together in grief, acknowledging our human loss.”⁷ There is both worship of God and celebration of a life not one without the other. There is also an acknowledgement of death and the grief death causes. Death is not ignored nor is it presented as something that should not cause us pain.

The Greeting concludes with “May God grant us grace, that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, in death resurrection.”⁸ Again, there is balance between pain, sorrow and death and comfort, hope, and resurrection. Yet many United Methodist funerals in the South Georgia Annual Conference are unbalanced between worship of God and celebration of life and between the pain of death and the hope of resurrection.

Andy Langford reminds us: “Whenever the followers of Jesus Christ gather, from daily prayers to weekly worship to Easter funerals, we proclaim the mystery of death and resurrection with joy and thanksgiving.”⁹ Our faith is all about death and the hope of resurrection. We have a lot to witness about in this subject, and yet we choose to ignore death, rather than speak a word of hope and resurrection to the pain it causes. If we fail

⁶ Luke A. Powery, *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 6.

⁷ Hoyt and Langford, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 141.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Langford, *Christian Funerals*, 2.

to do funerals well, then one wonders how well we are doing during other times of worship when we are to be “[proclaiming] the mystery of death and resurrection with joy and thanksgiving.”¹⁰

It is truly Good Friday—a time of great loss, grief, and pain—when the Church denies the reality of death for without death there is no hope of resurrection. The Church is now faced with the questions we asked at the beginning. Why are we ignoring death? Why do we take it so lightly? Is it an expression of our fear of death and lack of hope? Is it our lack of having a theology that addresses it honestly? Does it point toward a lack of respecting others as persons of sacred worth? Or is it some of all of the above?

This is the current reality in many of the United Methodist funeral services in the South Georgia Annual Conference. It’s Good Friday, but there is hope.

Facing Death with Hope, Overview of the Project

How does one begin to resurrect this death of well-balanced funerals which are truly worship services centered in God, celebrating the life of the deceased, acknowledging the pain of death, and speaking a word of witness to the Christian faith that offers hope of resurrection? This is the question that drove me and gave life to the project.

In the beginning, a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) of seven United Methodist pastors was formed by invitation. All members of this committee were white males. Two female pastors were invited to participate but were not able to do so for various reasons. At the time there were no United Methodist clergy members of other races in

¹⁰ Ibid.

driving distance. One of the LAC members was a retired clergy and two of the members were current district superintendents in the South Georgia Conference.

We met together numerous times discussing funerals and resurrection theology. A concern for how funerals are currently being conducted many times was acknowledged. It was realized that clergy have less and less influence on funeral service plans, which allows many funerals to become less a service of worship and more an occasion to carry out a person's preferences for remembering his/her life. Funerals, thus, become narcissistic and deceased centered.

It was also realized in our meetings that our theology of death and resurrection varied greatly. Some saw this purely as a resurrection of the soul or spirit only. Others saw the resurrection as metaphorical. Very few actually believed that graves would actually give up the dead with ashes and dust being united to live again. The concern became that many had never given their view much challenge or that there were other theologies for consideration.

It was acknowledged that this was a topic that needed discussion among the clergy. Yet how was such a discussion to begin? This was not at first clear. However, it was decided that we would host a clergy day apart where I would present my research and ideas for a more intentionally well-balance funeral service. Our goal would be to have a discussion that had the potential of informing the clergy's theology and to offer up ideas for consideration about how to more intentionally conduct a funeral service. The date of this day apart was set for Thursday, February 7, 2013, at Lee Street United Methodist Church in Americus, Georgia.

Each member of the LAC invited another clergy member of our conference as a participant in this project. The participants included two female local pastors, a retired pastor, an associate pastor, and a senior pastor. These additional participants were informed and gave their consent to the requirements of this project (See Appendix A). This included thinking through their theology and funeral practices as they prepared their own funeral service in a six- to eight-page paper along with an order of worship for the service. (See Appendix B). These papers were sent to me a week prior to our day apart. They were used confidentially in my own preparation for the day apart. In reading through these papers, I got to see how each participant went about conducting funerals prior to hearing any of the research.

The LAC along with the invited participants attended a day apart where I presented some suggestions and ideas in order to get us thinking and conversing about how to conduct funerals. We also looked at some various theologies of death and resurrection. There was some dialogue among the group and questions as we went through the day. All left with the instructions to ponder what had been presented and to be ready to share at our next day apart their thoughts and any changes in their funeral practices.

The LAC did a written evaluation of the session prior to leaving the day apart (See Appendix C). One week later the LAC had a conference call to evaluate the first presentation and to give suggestions for our next day apart.

Six weeks after the first day apart, the LAC and participants met for a second day apart. This day apart was a guided discussion of ideas. Those who attended gave great feedback.

To finish the project, each LAC member interviewed their invited person using a set of questions I provided. The questions were:

1. What conversations has this project influenced or created among you and other clergy members, family members, and/or parishioners?
2. What ponderings have you engaged due to these two days apart?
3. What, if any, resolutions have you decided upon?
4. How has this dialogue affected your understanding of death and resurrection?
5. Do you believe in the resurrection of the body? If so, explain what you mean.
6. Has this dialogue brought about any changes to how you do or will do funerals in the future? If so, what changes and why?
7. As we approach Holy Week this year, what impact has this project had on how you will approach Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday?

The LAC members wrote up the interviews and returned them to me for review.

The goal was to get these clergy thinking and talking about funerals in hope that we might begin to have some thoughts, ideas, and tools to use for facing the reality and pain of death with Christian faith. In taking time away to ask the question of what do we mean to be doing in funerals, each LAC member and participant had a chance prior to their next funeral to think through what message they wanted to convey and how best to convey it not only in the words we use, but also in our actions as we lead worship in the time of death. Thus, we are facing the current reality of this Good Friday for funerals and trying to bring about hope for a resurrection of thoughtful theology and action.

CHAPTER TWO

EASTER SUNDAY: A MODEL FOR FUNERAL PRACTICES

If the current reality is the Good Friday of funerals, then what would Resurrection Sunday look like? How would funerals be conducted? What would be proclaimed? How would it be embodied?

In the first day apart, I presented the material I had researched in hopes that it would get us all thinking of how we might better conduct funerals. This would be the hope of what could be in the future, the resurrection of the funeral service. The way preachers in South Georgia conduct funerals was not going to change overnight, but the hope was that a seed could be planted to bring more intentional thought to the current reality, an evaluation of the gap between what was and what was desired, and the possibilities of what could be and how that might become the new reality.

The first day apart was not approaching a subject for which the LAC and the participants had no prior consideration. Instead, the LAC had been engaged in multiple conversations about the subject and how to begin a new conversation. The participants also had been thinking about funerals and how they might be conducted as they planned their own funerals, funerals for which they had complete say as to how they would like the services to be conducted. It is with that background that we met together.

After a welcome, introductions, expression of gratitude for their participation, and other housekeeping matters, I gave a brief introduction to the project. First, I shared the

goal for our time was to begin a dialogue about how we United Methodist pastors in the South Georgia Conference understand death and resurrection and how we lead worship during A Service of Death and Resurrection. I emphasized that each of them had something important to contribute that would enlighten the rest of us. I told the participants there were no correct or incorrect answers and there was no judgment about their answers. The goal was simply to have an honest dialogue where we all might learn and grow together around this subject.

I created a slide show to outline our conversation as we went through the day. However, this was not very helpful due to the fact that I got so caught up in the dialogue and sharing my research I forgot to click to the next slide until the break. However, I did show slide one which gave the official title of my project: *Living in Holy Saturday: Keeping a Balance of Death and Resurrection in United Methodist Funerals*. The fire for this was ignited in me after reading Thomas Long's book, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*. I also shared other recommended books for their continual learning. These included N.T. Wright's *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* and Luke Powery's book, *Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope*.

Planning Your Own Funeral

After the introduction, I felt it necessary to say a word about planning your own funeral since this was an issue that Thomas Long speaks about in his book and since this was their assignment for today. First, I thanked them for the time and effort they put into the assignment assuring them I had read their work and found much interest in their plans.

Before going further, I wanted to pause and share that Long speaks about the Christian funeral as being something the community does and not an individual. This is how he describes the purpose of the Christian funeral:

Underlying all Christian funerals is a very basic action shared by all humanity. Someone has died, and the body must be cared for and carried to the place of burial, the place of farewell. From the very beginning, however, the church discerned in this simple act of caring for and carrying the dead a symbol of the baptized Christian life. We are, in so many ways, always carrying for each other, bearing one another's burdens, and carrying each other along the baptismal journey toward God. The purpose of a Christian funeral is to enact the human obligation to care for the dead in such a way that we retell the story of baptism.¹

Long emphasizes that in our society when many tasks of taking care of the dead are done by others, the church needs to find ways to “[weave] back into the funeral ritual the labor of our hands.”² The community should work together and do the work of taking care of the dead.

With this understanding of funerals, Long cautions against the detailed preplanning of funerals. First, preplanning funerals might be the refusal to give up control even from the grave. However, some desire to preplan their funeral out of care wanting to save families from the work of making such decisions. Yet he reminds us,

bearing one another's burdens makes us human and brings us closer to the spirit of Christ. We may feel the weight of trying to figure out the best hymns and so on for mother's funeral, but it is a good weight, much like the weight of putting our muscles to work in carrying her to the arms of God. We have the duty and the delight to carry one who has, in times before, carried us. Some broad-brush preplanning may be helpful, but we don't want to deprive our loved ones of the soul-making labor of fulfilling the law of Christ by bearing our burdens in a time of need.³

¹ Thomas G. Long, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), xv-xvi.

² *Ibid.*, 180.

³ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 181-182.

Maybe most helpful for us pastors is to hear how Long encourages us not to just see ourselves as one who just plays the role we are assigned by the deceased in their pre-funeral plans or the plans of the family. Instead, Long reminds us that

Baptism, marriage, funeral—these are not polite dinner parties needing good decorator ideas. These are sacred ceremonies of dramatic transformation, torches marking the perilous way between life and death. No pastor . . . should assume the posture, ‘Whatever you’d like at the funeral, whatever would be meaningful to you, will be fine.’ Pastors have a responsibility to help people in a season of loss receive not merely the things that they, in the terrible crush of mourning, most think they need, but the very best gifts and the most grace-filled vision the gospel has to offer. . . Part of the power of a Christian funeral is that we do not do this alone; the funeral is not just a ceremony for a single family, to which guests are invited. It is a service of worship involving the whole church—indeed, involving the entire communion of saints—and it is a joyful duty of the church to reenact the promises of the resurrection on the occasion of someone’s death.⁴

Long is not advocating that funerals should not have any sense of personalization, but that funerals are services of worship and the liturgy is the work of the gathered community. Funerals should be personal in that “the church gives thanks to God for the gift of a life, indeed, this very particular person’s life, and for all the ways the grace and mercy of God have been seen and experienced in this life, conflicted as it may have been.”⁵ The reason we have gathered for this service of worship is because this particular person has died, which is a death that has never happened before nor will ever happen again. This is personal. This is true for all funerals because “Whenever we perform a funeral on the occasion of a person’s death, we should be ready to do what we have done a thousand times before, but in a way we have never done it before.”⁶

⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 142.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

However, the funeral should not be personalized so that the service

is caught up in all of the current cultural anxieties about selfhood and identity . . . [because] this collection of traits, preferences, and social placements . . . [do not define] my deepest self. Who am I really? In the Christian faith, definitions of self do not begin with outer markings, such as job or education, and even with inner characteristics, like personality or family origin. In Christianity, the definition of self begins with baptism.⁷

The reason I asked the participants to plan their own funerals for this project was for the purpose of seeing how they would do a funeral in which they made all the decisions. I desired to see what elements of the service they felt were essential and which ones were not. Since what we do is a reflection of what we believe, I wanted to also get a glimpse into their theology of death and resurrection and what the funeral was all about.

After sharing this information, I paused to ask them to share any new understandings, realizations, or insights they gained as they planned their own funerals. Some of their responses will be examined in the next chapter.

The Concern

Our day continued with me sharing the overarching concern I had about the current state of funerals. I shared that Andy Langford, in his book, *Christian Funerals*, says, “People of all cultures and faiths honor persons at their death. . . In every place and time, persons gather to give thanks for the person who has died, comfort the families who grieve, and give reassurance to one another.”⁸ Yet the Christian funeral is not a ceremony of just honoring the dead. When someone dies, Christians gather to worship God and to celebrate the life of the deceased.

⁷ Ibid., 142-143.

⁸ Langford, *Christian Funerals*, 2.

It has been my experience that many funerals seem very heavy on the part of honoring the dead and light on worshipping God. Someone told me about a funeral he attended and summed up what he got out of the funeral saying, “The woman was so holy there was no need to talk about Jesus.” Another funeral I witnessed myself never mentioned Jesus except in the prayers and in The Word of Grace and Greeting.

The opposite can also be true. Some funerals can be so much about the Christian faith or more about being sure and certain the congregation is ready to die that the life of the deceased is never mentioned. In such a case, this could be any worship service and not necessarily a funeral and certainly not the funeral of the particular one who had died.

I would like to offer a model for balancing these two extremes. It is actually something you are most likely already familiar with because it is in our liturgy.

The Greeting as a Model for Keeping Balance

I provided the participants a copy of *The United Methodist Hymnal*. I asked them to turn to number 870. This is the beginning page for *A Service of Death and Resurrection*. This service is also found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, and is our official liturgy for funerals. (See Appendix D). The participants were then asked to look on number 871 and find the GREETING, which states:

Friends, we have gathered here to praise God and to witness to our faith as we celebrate the life of *Name*. We come together in grief, acknowledging our human loss. May God grant us grace, that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, in death resurrection.⁹

I shared that this greeting has become the model for my thinking about conducting funerals.

⁹ The United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 871.

This greeting offers us two foci, which I believe are important to keep in balance. The phrase, “Friends, we have gathered here to praise God and to witness to our faith as we celebrate the life of *Name*,” says the community gathers for two purposes: to praise or worship God and witness to our faith as we celebrate the life of the deceased. We will now look at these two foci in more detail.

The Funeral as Worship

Worship is not just about what we say. Worship is also something we do. “The word “liturgy” [leitourgia] derives from two Greek words meaning “the people’s work” or a “public service.”¹⁰ Communication is made not just with our voices, but also with our bodies and actions. With that in mind, let me share some things we can be mindful of or give consideration to that might emphasize worship of God.

Long speaks of the Christian funeral as a continuation of the baptismal journey.

He describes it as follows:

A baptized saint, a child of God, one who has been traveling the path of faith, is now, ‘traveling on.’ This brother or sister, precious in the sight of God, is moving along the last mile of the way, and we, his or her companions in Christ, are traveling alongside to the place of farewell. As we travel, we sing and we pray, we tell once again the gospel story, we say farewell, and in faith we return this our friend to God with thanksgiving.¹¹

If we view a funeral as such, then there are several ways we can emphasize that we have gathered to worship God.

The first way would be by ordering the service as a worship service. The Basic Pattern of Worship for United Methodists is found on number two of our hymnal. It

¹⁰ Charles D. Hackett and Don E. Saliers, *The Lord Be With You: A Visual Handbook for Presiding in Christian Worship* (Cleveland, OH: OSL Publications, 1990), 2.

¹¹ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 16-17.

consists of four acts: Entrance, Proclamation and Response, Thanksgiving and Communion, and the Sending Forth.

In the Confirmation Literature, *Credo*, the Entrance is described as “more than just a beginning, a gathering, or a time to settle down and reconnect with God. It is for us, as it had been in early Christianity, an assembly around the baptismal font.”¹²

If this is a continuation of the baptismal journey, then we might consider doing what the baptized community does each Sunday – gather around the baptismal font for the four acts of worship.

Following the order of worship for A Service of Death and Resurrection will lead us to these four acts. Notice in the hymnal on number 870 is the Entrance, on number 873 is the Proclamation and Response, on number 874 is the Commendation (which may include Communion or a Prayer of Thanksgiving). The Sending Forth is not defined, but the Dismissal with Blessing sends us forth as we continue the pilgrimage to the graveside where our service will conclude.

When the Service of Death and Resurrection resembles in form our Sunday worship, then people are much more likely to make the connection that we are not here just for a ceremony of honoring the deceased, but that we have gathered as the baptized community to worship God.

A second consideration is the place where the funeral service is conducted. The space in which we hold the funeral is important. We are on a baptismal pilgrimage from the place of death to the place of farewell. Along the way, we pause to gather and

¹² Tim Gossett et al., *Credo: Know Your Story, Confirm Your Faith, Live Your Commitment* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2011), 31.

worship. Where do the baptized routinely gather for worship? Yes, in the sanctuary. So why would we not do so for this service of worship?

N. T. Wright speaks about sacred space and says,

a proper theology of God's reclaiming of the whole world . . . is anticipated in the claiming of space for worship and prayer. Church buildings and other places . . . are not a retreat from the world but a bridgehead into the world, a way of claiming part of God-given space for his glory, against the day when the whole world will thrill to his praise.¹³

We claim a space as sacred and as holy for here the baptized community routinely gathers and Jesus promises to gather with us.

The rubrics in the hymnal on number 870 in the first paragraph say, "This is a service of Christian worship suitable for funerals and memorial services. It should be held in the church if at all possible, and at a time when members of the congregation can be present." This focus on the church and the congregation comes from the idea of worship. It is done in the community of the baptized in the place where that community routinely worships God.

It is also important to note that in the next paragraph it also says, "The pastor should be notified immediately of the death of a member or constituent of the congregation. All arrangements should be made and approved in consultation with the pastor." This is great, but doesn't always happen. Families don't always ask us where the funeral should be. Funeral homes pressure families to use their facilities because it is more convenient for the funeral home staff. It is also financially beneficial. Yet if we do some educating of our people prior to such occasions, we can teach people or at least give them some ideas to think through.

¹³ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 259-260.

We can also educate and encourage the baptismal community to gather for all funerals in the baptized community and not just the ones of the people we know well. Encourage various members to serve as ushers, greeters, etc. Engage the choir with music. We do not need the funeral home staff or other outside people to help us conduct a worship service in the sanctuary. We do worship here every week – in some cases more than once. Use the faith community to help with the funeral just as we would in any service of worship in the sanctuary.

Another action we can take in funerals to make a connection to worship of God and to baptism is to educate and encourage congregations to use a pall. The symbolism is powerful on several levels. These are the words we speak as the pall is placed on the casket. I would recommend one use the person's baptized name where the word "Name" appears.

Dying, Christ destroyed our death.
 Rising, Christ restored our life.
 Christ will come again in glory.
 As in baptism *Name* put on Christ,
 so in Christ may *Name* be clothed with glory.
 Here and now, dear friends, we are God's children.
 What we shall be has not yet been revealed;
 but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him,
 for we shall see him as he is.
 Those who have this hope purify themselves
 as Christ is pure.¹⁴

In baptism we put on Christ. We were clothed with new clothes. The pall is symbolic of our baptismal clothes. It is also a powerful reminder that in Christ we all come before God not in our own deeds (some great and some not so great), but we come all clothed with the same clothes of baptism. There is no fancy casket for some and

¹⁴ The United Methodist Hymnal (1989), 870.

minimal for others, no caskets with beautiful sprays of flowers for some while others have much less or nothing at all. Instead, all who enter here do so with the same cloth—the pall.

If your church does not have a pall and/or cannot afford one, then consider having someone in your church make one. Educate the people on what it means. Put this in the funeral bulletins to educate all who attend.

Another suggestion is to use the Paschal candle. At Easter, we light the Paschal candle symbolizing Jesus' passing from death to life in the Resurrection. It stays lit for all services of worship during the seven Sundays of Easter and stays for this time near the communion table. The rest of the year it moves to the baptismal font and is lit at all baptisms. It is also used in procession at funerals. This is the light that symbolizes for us the passing from death to life—the resurrection. It is placed at the head of the casket. Again, the symbolism can be taught, and it can be reinforced through communication with a short paragraph in the funeral bulletin.

Lastly, I would suggest you consider celebrating Holy Communion at the funeral. The early Christian community gathered for worship around the table. In the 23rd Psalm, we find the words “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” As we face the enemy of death, let us gather around the table that Christ has prepared for us. This is what the Christian community does in worship. We feed our faith, commune with the living Christ, receive Christ in the bread and cup, and take Christ with us. At what point do we need this more than in the midst of death? It focuses the service on Christ and Christian worship.

Part of our worship will be to witness to our faith. Therefore, let us now turn and discuss what our faith is especially when it comes to death and resurrection.

The Faith to Which We Give Witness

First, let us consider whether our faith is that of resurrection or of immortality of the soul. There is a difference.

Christians are resurrection people. Yet often at funerals one hears very little about resurrection of the body. Instead, we speak in ways that seem to imply that the “real person” never died. One talks of the body wearing out, but the soul continues to live. Our faith seems to be more in the belief of the immortality of the soul, than in resurrection of the body.

However, Langford reminds us, “Whenever the followers of Jesus Christ gather, from daily prayers to weekly worship to Easter funerals, we proclaim the mystery of death and resurrection with joy and thanksgiving.”¹⁵ At the heart of Christian theology is this proclamation about death and resurrection.

John Wesley preached of resurrection. In 1732, Wesley preached Sermon 137 entitled, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*. His scripture is I Corinthians 15:35—“But some man will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?’” Wesley introduces the sermon saying:

The Apostle having, in the beginning of this chapter, firmly settled the truth of our Saviour’s resurrection, adds, ‘Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?’ It cannot now any longer seem impossible to you that God should raise the dead; since you have so plain an example of it in our Lord, who was dead and is alive;

¹⁵ Langford, *Christian Funerals*, 2.

and the same power which raised Christ must also be able to quicken our mortal bodies.¹⁶

Wesley draws on Ezekiel's vision saying:

Ezekiel was indeed, in a vision, set down in a valley full of dry bones, 'and he heard a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone; the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them above, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet.' This might be in a vision. But that all this, and much more, should in time come to pass; that our bones, after they are crumbled into dust, should really become living men; that all the little parts whereof our bodies were made, should immediately, at a general summons, meet again, and every one challenge and possess its own place, till at last the whole be perfectly rebuilt; that this, I say, should be done, is so incredible a thing, that we cannot so much as have any notion of it. And we may observe, that the Gentiles were most displeased with this article of the Christian faith; it was one of the last things the Heathens believed; and it is to this day the chief objection to Christianity, 'How are the dead raised up? With what body do they come?'¹⁷

Although with varying accounts, all the Gospels tell of Jesus' death on a cross and the burial of Jesus' body. They also tell of various persons coming to the tomb on the third day to care for Jesus' body but finding the tomb empty. John's Gospel tells it like this:

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. . . [The other disciple] bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹⁶ *The Works of John Wesley, 3rd Edition (7 Volumes)*, 3 ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 474.

¹⁷ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 474-475.

The scriptures proclaim that Jesus died a bodily death. Lloyd Bailey Sr. argues in his book, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, that “Jesus . . . is said to have had an . . . anthropology, which mandated a belief in resurrection. He died *totally* (‘in body and soul’), and hence viewed death as a terrible destroyer, the enemy of God.¹⁸” On the third day when Jesus was resurrected, his body was not in the tomb. Even the wrappings that embraced his body in death were there, but no body. His followers touched the resurrected Jesus and experienced him. This was not just the experience of a ghost or a spirit. It was a bodily resurrected Jesus.

When we talk in Christian theology about death and resurrection we proclaim a resurrection like this that Jesus experienced. In the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the author reminds the Corinthians of “the good news that [he] proclaimed to [them] . . . through which also [they were] being saved.” He says that this is of “first importance . . . that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared” to many. He goes on to argue for resurrection against those who did not believe of such, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. . . If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”

In Philippians, the author writes, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection of the dead.” This was the author’s goal of the

¹⁸ Lloyd Bailey Sr, *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Press, 1979), 93.

faith – resurrection of dead. This was not just an optional part of his theology, but very much the foundation. If this is not true, then the whole thing is of naught.

The resurrection was not just important to Paul, but also to the early Church. In the statements of faith or creeds of the Church, one finds not only statements of faith concerning Jesus' resurrection, but also resurrection of the dead. In the Apostles' Creed Christians say, "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body." According to William Barclay, "In the Greek what is believed in is *anastasis sarkos*, and in the Latin *resurrection carnis*, which both mean literally, not the resurrection of the *body*, but the resurrection of the *flesh*. . . Up until 1543 this article did in fact read in the English creeds, 'I believe in the resurrection of the flesh.'"¹⁹

In the Nicene Creed, Christians say, "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." Resurrection is a hope. Romans 8:24-25 says, "hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

James Ivey Warren Jr. in the book *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife* speaks about The United Methodist Church. About the creeds he says,

Two points stand out and call for notice. First the 'resurrection' is the resurrection of the dead. Christian faith does not deny, avoid or prevent death. Death remains real and inescapable. . . Resurrection is not to be confused with 'immortality' (which asserts that we possess some part of us that never dies) or with a 'dualism' (that exalts 'soul' and denigrates 'body'). Instead, resurrection of the dead presupposes the reality of death.²⁰

¹⁹ William Barclay, *The Apostles' Creed for Everyman* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 333.

²⁰ James Ivey Warren Jr., "United Methodist Church," in *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife*, ed. Christopher Jay Johnson and Marsha G. McGee (The Charles Press: Philadelphia, 1998), 228-229.

Thomas Long informs us explaining that:

The Christian view of human beings and human bodies, which in large measure was inherited from Judaism, . . . [rejects] as reductionists the view that human beings are *only* bodies. . . Christians with equal force [reject] the Platonic view that human beings are essentially nonmaterial and immortal souls, temporarily housed in disposable and somewhat loathsome bodies.²¹

Instead, Long says, “Christians affirm, rather, that human beings are *embodied*. . . Take away the breath of God, and there is no immortal soul left over to make a break for it to freedom; there is just dust.”²²

In Genesis 2:7 it is recorded that “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” A living being was not just the “dust of the ground” nor just “the breath of life” without a body made from the dust. Instead, only when the two were joined inseparably was a living being created.

In the New Testament when the word “soul” is used it is often misinterpreted. N.T. Wright says that where there is mention of soul in the New Testament the word is “not to a disembodied entity hidden within the outer shell of the disposable body but rather to what we would call the whole person or personality, seen as being confronted by God.”²³ What the scriptures do make clear is that “We don’t have deathless souls, spirits, or anything else. Only God is immortal (I Tim. 6:16).”²⁴ So to sum this up, “Since we are not immortal, when the body dies, the whole person dies, period.”²⁵

²¹ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 24.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 28.

²⁴ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

According to Jaime Clark-Soles in *Death and the Afterlife in the New Testament*, “There is no systematic theology in the NT regarding death and afterlife.”²⁶ “As is commonly understood, the OT considers a person to be a unified subject such that whether in life or death, no part of the person enjoys a different ontology from the other parts.”²⁷ “Israelite anthropology, according to Jan Bremmer, was ‘strictly Unitarian and remained so until the first century AD, when the Greek belief in an immortal soul started to gain ground in Palestine and the Diaspora.’”²⁸

Clark-Soles continues saying:

Like many Jews, some Christians imagined a person to be a psychosomatic unity. The whole person was to be saved, including the body. Therefore, such believers eschewed any notion of a salvation without the body. The language of ‘immortality of the soul’ is inaccurate insofar as it never appears in the NT. Paul speaks of that which is perishable ‘putting on’ imperishability, but that is an attribute that will inhere only when the Parousia arrives. Later, resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul become confused categories, such that ‘the idea of the immortality of the soul came eventually to be identified with the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the body, a doctrine one of whose original polemical targets was the immortality of the soul.’²⁹

There are several theories about Resurrection. These include, but certainly are not limited to, the idea of paradise as promoted by N.T. Wright; God’s timing versus our timing as described by Jurgen Moltmann; and the theory that the dead are sleeping awaiting the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the body. I want to now briefly highlight these realizing that each could take days of discussion and debate. However, we can at least familiarize ourselves with these theories here.

²⁶ Jaime Clark-Soles, *Death and the Afterlife in the New Testament* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹ *ibid.*

N.T. Wright states his understanding of resurrection saying, “The resurrection is still in the future.”³⁰ His view is that

All the Christian departed are in substantially the same state, that of restful happiness. Though this is sometimes described as sleep, we shouldn’t take this to mean that it is a state of unconsciousness. . . Rather, sleep here means that the body is ‘asleep’ in the sense of ‘dead,’ while the real person – however we want to describe him or her – continues.

This state is not, clearly, the final destiny for which the Christian dead are bound, which is . . . the bodily resurrection. But it is a state in which the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God and the conscious presence of Jesus Christ while they await that day.³¹

Thomas Long rejects the idea that bodies and souls can separate. He says,

It is fully Platonic in origin and carries with it the unbiblical idea that it somehow makes sense to speak of human beings as ‘souls’ apart from bodies. . . It implies, as James Barr has pointed out, that, when people die, their immortal souls go wafting off to final destinations, presumably either heaven or hell, until judgment day, when they swoop back down to earth and pick up their new bodies, only to return again to where they had been all along since death, which would be pretty funny if it were not serious theology.³²

Long recounts how N.T. Wright

. . . is eager to squash the notion, so dear to romantic piety, that Christianity is all about individuals ‘going to heaven.’ The idea that individuals, one by one, make their personal pilgrimages to an ethereal oasis in the afterlife is not, Wright argues, what the New Testament has in mind. He makes a vigorous case instead that the Scripture describes one and only one resurrection of human beings, namely, the general resurrection of the dead as a part of God’s new creation of the earth at some specific time in the future. Salvation is not about individuals escaping earth and going to heaven, Wright insists; it is about God’s intention to renew the earth and to involve us in this act of re-creation.³³

Yet Long questions Wright’s view of Paradise especially when it comes to bodies.

He says of Wright,

³⁰ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 168.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

³² Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 48.

³³ *Ibid.*, 49.

On the one hand, he is a fierce critic of Platonic dualism and its doctrine of the disembodied immortal soul. So if he says, no, the blissful dead do not have bodies but are temporarily disembodied ‘persons,’ waiting until the new creation for their resurrected bodies, then the Platonism he slew at the front door has slipped in, dagger in hand, through the backway. If on the other hand, he would say, yes, the blissful dead are indeed embodied in their state of ‘restful happiness,’ then where are they, and what sort of bodies do they have? Either they are out there in the cemeteries in their old bodies, which are crumbling rapidly away, a strange thought, or they already have their glorified bodies, in which case, what’s the point of lying around in paradise park?³⁴

Long shares Jürgen Moltmann’s view of resurrection, which involves seeing resurrection in eschatological time. He says,

Moltmann points in a better direction when he argues that the raising of individuals at the hour of their deaths, which we in our world of clocks and calendars experience one by one in linear chronological fashion, and the general raising of all the dead in Christ on the Day of the Lord should be thought of not as events that happen one before the other in temporal sequence but as simultaneous events.³⁵

The last theory we will look at here is the theory that the dead are dead and are awaiting the resurrection at the Last Day. They are resting in peace in the arms of God with sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life. Yet they are unconscious of such much like when one goes under anesthesia. Time continues on without their awareness. When they are resurrected, it is as if today is the day they died.

There is a sense in which one can see that in history, resurrection of the body was expected. Catharine Arnold writes in *Necropolis: London and Its Dead* that “Londoners who succumbed to the Black Death were . . . [buried] with their heads at the west and feet

³⁴ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 49.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

to the east, in keeping with the Christian practice that bodies should be facing the right direction when they were resurrected on Judgment Day.”³⁶

Celebrating the Life of the Deceased

The other focus of the funeral service is to celebrate the life of the deceased. Our worship is God centered. Yet we gather at a funeral service to worship because one of the baptized among us has died. The Greeting says that we “praise God and witness to our faith AS we celebrate the life of *Name*” (capitalization mine for emphasis). If it had not been for this person’s death, we would not have been here at this particular time to worship God. Therefore, we have gathered to “give thanks to God for the gift of a life, indeed, this very particular person’s life, and for all the ways the grace and mercy of God have been seen and experienced in this life, conflicted as it may have been.”³⁷

There are several ideas and actions we might consider in order to help keep the balance on the side of celebrating the life of the deceased. For starters, instead of seeing the body as a shell that is no longer needed and can easily be discarded, let us consider the need to honor the body.

Long argues, “One of the clearest and most needed reforms in the funeral practices of many Christian communities is the honoring of the bodies of the deceased.”³⁸ God is the creator of our bodies. God came and dwelt among us in bodily form. Long

³⁶ Catharine Arnold, *Necropolis: London and Its Dead* (London: Pocket Books, 2006), 26.

³⁷ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 142.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

quotes Margaret Miles saying, “[Christians] understood that the Incarnation of Christ had once and for all settled the issue of the value of human bodies.”³⁹

Jesus was resurrected in bodily form. Mark and Luke share in their gospels that the women came to the tomb to anoint and prepare Jesus’ dead body. Had they not come to care for the body, they may have never known of the resurrection.

Christians [did] not . . . idealize bodies (as the Greeks did in their perfect sculptures) or . . . romanticize them (as *Sports Illustrated* does in its swimsuit issue), but [cared] for bodies, real bodies, both living and dead, in ways that perplexed and confused their pagan neighbors. . . What was even odder to Roman eyes was that the Christians ‘volunteered to take care of bodies, both living and dead bodies,’ writes Miles, ‘not just of their own families but also of the poor surrounding them. . . This immediate, almost instinctive urge of Christians to care for the sick, the hungry, the old, and the poor aroused comment from their neighbors.’ . . They did not derive their attitude toward the human body from their Roman neighbors, from the great philosophers, or even from their own inner goodness, but from their theology of creation and their experience of Jesus Christ.
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To speak of the body as something less than a complete being, makes the body something one desires to shed with all its inefficiencies, especially when the body is weakened or disabled due to injury, illness, disease, or age. Yet “human beings . . . these creatures of dust into which God has breathed life—are sacred . . . Sacredness is a divine gift, and it can never be taken away, even when the old thieves, disease and death, pillage us of our dignity.”⁴¹ A very important part of the funeral is to honor this sacredness and not to discard it as only a body and not the real person.

In order to honor the body, I suggest having the body (even as ashes, if necessary) present at the funeral. By doing this, we would embody in our worship the sacredness of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁰ Long, *Accompany Them With Singing*, 29-30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

the body and not allow an irreverent dismissal of the sacred body. Long says, “If the ‘real me’ is a soul and not a body, then the presence of my body at a funeral is unnecessary.”⁴² Instead of honoring our bodies, “Dead bodies . . . have become unfortunately an embarrassment to us, a vulgarity, so much so that we have arrived at a place unprecedented in history: conducting Christian funerals without the presence of the dead.”⁴³ We do not want to do this either with our words or our actions.

Consider also other reasons having the body present is so important. Warren reminds us that the body can help us face the reality of death. He says,

The section on worship developed by the Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church has suggested a ‘service of death and resurrection’ with an accompanying theological rationale and commentary. In its commentary it urges its readers to confront bereaved persons with the reality of the body of the deceased, arguing that a ‘genuinely felt admission of the reality of death, in so far as a bereaved person is capable, best fosters spiritual and emotional health.’⁴⁴

Jeffrey VanderWilt in *Preaching on Death: An Ecumenical Resource* also reminds us of the importance of the body. He says,

How we think about death profoundly influences our thoughts about who we are in life. We misunderstand our bodily nature if we think that we are ‘ghosts in machines’ or ‘angels with bodies.’ Biblical anthropology, by contrast, does not distinguish so sharply between the mind and the body. For the biblical writers, the body symbolizes the entire person (Robinson, 97). The body is the product of all information and responses to information that it gathers from the physical world over the course of a lifetime. Only through the body, for good or for ill, are we available to one another. Knowledge comes from the body and through the body. Experience, especially emotions, as any good chiropractor or massage therapist will tell you, is even stored within the bodily frame. . . Our bodies are

⁴² Ibid., 23.

⁴³ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 31.

⁴⁴ Warren, United Methodist Church, 229.

primary symbols, sacraments even, of who we are and of the love and faith we bear within.⁴⁵

Long even goes as far as to talk about the body as a sort of sacrament saying,

“The brother or sister in Christ who has died has been known to us in embodied ways—in fact, only in embodied ways—and it has been a sacramental knowing. The body is the way we have received God’s gift of life in this person. . . And now bearing the dead body of this saint is the way we will experience and bear witness to the transition from this life to the next. So we need to wash this body once more and to anoint it, to treat it with reverence, to carry it to the place of farewell. To do so is more than a duty; to do so is a holy privilege and a joy.⁴⁶

It is difficult to see the funeral as a baptismal pilgrimage when we do not have the body or ashes to carry and bear. And why would we not have the body present in some form? Are we trying to deny death by hiding it? Would we not invite the bride to her own wedding? This funeral is about the deceased and not just worship. If the body cannot be present, then we do our best to make it present through our words and imagination. However, we should not see the body as just a shell.

Another way we can keep the balance between the foci of our worship of God and celebrating the life of the deceased is by the way we receive and place the casket or cremains. Consider this thought from Long:

This saint, though deceased, is still joined to the congregation and is coming in the body to this place one last time for worship. . . In the Christian faith, death changes, but does not destroy, the relationship between the community of faith and the deceased. Certainly at a funeral the living do not worship God on behalf of the dead in the sense that we would be so arrogant as to try to strike a bargain with God, but the living also do not worship in spite of the dead or in the absence of the dead. They worship with the dead. . . The deceased saint as a role in a funeral similar to that of the bride and groom in a wedding or the one being baptized in a baptismal service. . . A funeral is also about the adoration of God,

⁴⁵ Jeffrey VanderWilt, “A Rebirth of Images for Death,” in *Preaching on Death: An Ecumenical Resource*, eds. Virginia Sloyan, Blair Gilmer Meeks, and Hilary Hayden (Silver Springs, Maryland: The Liturgical Conference, 1997), 14.

⁴⁶ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 31.

but the occasion is the death of a saint, and we could not engage in this act of worship without the presence of the one who has died.⁴⁷

At funerals I conduct, I meet the casket at the narthex, and say, “We greet our brother/sister, *Name*, a sheep of God’s own fold, a lamb of God’s own flock, a sinner of God’s own redeeming.”⁴⁸ This is just one way I try to give acknowledgement of this person who is the guest at this service of worship and of this person who is here with us in bodily form. We recognize that the deceased is a part of the congregation but not in the same way as they have been. This is also their last time to worship in this congregation. So they are a part and a prominent part of our worship.

The deceased is carried into the sanctuary as a part of the procession. That’s what we do with persons of prominence in worship. They go to the front of the church, but not as the focus of our worship. Sometimes caskets hide the communion table or other worship furnishings making them appear to be the object of our worship. However, there is a way to avoid this providing the architecture allows for such. The tradition is to have lay people carried in feet first and placed with their feet toward the chancel area as they would be seated among the congregation. Placing the deceased close to the people or down the aisle among the people symbolizes they are a part of the congregation with whom we worship. Clergy are brought in head first and placed with head nearest the chancel area just as they would be in worship. By placing the casket this way, the deceased (lay or clergy) is where they would have been among the congregation in any service of worship and yet today they are also in a place of honor.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 154-155.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 156.

These are some ideas and actions we might consider incorporating in our funerals in order to keep the balance between our worship of God and our celebrating the life of the deceased. There is another balance in which we live and need to keep before us in the funeral service and throughout the journey of grief—the balance of Good Friday’s pain and Easter Sunday’s resurrection.

Living in Holy Saturday

The reality is that a baptized member, a saint of God, is dead. This person is never going to be replaced. Even if they have been ill for a long time, we still mourn for them to be like we once enjoyed them. Death is the reality that is right here in front of us. It brings us sorrow and pain. In the morning, rather than getting down two coffee cups, there will be need for just one. Tonight in the bed there will be no rolling over and snuggling next to your spouse. You get the entire bed to yourself. This is the reality of death and the pain it brings.

Yes, it is true that we are resurrection people, but whether resurrection is of spirit only, something in the future, or something simultaneously and still yet to come; on our side of time there is no current reality of resurrection only death. It is Good Friday and death hurts.

Langford says, “Today, some persons and families prefer to ignore death, or treat it as a simple passage from life, or create temporary collections of flowers and stuffed animals.”⁴⁹ Yet for the Christian, there can be no denial of death. Death is what we know well. At the heart of our worship is a meal where “as often as [we] eat this bread and

⁴⁹ Langford, *Christian Funerals*, 2.

drink the cup, [we] proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."⁵⁰ The Christian faith is about a crucified and dead Lord who was resurrected. As Luke Powery reminds us in his book, *Dem Dry Bones*, "Christian hope is not hope without death. Real hope is discovered in the midst of death."⁵¹ Only the dead are in need of resurrection.

If we jump to resurrection too soon pretending we know it to be a current reality, or if we pretend death has not even happened; then we will fail to address the pain and sorrow death brings. As tempting as it is, do we really need to try to fix this reality with talk about how gloriously this person is now living? One mother said to me, "I guess I am horribly selfish for missing and wanting my daughter back, when they tell me she is so better off and in such a wonderful place."⁵²

The danger is to become so spiritual in our theology that it fails to embrace the earthly realities. Powery speaks of the prosperity preaching that is popular today calling it "candy theology." Not only in the preaching, but also in the music "they emphasize 'praise and worship' or celebration without likewise acknowledging lament and death in real life."⁵³ We can easily become like those Powery describes "who possess theological and philosophical systems that have nothing to do with the real, down-to-earth practices of the church that will make a difference in society."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ First Corinthians 12:26 (NRSV).

⁵¹ Powery, *Dem Dry Bones*, 6.

⁵² Conversation with a member of Lee Street UMC after the death of her daughter, January 20, 2013.

⁵³ Powery, 3.

⁵⁴ Powery, 107.

It is Good Friday—yet we don't stay on Good Friday. We are moving on, so we also preach that Sunday is coming. It is not reality yet. Resurrection is our hope. Resurrection is our comfort. It is not to be our denial of death. There is no resurrection without death. There is no need to look forward to Christ's return and the resurrection if the dead are already alive in heaven.

If we have experienced the reality of death on Good Friday and Easter or Resurrection Sunday is coming, then where are we? We are living in Holy Saturday, the place in between the reality and pain of death and the comforting hope of resurrection.

Paul says in Romans 8,

I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us. The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice – it was the choice of the one who subjected it – but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.⁵⁵

We and all creation groan and wait with “breathless anticipation” in hope of resurrection and re-creation—of being set free from decay. We are waiting for resurrection, for Easter Sunday. On Holy Saturday we pray:

“O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Romans 8:18-25 (CEB).

⁵⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer* (The Seabury Press, 1980), 283.

We keep the balance with worship and celebrating the life of the deceased. The pain, sorrow and death of Good Friday are real and are held in balance with our comfort, hope, and resurrection.

How and when does resurrection happen? Nobody knows. It is a mystery that none of us has yet experienced. However, the most important thing is for us to live with the reality of death and deal with it confident in our faith of the resurrection to be realized in the future. For now, we come and we bring the deceased saint of God to the place of farewell—to the arms of God. No matter what happens at death, we have faith and hope of the resurrection. With that we entrust our loved one into God's hands.

This was the information I shared on the first day apart. If we could begin to embody this through both the words we say at funerals and the actions we take at funerals, then I believe there is hope to resurrect the funeral service itself. Therefore, although the funeral seems to be facing Good Friday at the moment, there is hope for resurrection in the consideration of these ideas presented. In the next chapter, I will speak about Holy Saturday and where we currently reside after the beginning of this conversation.

CHAPTER THREE

HOLY SATURDAY: A JOURNEY OF HOPE

The current reality is that many funerals in the South Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church are being conducted with little to no thought about worship, theology, and how the proclamation of the Gospel can be made as we celebrate the life of the deceased. I refer to this reality as “Good Friday.” There is nothing “good” about our current practice, yet I use this term in analogy to Jesus’ death and resurrection. Before we can move to comfort and hope of resurrection, we must first deal with the death that is before us. When funerals fail to deal honestly with the pain of death; when funerals become just a meaningless ritual we expect no one to really remember, but just endure; when the funeral becomes just a remembering of the deceased or only a sermon about salvation and/or heaven; then the funeral is dead. It has lost its potential to provide Gospel proclamation and true comfort and hope. This is the current experience and thus, the “Good Friday” from which we hope to move toward a healthier place of resurrection.

How would we conduct funerals if they were resurrected and became an important part of what the Christian community did in the face of death? The project itself was a time to share a vision of how such a funeral might be conducted and what would be the essential parts of such a service. The vision includes an informed theology of death and resurrection and not immortality. Uniformity of theology is not the goal. Instead, the desire is for a theology duly considered among the choices available and

proclaimed with intentionality. The funeral envisioned also includes a service that has balance between worship of God and celebration of the life of the deceased without either being neglected. And finally, the vision is of a service where both the pain of death is duly acknowledged and the hope of resurrection is proclaimed as a hope to come in some sense as we deal with the reality before us. This vision is the hope into which we would begin. The fulfillment of this vision would be resurrection of the funeral service from its present state of death. This vision is not yet the reality, but it is our hope for the near future.

Between where we were (Good Friday) and where we hope to eventually arrive (Resurrection Sunday) is the place we currently abide after presenting this project. This is our Holy Saturday. In exploring Holy Saturday, we can begin to evaluate what impact the project had upon those who participated and the possibilities of it projecting us closer to our hope.

Transforming a Concern into a Project

At the first meeting of the LAC, I introduced the concern I had about funerals. I presented each person with a copy of a reflection paper I had written on the subject. My thoughts centered mainly on the concern of pastors preaching immortality instead of resurrection at funerals. This idea was heavily influenced by my readings from Thomas Long and N.T. Wright. I assumed that the reason for this was a concentration on being pastoral and comforting at all cost and a lack of thinking about what needed to be said at funerals prior to our conducting them. After all, there is not a lot of preparation time between death and the funeral for the pastor to deeply consider what a funeral needs to be

on a theological level. The immediacy of the death prompts the pastor to do something and say something that might help a grieving family find some degree of comfort.

Another concern presented in the paper was the idea of separating body and soul. There seemed to be such a dismissal of the body. This was not something that happened only at death when some pastor would describe the body as “only a shell.” Dismissal of the body leads us to a theology that is all spiritual and has little to nothing to do with the material world. Such theology leads us away from the very prayer Jesus taught us to pray saying in part, “Our Father . . . Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”¹ As disciples of Jesus, we are to be praying and living in such a way that God’s kingdom can come to earth—God’s creation, which God loves.

Thomas Long speaks of this concern also as stated earlier when he argued that “Christians affirm . . . that human beings are *embodied*. . . Take away the breath of God, and there is no immortal soul left over to make a break for it to freedom; there is just dust.”² He sums up his argument saying, “Since we are not immortal, when the body dies, the whole person dies, period. We don’t have deathless souls, spirits, or anything else. Only God is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16).”³

This seems to be the heart of the argument for immortality—we have a hard time thinking that our loved ones who have died are dead. However, how can we have a theology of resurrection if there is no death? If the deceased continue to live in just another form, then what do we do with the theology of resurrection of the dead?

¹ Matthew 6:9-10 (NRSV).

² Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

The paper went into detail about some of the various theories of resurrection of the body. These were also presented to the group in the first day apart. It also shared about the importance of not only preaching resurrection, but also embodying the theology through our movements in the service and through our treatment of the body. The paper ended with mentioning how the funeral was not just about what the pastor did, but was a time for the entire Christian community to act out our faith into which we were baptized by gathering around the table that Christ, our Shepherd, prepares for us and by carrying the deceased the last part of the baptismal journey.

Along with the paper, I shared with the LAC an article by Dr. Heather Josselyn Cranson and Rev. Taylor Burton-Edwards entitled *Surprising Hope in United Methodist Funerals: Answering the Challenge of N. T. Wright*. Each member also received three articles from *The Christian Century: Living By The Word* from September 19, 2012 by Brant S. Copeland; *The Good Funeral* from October 6, 2009, by Thomas G. Long; and *Life After Life After Death* from May 17, 2012, by Rodney Clapp.

After giving an introduction to the material and the subject matter, I asked the LAC for their thoughts and feedback. Member A shared that he had found that theology really didn't matter at a funeral. "Most families don't remember what you say anyway because they are so overcome by grief. All they really want is for you to keep it short." This sparked a conversation about whether funerals were a time of spiritual formation or a time of just bringing closure to the experience of death.

Member B offered the insight that the concerns I shared may be my concerns and the concerns of some clergy but these were not the concerns of lay persons. The suggestion was to "get pastor and lay persons to engage in thinking through theology to

spark a desire for further investigation and learning.” It was an agreement of the LAC that lay persons had a different narrative about funerals than did clergy.

Member C offered another idea. He suggested that we interview lay persons who have had to process a family member’s death in the last five years, three years, and one year. From the interviews we could evaluate how well they are processing death and what affect the pastor’s theology had on their own theology of death and dying.

There was much discussion around the resurrection of the body and how literal one was to take this. Member C made the connection between death and Holy Communion saying, “If Christ can re-present his body in this meal, then he can re-present any body. The question is, ‘Is the body really here?’” This was a good insight. How we answer that question determines how we conduct services of Holy Communion and how we handle the elements. This is also true for funerals. Our understanding of the body and the person determines how we conduct funerals and handle the body. Do we believe this body is the person or just a shell from which the person has escaped?

Other ideas emerged from our time together. It was suggested that we have lay persons plan their own funerals and justify why they chose to do what they requested. Since the project was not about lay persons, but about starting a conversation among clergy, the suggestion was modified to have pastors plan their own funerals and justify why they chose to do what they planned. The project could include a teaching moment followed by an interview with the clergy to see what changes they would make to their funeral plans and why. Suggestions for the teaching moment were to have an outside speaker like Thomas Long or to have the clergy read Long’s book on funerals and/or N.T Wright’s book on resurrection.

After the first session, I was somewhat dismayed. I felt like many of the members brushed off my concerns about funerals as something that would never be different. Some of the members wanted to take the project in directions that had little to do with what I was trying to accomplish. These directions included studying what lay persons felt funerals should be about or how effective they felt we clergy were in comforting them in times of death. These ideas were good, but were not what I had in mind. It was like they thought my concerns of the direction of funerals and how we clergy conducted them were of little value in comparison to the more important ministry we needed to be about. However, there were some who seemed to really engage and some of the ideas were helpful in my further thinking through where we needed to go with the project and how we might begin the conversation with other clergy. These ideas stretched my own ideas in directions that gave focus to what the project really needed to address.

A month later, we met again. I presented to the LAC another article entitled *We Shall be Raised* by Cecile S. Holmes from <http://www.interpretermagazine.org>. The issue I was trying to address was also presented in written form (See Appendix E). I also presented two options I had fleshed out from our last conversation (See Appendix F). These proposals were compiled after having spoken to the LAC at our prior meeting, speaking with Thomas Long via email, and input from my advisor and colleagues in my colloquium at Drew University. The drawback from having someone like Long to do the presentation is that little to none of my research would have been presented. Members of the LAC also were concerned as to whether there would be any pastors passionate enough about the subject of funeral to attend. They also raised the issue that arose more

than once throughout the project—pastors have less and less control in funeral services; families plan the funerals.

The LAC gravitated to Option Two. In this option, I would present to a small group of clergy my research on this topic. The tone would not be so much a teaching time as a time of considering how we might bring sound theology into the funeral. Our question for the clergy would be two-fold. First, what is your theology? Second, how does your theology inform your ministry during death and funerals? We agreed to try to avoid arguments of the extreme and especially the theology of immortality of the soul meaning a denial of grief and loss. Instead, our conversation would be around how one might reclaim the powerful message of resurrection of the body at funerals.

It was decided that in preparation for the day apart, participants would be asked to plan their own funeral along with a worship bulletin. The guide we used was adapted from Dr. Heather Elkins' assignment *Pastoral Rite: Christian Funeral Paper* found in the syllabus for the class *Church at Worship (505)* fall term 2012 at Drew University (See Attachment B for the revised assignment). At the day apart, I would talk about my research of death and resurrection. The group would then be given time for input asking the members what they felt were essentials that could not be given up when it came to funerals. There would be a questionnaire the LAC would use to interview the participants after the session.

At the second meeting of the LAC, I also introduced the idea of Holy Saturday being where we find ourselves with death being a reality we face and resurrection being a hope not yet experienced by the faith community. This idea of Holy Saturday was actually an idea shared by The Reverend Leslie Hague in our colloquium at Drew

University. A copy of the liturgy for Holy Saturday was shared from the Book of Common Prayer. The Collect of the Day says:

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.⁴

This prayer captures where we are. We have the death of the deceased, and we have the body of the deceased to lay in its resting place as we then await the coming of the resurrection.

After the second meeting of the LAC, I felt the members were catching hold of what I desired to do in this project. There were still some who were coming along with resistance, but I felt they were coming along. The resistance was mainly around the importance of this subject and the impact pastors could have with lay people and the local customs.

At the third and final meeting of the LAC, a rough draft of the prospectus was distributed. There was still confusion about what we were trying to accomplish in the project. I explained we were trying to take the conversation we had already begun among ourselves and find a way to include even more clergy in it. Our goal is to have a conversation about how we do funerals and how we might be more intentional in conducting these times of worship.

Our discussion turned to my concern about how the faith community has let go of much of the ministry the early Church provided when one died. The faith community no longer washes the body and prepares it for burial. This has now been hired out to

⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (The Seabury Press, 1980), 283.

professional morticians. Even the eulogy announces the funeral home as being in charge of the funeral arrangements. When the service begins, the funeral home ushers people in, gives them bulletins, and tells them when to stand and sit. All the while, the church is complacent as if we have nothing to do with or to say about death. The Christian theology of death and resurrection is too important to dismiss and fail to proclaim. Our ministry includes proclaiming what God has done in Christ and what God is going to do in resurrection. The concept of resurrection is larger than any one death. It is the big picture of God redeeming creation.

Together we decided there were three things we would emphasize about funerals at the day apart. First, we would honor the deceased and embrace our grief, not deny it. The body, in whatever form it is available, needs to be present for it is the person who can never be replaced. We will celebrate the life lived, the person we know, and the aspects of this life that witnesses to Christ and that was already living into the resurrection.

Second, we would emphasize that funerals are worship services and should be God centered. Since the faith community is gathering for worship, we should gather in the sanctuary where we normally gather for worship. The liturgy should acknowledge death and proclaim the hope of resurrection. We should take caution not to allow the funeral to become ceremony rather than worship.

Third, we decided we would emphasize resurrection. What are the various understandings of resurrection and how is our theology of resurrection applicable in the midst of this death? Resurrection is a mystery that is yet to come to us, so we entrust the dead into God's hands, regardless of when and how resurrection is to happen.

The project was outlined and a time table was established. When the prospectus was approved, the LAC members would invite people to participate in the project. As participants accepted they would be mailed expectations and instructions.

Much transformation took place among the LAC between our first meeting and the final planning of the project even though we met only three times. From an idea that seemed scattered across the board, the project came into focus on what we really felt needed to be accomplished and could be accomplished. Developing the idea of Good Friday, Resurrection Sunday, and Holy Saturday gave us a framework on which to build and to evaluate what was helpful. At the beginning there was a focus on body and soul, but as the project went along the focus broadened to presenting various theologies of resurrection that could be proclaimed.

As we journeyed together, the LAC members developed an interest in the project and the need for the project. From what started as a disappointing reaction of disinterest in the subject, the LAC read the material, read my concerns and ideas, and conversed with me until the interest developed and a degree of excitement formed. As we conversed about resurrection and funerals, one LAC member admitted to the group, “I have done funerals throughout my entire ministry with the ease of riding a bike. However, now I am so thinking about what I do at a funeral I keep falling off the bike.” This quote was one of the first seeds of hope for me. From the very first, this is what I had desired—to get pastors to think about what we do at funerals and why we do it. I now felt the LAC was growing with me.

My own understanding grew as well through the process. I had begun with some degree of dogmatic understanding. Yet as we moved forward, and as I listened to various

members of the LAC express their understandings, which ranged from resurrection as a spiritual thing to resurrection as metaphor, I began to understand more of the diversity of thought. The place where I landed at the end, and many of the LAC did as well, was what happens after death is a mystery—no one knows. Therefore, I decided to try to focus on what we did know: someone dies and it is painful; we entrust them into the arms of God whom they and we trust; and we wait in Holy Saturday with hope that resurrection in some form will become the new reality at some time in the future.

Insights from Funeral Plans

Prior to the first day apart, the participants were given an assignment to plan their own funerals with a six-to-eight page commentary and a worship bulletin. The assignments presented showed great diversity among the participants' understanding of the funeral and their plans for how the service should be conducted. One participant had the service in two parts: "Part one will be a service held in a church with a mix of contemporary music and traditional hymns. Part two will be a celebration banquet that will be a gathering of friends, family and colleagues who will eat, fellowship and praise God for his goodness and mercy and loving grace." This participant wrote an explanation of the second part saying:

One image throughout all of Scripture that has been meaningful to me is the image of the table. Whether it is The Last Supper, the wedding feast in Cana or the Messianic imagery found in Isaiah 25, the place of food, eating together, sitting at the table has been informative and transformative in my understanding of God and grace. I want there to be a feast at my funeral as a way for people to taste and see a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

The participant had already included Holy Communion in the first part of the funeral. However, I assumed this would give a connection to such and meaning to the meal that is often shared by family and friends after the funeral.

This participant did say he desired cremation and therefore would not have his body present at the church. It seemed there were some disconnects. First, by stating he would not have his body at the church, it seems he and his body were disconnected. I did not get to converse with him about this since he had to leave at lunch and never participated further in the project. Second, I am not sure where he understood himself to be during the funeral and the banquet. I would have like to have heard his response to the understanding of the importance of people being invited to their own funerals. The plans were well thought through but they were obviously only for the living and had little or nothing to do with the dead.

Another participant turned in the assignment but due to a funeral in his congregation was not able to attend or ultimately participate in the project. However, in his written work he planned for his body to be present at the funeral but he separated the funeral service from the committal of the body. He said:

My ecclesial and biological families are primarily scattered across the southeastern United States . . . , so my body may be buried in one of several locations unbeknownst to me at this time. That said this study will focus on the service of Death and Resurrection and not the committal of my body to the soil, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

I would like to have conversed with him about Long's idea of the funeral being a journey where we are carrying the deceased to the place of farewell. Admittedly, there are times when the funeral service and committal are separated by great distance. So in what ways

could we help to make a connection of the two and embody the idea of the faith community on a journey?

One of the first assignments I received was from a participant who was leaving the country and turned in his work before he left. The next week we got word that he had died while traveling abroad. I went to his assignment in hopes of handing his funeral plans over to the district superintendent in charge of his funeral. Unfortunately, he had misunderstood the assignment and had not planned his funeral, but the funeral of a friend. This brought the project close to home and reality.

Another participant shared her theology as being “centered on Christ and the sure and certain hope of those who believe of being present with Christ while away from this world.” There is one scripture passage that seems to be the very cornerstone of most people’s theology. I am referring to the scripture that says, “So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord – for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”⁵ For many people, this one passage makes it clear with no wavering that the body and soul divide and at death the soul continues to live with Jesus.

She continued to explain that her funeral was “to be a time of worship” that “[comforts] all present and [that proclaims] the hope we have in Christ.” Later she defined the hope we have saying, “Therefore, it is obvious to me that I believe I will be with Jesus regardless of what happens to my earthly ‘tent.’” She continued saying, “My body or my ashes may be put to rest, but I will not be in the grave.” It seemed the

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 (NRSV).

emphasis for this participant was that to which many turn: comfort for the living and joy for the dead.

Another participant stated “Grief is very real and should be fully acknowledged.” She also admitted “Grief is fatiguing.” She “[urged] the pastor to limit the service to under an hour” and desired that scripture be used “to proclaim the Good News” and that “reflections on [her] life . . . [would] be kept in the context of the Gospel.” Holy Communion would also be a part of the funeral in a desire “that those who are so gracious to attend this service [would] have the opportunity to encounter Christ in his tangible presence at the table.” She also wanted attendees to know “As I was there to share Christ’s table with you in life, so I am present even in death with everyone there at the table.”

One participant also mentioned the desire for the funeral to be held in the sanctuary acknowledging it as “sacred space.” He desired the time to be at 11:00 a.m. “[allowing] many of my friends to spend some time at their jobs, if need be, before coming to the service.” Although I realize he is being considerate of others, I wonder when the Christian community will realize the importance of the funeral and find persons of such sacred worth that their funeral services are worth any inconvenience to one’s self.

I was delighted to see that many of the participants desired to use a pall. This is a concept that is not used much in United Methodist churches in our conference. Yet with these pastors finding meaning in it, maybe this will begin to move closer to the norm than the exception.

The LAC members were not required to do the assignment. However, two did so any way. One of the members expressed his theology saying:

The service re-presents the essence of my life and faith. The service re-presents the Christ Jesus who comes for us in that moment. The body, reverently returned to the earth, is a tent I have thrown off in glory. Jesus is the only physical body in heaven with scars. We shall see Him and be like him. Everything lost in the living of our life is restored when we receive a new body, even like His, which will be flesh and Spirit and live forever. Flesh and blood is no more. Here the life is in the blood; there eternal life is in the Spirit. That we will receive a new body, a real, touchable, embraceable body is the word of a gentleman. It is Jesus' Word.

These words seem to me to be incongruent. If "Jesus is the only physical body in heaven with scars," then how is it that "we receive a new body, even like His?" Wouldn't a body like his be a physical body?

The other LAC member included in his funeral service the Word of Grace and Greeting from The United Methodist ritual. Many of the participants did this as well. This member also said of these parts of the liturgy, "I love that these passages tie our death to our baptism." As Dr. Heather Elkins once stated in conversation, "Death and baptism are two sides of the same coin." It was also this member who commented on the commendation in the ritual saying about it, "[W]e are reaffirming to my loved ones that I am in God's love and care in the same way that I have been in His love and care all of the years of my life."

The assignments gave evidence that some of the issues we would be dealing with in the day apart had already been thought through. There was also evidence that some new ideas might help tie some loose ends together. The greatest hope was that we would be able to have a conversation around death, resurrection, and funerals learning much from each other as we conversed.

The Project: The First Day Apart

I was very nervous the first day apart. This was one of the first times ever for me to plan and present a major study for my colleagues on this scale. The LAC included persons I highly respected. Some of the participants I knew only by name or brief acquaintance, and even the ones I knew best I did not know how they might receive some of the things I was presenting. I have to live with these people in this conference, and I wanted so much for this to go well and to be helpful to us all.

The presentation I made was presented in chapter two. The first part of feedback came when I asked for comments about the assignment of planning their own funerals. One participant spoke of the emotion of the process saying, “Trying to separate myself from the emotion of my girls and wife . . . It wasn’t easy to think about not being here.” He went on to share about how the process made him reflect on his present living. He said, “How do you want to honor God in your life as it’s celebrated? . . . [G]ood task to do, helpful.” This comment tends to focus on the pain and separation that is caused by death.

Another participant seemed to bypass the idea that death would cause pain. He said about his experience of planning his own funeral:

There was an excitement because of the way I view . . . The funeral for me is always planning for resurrection in the end. There is excitement for that and a hope and joy in the resurrection. . . We are thinking about things on a theological level and on a very joy and hope base level and really buying into this idea in the resurrection and the life and there’s almost a wonderful party atmosphere in . . . going home to my loved ones. . . I felt bad for not taking into consideration the pain of my son or my wife when I was planning. There was a disconnect there.

If I am interpreting this participant’s comments correctly, then this is part of the problem I have with jumping so fast into resurrection. He states he was so “excited”

about planning for his party that he didn't consider the pain of his son and wife. This is what happens when the entire service goes in that direction as well. It is like the woman in a parish I served who lost her young adult daughter after many years of mental illness. The church ladies came by to comfort her. They talked of how much the daughter loved walking on the beach. The ladies said to the mother that the daughter was now so happy because she was walking on the beach with Jesus. Later when I came to visit, the mother said to me, "I feel so guilty." I inquired as to why. She said, "The ladies assured me how happy [my daughter] is now walking on the beach with Jesus. Yet I miss her so much and want her back with me. I must be a horrible mother and a selfish person to miss her." In the name of comforting, these ladies had actually tried to get the mother not to grieve and to deny the pain death had brought. This just isn't healthy.

After the above participant shared, another participant spoke up and said, "That's where I was. I had that same sense. I expect there to be grief in the family, but all I could think of was let's get on with this in a sense—not today . . . Don't enact it today." This participant isn't alone in feeling this way. Many people talk of how wonderful it will be when we die, but none of them desire to have death come to them right here and right now. Nor do they want such for their family members. If it really is a great thing and an event for which one should be excited not in pain, then why does everyone want to put it off as long as possible? There seems to me to be such an air of inauthenticity.

Later in the morning we discussed the appropriate place to have a funeral. In that section of the presentation, a member of the LAC said, "Some family members intentionally choose the chapel as their place rather than the church because they have difficulty going back to the church—the emotional part of that . . . They say, 'I don't think

I can go back to worship because it makes me think of the service.” I myself have had people share this concerning funerals. When we are not clear about what a funeral is and what we are doing; when we are not authentic with pain and hope of resurrection; when we do not keep the balance between worship of God and celebration of the life of the deceased; then many pastoral issues such as this arise. This is the very reason why education on death and funerals is needed.

Maybe the quote of the day belongs to one of the participants who, late into the morning session after we had talked of theologies and how what we do and say needs to be congruent in message, said, “It would be easier to have funerals if theology wasn’t involved.” I replied to the group, “And that’s where many of them go.” The participant’s quote is the truth and is the problem. Theology has been thrown out the window and replaced with a service that has some scripture and a time of remembering the deceased. The goal becomes to keep it simple and quick because this is just a social necessity the family is enduring. Some have even decided that the best and easiest thing is not to have a funeral at all. If the Christian faith has lost its voice in the time of death, then what message is the Church proclaiming? The cornerstone of the faith is the death and resurrection of our leader, Jesus.

This was summed up by one of the LAC members. His comment showed the growth of understanding that had evolved from the first day we met. He said:

We succumb . . . to the oversimplification of the service of the funeral because it is the expedite thing to do. When the family is moving through a 2 ½ day scenario between the death and the service and they are saying to you, ‘keep it simple, preacher;’ it is easier to keep it simple. But by virtue of doing that we do—I appreciate what you’re leading us through here—because we extinguish so much of the community’s processing. . . I haven’t done an adequate job. Thank goodness there are a few good year left in me yet that I can maybe do some better work with this . . . That is really making it something that helps the community

process well what has happened whether you're looking literally at the scripture or whether you are looking metaphorically at some of those concepts.

My own understanding of the project shifted at this point somewhat. This participant was one who confessed he believed the resurrection was metaphorical. I realized my goal wasn't to change anyone's theology. Instead, the goal was to consider what one's theology on death and resurrection had to say in the midst of death. How can we lead the family and Christian community through this death? What is the Christian community's response to death? How can we help the community process this death in an authentic way that embraces the pain of death and offers hope of resurrection to come in some way and at some time, but which is not yet reality for us?

After lunch, we talked about the importance of respecting the body and not discarding it as unimportant or just a shell. One participant reminded us that the body is important. He said, "That is especially true for children. They understand when they see the body. Otherwise, it is kind of nebulous." The session continued with people being very engaged and asking questions with much discussion on various topics. I was really excited about how things had gone. I did feel that at times the lecture was heavy and became boring with me reading so many quotes. Yet I felt I needed to share that this concern of mine was not just mine. There were others, many others, who were working on the same issues and had much to say in their research.

At the end of the first day apart, I passed out evaluations for the LAC members to provide feedback on how they felt the session had gone. (This form is included in Appendix C.) Four evaluations were returned to me. Here are some of the comments I received.

The first question was about the participant's engagement. On a scale of one (Not Engaged At All) to eleven (Very Engaged), there was one 9, one 9 ½, and two 10 ½ scores. The comments on this question included:

“Many sitting forward in their seats nodding heads in agreement.”

“Morning session very engaged.”

“Persons very engaged. Everyone alert and interested.”

“It appeared to me that participants and LAC members were all very engaged with the discussion. While some showed more than others, all were listening and thinking through the subject.”

The second question was about the presentation of the material. Again on a scale of one (Much To Be Desired) to eleven (Well Done), there were one 10, two 10 ½, and one 9 ½ scores. Comments were asked for about how the presentation could be improved. The suggestions were:

“Enjoy the content. Well presented. Maybe more questions.”

“Might have taken break at one hour / transition worship to resurrection could be a break. Long stretch of you giving to them-some questions/engagement in resurrection sooner-maybe break down text with them.”

“You presented the material and led the discussion so well. The topic was introduced sufficiently to generate good discussion.”

The third question was about how well the presenter was prepared. The eleven-point scale ranged from “Not At All Prepared” to “Very Prepared.” There were three 10 ½ scores and one 10 score. Comments about what needed improving included:

“Would enjoy more on how the church through the ages approached the subject.”

“Content was great. Looking for ways to engage at a couple of places to pull [the participants] out.”

“Excellent presentation.”

“It is clear that you have spent much time reading and reflecting on this matter. This preparation on your part is not only challenging, but motivating.”

The fourth question concerned evaluating how the day overall accomplished the mission to begin a dialogue among the clergy. The eleven-point scale ranged from “Mission Failed” to “Mission Accomplished.” There was one 8, one 9 ½, and two 10 ½ scores. Comments about how we might improve on accomplishing the mission were:

“The dialogue you have started in this small group I believe will have large benefits. Your passion on this issue, this subject, is seed planting for the beginning of the reclamation of Service of Death and Resurrection done with integrity, compassion, and good theology.”

“Raised many issues that alone we could not solve. Thought provoking. Challenging. This is an on-going journey.”

“Maybe outline of the day would help.”

“Very good way to begin! Hope we can cover some of the things we can say in the eulogy that has been meaningful.”

Other observations, notes, and suggestions shared were:

“Good conversations. Engaged people. Resurrection topic generated most reflection. Good visiting and connecting at lunch. People were relaxed—body language conveyed comfort, acceptance, engagement. People were connected.”

“I hope you will put all this in some form that can be circulated to other pastors and churches. It would be helpful to see the participants’ funerals as addendum to your dissertation. In addition, it might be helpful to catalogue some stories of funerals done well—and some stories of funerals done poorly. Stories of others push us to do the self-reflection that can be transformative for us.”

I appreciated all the feedback from this session. The comments received were much in line with how I felt the day had gone. Yes, there was much more I could have researched and presented. I hope this is an on-going journey in which I can continue beyond this project and help bring about an even larger and more encompassing conversation.

A week after the first day apart, the LAC had a conference call to discuss the first day apart and to offer suggestions for the second day apart. The comments were much in line with those recorded on the evaluations. There was discussion around the need to have an agenda for the day and an outline of the big concepts with maybe a quote included for each. My goal was to accomplish this through a Power Point outline on the wall behind me. However, I forgot to change the slide, so it served no purpose. Another suggestion was to share the funeral plans of the participants and the LAC members who did them. I informed them I would need to get consent from those submitting the funeral plans. I did this and the plans of those who agreed were distributed at the second day apart. They are not included here just due to the enormity of their size.

The Project: The Second Day Apart

For the second day apart, I prepared an agenda with an outline of our conversation for the day along with some questions to stimulate our conversation (See Appendix G). I

passed out the document of funeral plans for which people had consented to share. I also shared a funeral bulletin and sermon that I did for a dear friend and former church member. At the first day apart, there were five participants and five LAC members. One participant and one LAC member left after lunch. At the second day apart, there were only two participants and five LAC members.

The first item of conversation was about Long's view of the funeral as continuation of the baptismal journey. One participant said, "I think for me it's the thought of it being part of our baptismal journey I had never thought of that in that direct of a fashion. As soon as you said it I thought about we die with Christ when we go into the water and rise with him. I thought about the funeral in a new way in the fact that we truly are dying in him and will rise in him. And it's just incorporated in that word 'baptismal journey.' So that's a new thought for me and I like it."

Another participant added to that saying, "There is the continuity of God's care for us from birth through death to life everlasting. It is a wonderful perspective on which to see life. That is a line of thinking that is very theologically sound, but also a line of thinking that is progressive." Someone else said the "image of washing and anointing the body is the same image connected by physicality, theology, and language. Hospice emphasizes taking responsibility for care of the body prior to the funeral service." The former speaker continued by saying, "I've thought a lot more about not only my own funeral, but also how in ministry our role in helping persons grieve, our investment in the lives of our people that we've grown to love because we've been called by God to serve them—there is such power there and to miss these opportunities would be a great shame. We are to help people in that grief process."

The place where we got the most pushback was around worship. We discussed the pattern of worship, engaging the community in participation of the worship service, the paschal candle, the pall, the place of funerals and celebrating the Eucharist. One issue arose several times—the culture of where we serve. One LAC member stated it this way: “There is a lot of stuff there that would not be, I think, understood and also may actually become a deterrent to this being a celebration and worship. Just from the standpoint that there are a lot of different theological and cultural issues that would interfere with this being a meaningful part of the experience of a funeral. For example, some are from other churches and not open to having Communion. Is it worth the battle or do you just incorporate other things?”

Another LAC member replied, “I would agree that there are, but I also would say that the request to do them comes from the teaching and preaching and some things like All Saints Sunday when you talk about why and make some connections. It’s kind of like the pall. I first of all would say that I wouldn’t recommend anyone go from not doing any of this to doing all of this in a funeral. That would pretty much guarantee the church asking for a new pastor. But the idea is to teach so that it rises up out of the people and the family makes the request. I still explain the pall with the idea that there are significant numbers of people who don’t know why they don’t have an American flag on the casket. That’s teaching the culture and trying to bring the culture to us on our turf, rather than surrendering my culture to the culture. I would never try to ram it down their throats (either the church or the culture), but I do think that such a teaching moment is an opportunity to make it meaningful, but you have to be willing to sacrifice the time to explain.”

Throughout the LAC's time, pre-project, project, and post-project, there was an ongoing conversation about culture. Funerals tend to highlight this. As one LAC member brought out, "Contrary to the rubrics from the ritual, you will notice in the obituary that such and such funeral home is in charge of the service." So who is in charge? Is it the family, the church, the hired professionals, the culture or who? A point made in our discussion was the need to discern if pastors were not just abdicating their responsibilities of teaching and leading with the excuse that others are telling them what they must do. I am not sure we totally answered this, but we did challenge the clergy present to be proactive in teaching and explaining new things or old things that seem new to the present culture in the congregations.

Another question was raised when a LAC member said, "When I've been looking at ritual, there would be things one was to say that I was uncomfortable with because the language doesn't fit the person. For example, baptism is nothing if it hasn't taken on meaning in the person's life and been lived out in participation with the church." Another member responded, "It seems to me that what has happened is that by not having a culture at funerals, we have accepted the culture of the community around us to do funerals in the way that it was expedient to do those in non-confrontation with the Baptists who are also present and with the funeral home director who happens to go to the Baptist Church or wherever. This is what has evolved, and we haven't taken seriously the Service of Death and Resurrection as it was prescribed."

I agree with the last comment. What has become the funeral service in The United Methodist Church in the South Georgia Conference has been an evolution of appeasing the family, the non-Methodists and non-liturgical Christians present, and just

an abdication of the clergy to keep faithful to the theology and the ritual of our denomination. We now let anything go and pretend we clergy have no role but to just placate to whatever someone else suggests or is expecting. To change this will take much teaching, intentionality, and effort. I pray we clergy will rise up to the occasion and lead, rather than being just hired hands.

We continued after a break with discussion about the faith to which we give witness. One LAC member said, “I know that I swim upstream of the culture of the idea of ‘close my eyes in this life—open my eyes in heaven in the fullness of whatever it’s going to be.’ Our culture of instant gratification has certainly taken over and pushed. I know it’s one of those places where I don’t try to fix that. I don’t think it is right, but I don’t try to change that perspective. One of the things about this is not trying to change people’s understanding of that in the midst of death, especially since it’s not something I can say with certainty.”

I agree there is a mystery here. I also agree that you don’t try to fix this in the midst of death. It is not healthy to start an argument with grieving people. However, most people to whom I teach about this have never heard of this before. They assume that all Christians believe this “instant gratification” theory. Maybe that is the correct theory, but it is always healthy for people to understand it is not the only theory.

To get a glimpse of what a difference this conversation has made and is making, I shared with the group comments of an LAC member. He said, “Had I not done this [the project conversation] I would have never thought about, ‘Okay, what am I going to do at my first funeral in a new place because that would have been something I thought ‘do funerals the way I do funerals’ . . . Now I look at this through the lens of you get to a new

place and how do you have the conversation with the first funeral because then all of a sudden it's your dialogue with that local culture—that local setting and you are setting a course. If you are clear about your own place, then it makes it easier to engage the local culture and then to know from whence to move. But if you're fuzzy on this continuum and the community is fuzzy, then the likelihood that we're driving together . . . well, having some clarity is a good thing.”

When lunch was over, we convened again to discuss how we celebrate the life of the deceased including honoring the body, having the body present, and placement of the casket. The large talking point here was the placement of the casket. Some spaces do not allow placing the casket perpendicular to the communion table, only horizontal. The other concern was pushback from the congregation and attendees of the funeral. I personally had a funeral director tell me that placing the casket perpendicular was “devil worship,” and he would not ever do it.

The conversation here turned and became more about worship in general. One LAC member asked, “Someone decided how to place the casket at some point. Do I share the importance of this? Is this an essential over which I should die? Is every teaching moment a dying moment? There is something different about my view of worship and yours when it comes to what is essential or not.”

I responded that many times the difference is about where our center of worship is. It bothers me to see a casket as the center of the worship time hiding the communion table, which for me is the center of worship—Eucharist. For others, the center of worship is all about the pulpit and preaching or even Bible centered. If someone took the casket and totally hid the pulpit, a pulpit-centered person might have a problem with such.

Another member also added, “How we do it can help develop the message or help undermine the message. There are some people who are more spatially and visually oriented than they are oriented around a talking head. It is about making connections with people. I wonder how people might connect baptism with Easter for example.”

Another LAC member said, “But Wesley broke and started field preaching. He took the preaching to the people and saw lives changed. The purpose is transformation, which the Holy Spirit does. Is our purpose to draw attention to the Table, or hoping and praying there will be transformation?”

I answered, “Both.” I said we are all hoping and praying for transformation. However, the Holy Spirit doesn’t always move in the same way for everyone. The Holy Spirit might speak to some through a spoken word, for others through the sacraments, for another through a visual or an enactment of the Gospel in some way. For me, we should make worship as sensory as possible in order to give the Holy Spirit the utmost of avenues through which to speak to us and not just limit it to one way with which we and the people are most comfortable.

Lastly, we moved to talking about the idea of living in Holy Saturday. Most found this to be a good model. One said, “It is good to keep the mystery.” Another said, “We need to acknowledge pain and loss. Then we need to speak to resurrection not as wishful thinking, but as true confident hope. Don’t take the funeral sermon as just another responsibility that has to be done!”

The second day apart was a day of good discussion. Sometimes we got off track into other areas, but they were areas that tied into funerals and how we do them as

worship. The feedback was helpful in keeping me in a spirit of learning and thinking. There is a mystery and yet there is a proclamation of hope in the midst of the mystery.

Several months after the second day apart, I was asked to speak at a conference-wide school. The registration for my particular class was not that great (less than ten). However, just before the class began I had to cancel and go be with a family who unexpectedly lost their father. In the future maybe there will be other opportunities to share this with more people and grow the conversation we began here.

The Project: The Final Evaluation

Between the second day apart and the LAC's final evaluation on April 11, the LAC members were to interview their invited participant using the questions provided them. (See page ten for a list of the questions.) There were only four participants who participated throughout the process and two of those missed the second day apart. I would have liked more faithful participation, but this was a start.

Most of the evaluations mentioned that this process had made them ponder about funerals more than ever. This project helped to highlight some important opportunities that need our thoughts, rather than just walking through them as necessities that have no long lasting importance. Some commented that what they believe about death and resurrection was stronger. Others saw a need for more study and committed to wrestling with the concepts presented. Some modified their funeral plans. Maybe the largest contribution was making a connection with funerals and baptisms. Many mentioned this.

Many stated they still believe in the resurrection of the body. They admit they are not sure about when and how. One sounded much like N.T. Wright saying, "[A]t the instant of death the 'spirit and soul' go to be with God. The body goes to the resting

place until the bodily resurrection. The timing of resurrection is not certain.” Others made no attempt to explain what they meant by stating they believed in the resurrection of the body.

Most stated the conversation would not change how they did funerals. Some said it was due to the context in which they were ministering. Others stated it would change how they would minister to families in times of death, but no specifics were given as to what change or why. Still others said they were already doing some of this while others said they were thinking through it still. I was a little disappointed with the feedback. It sounded like people were saying, “That is so interesting, but not for me.”

As the LAC and I talked, they helped me see things in a little more positive light. One of our participants was a retired minister. He could have ignored the teaching and turned out any new ideas. However, his LAC member said he responded that he was thinking anew and afresh about funerals after this project. He did participate eagerly and with enthusiasm. He said, “It’s caused me to do some fresh thinking.” His LAC member said it was very meaningful to him.

Another LAC member responded that his participant had changed a hymn in her funeral plans due to this project. It was a hymn that her family had always used, but she rethought it realizing it was somewhat inappropriate.

One LAC member shared that he served the Crawford County Circuit in South Georgia. He said, “In Georgia, you do not have to be embalmed. Women of the church made quilts for burial. They would wash and dress the body, put it on the bed, and cover it with the quilt readying it for visitation. The men would cut and mill pine wood and make a coffin. The body wrapped in the quilt would be placed in the handmade coffin

and nailed shut. The persons were then buried in the cemetery behind the church. If you don't bring them to the reality of death, then it will go off like a bomb inside them later.”

This member continued to share, “It's easy to become numb. Lazarus' sister said, ‘He's dead.’ This pregnant moment doesn't last long enough in most funerals. On Holy Saturday, she said, ‘We had hoped he was the one.’ Who are you and what are you to the ones you love? This is understood only with the help of the Holy Spirit.”

One LAC member commented that the funeral service distributed at the second day apart helped him to see what I was trying to say. Another LAC member said this about the time when I served as his associate:

Matt has a liturgical sense. At the offerings at St. Paul UMC, he would pick up the plates from the ushers and lift them up before God. It came to mean to me that we offer our offerings and long for God to receive it. It is so hard to get people to live into any liturgical timing. This slows down a funeral in an appropriate, positive way. I've been influenced by it.

Overall, I walked away from this final evaluation and the project feeling like we had made some difference. For each person, including myself, the degree of difference varied, but no one could walk away totally unaffected. We live now in the present place. Hopefully things will never be exactly the same, and yet the full hope of resurrection has not yet happened. But there is hope.

And Now

The journey began with me wanting to start a conversation about how United Methodist clergy in South Georgia do funerals. I believe in some small way that has happened. Maybe the biggest hindrance to our conversation is that which also hinders more intentionality with death and funerals, and that is our schedules. Only one member of the LAC was able to make every meeting we had as an LAC. Most of the invited

participants found two days out of their schedules to be rather impossible also. Being a pastor myself, I totally understand. There just seems to be so little time for ongoing deep conversations with other clergy members around any subject. With funerals being planned by families and with funeral homes in charge, clergy are often reluctant to resist the over step and find relief in having one less thing to plan. We abdicate our responsibilities to others who are willing and glad to just tell us what we need to do. There is so much on our schedules that death seems to be a subject we gladly allow to take the back seat.

One issue that stirred conversation throughout the project was the idea that the body and soul are inseparable. This idea seemed foreign and made for much discomfort among most the clergy. People who argue that the body and soul are not separable and those who argue that they are separable both quote historical, biblical, theological, and liturgical proofs for their arguments. I came into the conversation somewhat convinced that they are inseparable. My viewpoint is partially due to my desire to challenge the position that has become so prevalent in the church culture in my context. This is the position where pastors convincingly tell people just how the deceased met Jesus at the time of death. They share how now the person is enjoying their favorite hobby and are being reunited with all the family members that have also died. The end message is that we should not grieve or want them back with us because they are so happy now.

This position seems so shallow. My first thought when I hear a pastor share such is that this pastor will say anything in order to deal with his or her own discomfort with the grief the family is experiencing. It also has such a small world view. The deceased is not in a heaven where God is the center or where people from all nations have gathered.

Instead, their picture of heaven is just a continuation of this life with the same characters in heaven. It is another form of the “me and my family” mentality. And lastly, the truth is that none of us know what happens at death. Do the body and soul separate? Is resurrection an immediate experience of the deceased or is it something to come? Is the answer either one or the other, or is the answer both? I don’t know and no one else knows for certain. Therefore, why do we feel we have to convince people of something we don’t know for certain? Can we not admit and find comfort even in the midst of mystery?

I came into the conversation feeling somewhat confident that the body and soul does not separate. Yet as I continued through this journey I became open to other thoughts and beliefs about what happens at death and how resurrection might happen. What I most wanted to challenge was the ignoring of the pain of death and some superficial joy that the deceased are with Jesus now having fun. What I have become convinced of is that for those who experience the death of a loved one, resurrection is not yet a reality. Maybe the deceased is with Jesus somewhere and somehow. Yet the reality the family lives with is that the person we loved and who loved us, the person we enjoyed and from whom we sought advice, the person who is responsible in part for who we are and how we see the world is no longer here to share this life with us. That hurts! That hurt is real and cannot be covered up by some story about something we don’t know. This pain needs acknowledgement and embracement.

Resurrection, however and whenever it happens, is not yet our reality. If the deceased is resurrected, they have not been resurrected for us. We know the deceased through their body and that body we are now burying and/or cremating. They are no

longer with us. They are not resurrected to us. Instead, resurrection is that for which we hope. This hope is certain even though our understanding of all its details is not.

Therefore, as we develop our theology of death and resurrection, I feel it is so important that our theology include resurrection. This resurrection is something that is not yet a reality for us, but is still our hope. We are certain that in time resurrection will be a reality for us and for all of God's creation that now knows death and decay.

Therefore, on the other side of this project I am very convinced not of how resurrection happens, but of the following. First, I am convinced that funerals need to speak a word of hope to the pain of death and in no way try to deny or ignore death or its pain. This would include not ignoring the body of the deceased, which is for us the only form of the deceased we know. Christians are not a people who don't believe in death and pain. We are a people who believe in resurrection and hope in the midst of death and pain.

Secondly, I am convinced that the hope of resurrection we are to proclaim at funerals (no matter our theology and our opinion of what happens at death) is not pretending we are news reporters who were there when the deceased died and met Jesus. Thus, we tell the congregation exactly what happened and how it happened and how joyful the deceased now is, as if we had been to visit them and came back to give you a report. This makes us sound like we know, experience, and can visit where others cannot. It seems arrogant. In addition, it tells the grieving not to grieve; when what we need to do is give permission for grief and embrace them in their grief.

When Jesus died on Good Friday, many grieved. The second day for them was a day of grief and of doing that which they were accustomed to doing for the dead.

Arrangements were made as to where to place his body. Women went to anoint his body. For them the reality was that Jesus is dead. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. His resurrection was something that many experienced whether meeting him in the garden, on the road to Emmaus, or behind locked doors.

As Christian people, the second day is still a day of grief for us because we have experienced the reality of the pain death brings. Yet we also know that the second day is not the last day—death is not the last word. When Sunday comes, there is resurrection of the dead. Therefore, I am convinced that Holy Saturday is a model we can use to understand and help others understand where we are presently. We are walking with the reality of death, doing that which we do when those we love die—we make funeral plans, burial plans, and we grieve. Yet still to come—still to be a reality for us—is Sunday’s resurrection. This is our hope. Our hope is not in knowing the details or how and when resurrection happens. Our hope is that God will raise all creation to new life—resurrection. For now, we live between the pain and the hope. We live in Holy Saturday.

Lastly, I am convinced that ultimately we entrust the deceased into the hands of God who created, redeemed, and will in time resurrect them. Whether the deceased are dead and stay dead until Christ’s coming again or whether they are consciously present with God: we entrust them to God who loves them more than we could ever love them. God will take care of them. This too is our comfort and hope.

There are many things about death and resurrection that are truly mysteries and do not need the attempt of explanation. The explanatory details cannot be the foundation upon which our theology and hope is built or upon which we lean for comfort. Instead,

our foundation is that in death there is with God resurrection. Funerals need this foundation.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FEBRUARY 2013

Signed by participants in the Project at the first day apart.

INFORMED CONSENT

INTRODUCTION: My name is Matthew Stewart, and I am a student at Drew University conducting research for a Doctorate of Ministry degree. My telephone number is 229-331-1193. My D.Min. advisor is Sister Kathleen Flood and her email is KrfloodOP@aol.com. You may contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this project is to dialogue with United Methodist clergy of the South Georgia Annual Conference about how we live into the liturgy of The United Methodist Church when presiding over A Service of Death and Resurrection. My hope is to get pastors thinking about their theology of death and resurrection in order to bring intentionality to the funerals we conduct. The Greeting in A Service of Death and Resurrection will serve as the outline for such services looking at how we can best embody each part of why we say we have gathered. Emphasis will be placed on living in the tension between death and resurrection. The model for this is Holy Saturday, where we live in the between time of death (Good Friday) and resurrection (Easter Sunday).

PROCEDURE: If you consent, you will be asked to:

1. Plan your funeral service with a six to eight page description and reflection along with a bulletin.
2. Attend two sessions (February 7 and March 21) from 10:00 AM till 3:00 PM with lunch provided and enter into dialogue around the subject matter. These sessions will be video recorded along with all dialogue and comments for further review and study.
3. Between the two sessions ponder how the first session brought new insight and/or changes to your understanding and/or practice of funerals.
4. After the last session, you will be asked several questions in an oral interview that will take place between you and the Local Advisory Committee member who invited you to participate. Answers to these questions will be recorded via dictation of the interviewer. This interview should take less than one hour.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

RISKS: There are no known risks associated with your participation.

BENEFITS: If you fulfill the requirements entirely, you will receive one unit of CEU. Partial credit may also be available. There are no other guaranteed benefits. However, it is possible that you will enjoy our time together and find the discussion meaningful. This study is intended to benefit the clergy of the South Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church by enlivening and making more meaningful and spiritually beneficial our conducting of funeral services.

(Continues on Back →)

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. Only the person who invited you to participate will be present for the interview. I will be the only person who listens to the tapes of our sessions. When I write my D.Min. thesis, I will use pseudonyms – made up names – for all participants.

SHARING THE RESULTS: I plan to write my D.Min. thesis based on our discussions and the interview together with my reading and research. This thesis will be submitted to my advisor at the end of my program.

I also plan to share what I learn from this study with various clergy and lay persons. Portions of the thesis may be printed and made available to the members.

PUBLICATION: There is the possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

BEFORE YOU SIGN: By signing below, you are agreeing to the terms above. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE: _____ **DATE:** _____

Print Name: _____

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE: _____ **DATE:** _____

Print Name: _____

APPENDIX B

PLAN YOUR FUNERAL ASSIGNMENT
October 25, 2012

Guidelines for the funeral assignment for the participants prior to the first day apart.

A SERVICE OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Paper Specifications:

Length:	6-8 pages commentary, 2-4 pages bulletin
Font Size:	12 points, Times New Roman or equivalent
Margin:	One Inch
Spacing:	Double space

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is for you to share your theology of death and resurrection and how it is proclaimed and embodied in a Service of Death and Resurrection.

Assignment:

You are asked to design your own Service of Death and Resurrection. The assignment includes the following:

- Brief introduction to the context of the service: time, place, community, cultural practices
- Description of basic movements of the service: such as proclamation, music, witness
- Description of the physical arrangements regarding your body in this service
- Consider the following aspects as you write the paper and design your service:
 1. Pastoral care to family/community
 2. Christian witness
 3. Sense of intimacy/mystery
 4. Sense of relevance regarding grief and hope
- A service bulletin with texts should accompany the paper.

Send Hard Copy To: Rev. Matthew Stewart – 1105 S. Lee Street – Americus, GA 31709

OR

Send PDF Document To: RevMatt70@gmail.com

Due Date: January 31, 2013 (If mailing a hard copy, please send two to three days prior to due date.)

APPENDIX C

EVALUATION FORM FOR DAY APART
February 7, 2013

Used by the LAC after the first day apart.

EVALUATION FORM FOR DAY APART

February 7, 2013

Please evaluate throughout the session recording insights as they become obvious.
This form should be turned into Matt prior to your leaving today.

1. Notice body language and responses of LAC members and the participants. How engaged are they?

Very Engaged

Not Engaged At All

| | | | | | | | | |

OBSERVATIONS SUPPORTING THIS EVALUATION:

2. How would you evaluate the presentation of material?

Well Done

Much To Be Desired

| | | | | | | | | |

COMMENT ON HOW IT COULD BE IMPROVED:

3. How prepared was the presenter with the content?

Very Prepared

Not At All Prepared

| | | | | | | | | |

WHAT DID YOU FIND NEEDING IMPROVEMENT ABOUT THE CONTENT:

4. Overall, how would you evaluate today in terms of the purpose of beginning a dialogue?

Mission Accomplished

Mission Failed



WHAT SUGGESTION DO YOU HAVE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN ACCOMPLISHING THE MISSION:

5. Other observations, notes, and/or suggestions:

APPENDIX D

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #870-875
A SERVICE OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION
October 25, 2012

Used at the first day apart.

870 SERVICE OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION

A SERVICE OF DEATH AND
RESURRECTION

This is a service of Christian worship suitable for funerals and memorial services. It should be held in the church if at all possible, and at a time when members of the congregation can be present.

The pastor should be notified immediately of the death of a member or constituent of the congregation. All arrangements should be made and approved in consultation with the pastor.

This order is intended for use with the body of the deceased present, but it can be adapted for use at memorial services or other occasions. The coffin remains closed throughout the service and thereafter. It may be covered with a pall.

Use of the term "Service of Death and Resurrection" is not intended to discourage use of the more familiar terms "funeral," "burial of the dead," or "memorial service." "Funeral" is appropriate for a service with the body of the deceased present. "Burial of the dead" is appropriate for a service where the remains of the deceased are buried. "Memorial service" is appropriate where the body of the deceased is not present. "Service of Death and Resurrection" was selected as being appropriate to any of the wide variety of situations in which this service might be used. It expresses clearly the twofold nature of what is done: the facts of death and bereavement are honestly faced, and the gospel of resurrection is celebrated in the context of God's baptismal covenant with us in Christ.

ENTRANCE

GATHERING

The pastor may greet the family.

Music for worship may be offered while the people gather.

Hymns and songs of faith may be sung during the gathering.

The pall may be placed on the coffin or urn with these words:

Dying, Christ destroyed our death.

Rising, Christ restored our life.

Christ will come again in glory.

As in baptism *Name* put on Christ,

so in Christ may *Name* be clothed with glory.

Here and now, dear friends, we are God's children.

What we shall be has not yet been revealed;

but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him,

for we shall see him as he is.

Those who have this hope purify themselves

as Christ is pure.

The coffin or urn may be carried into the place of worship in procession, the pastor going before it and saying the word of grace, the congregation standing. Or, if the coffin or urn is already in place, the pastor says the following from in front of the congregation.

THE WORD OF GRACE

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and I am life.
 Those who believe in me, even though they die, yet shall they live,
 and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.
 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.
 I died, and behold I am alive for evermore,
 and I hold the keys of hell and death.
 Because I live, you shall live also.

GREETING

Friends, we have gathered here to praise God
 and to witness to our faith as we celebrate the life of *Name*.
 We come together in grief, acknowledging our human loss.
 May God grant us grace, that in pain we may find comfort,
 in sorrow hope, in death resurrection.

If the pall was not placed on the coffin or urn earlier, the sentences used above for that act may be used here instead.

HYMN OR SONG

PRAYER

The following or other prayers may be offered, in unison if desired. Petition for God's help, thanksgiving for the communion of saints, confession of sin, and assurance of pardon are appropriate here.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

**O God, who gave us birth,
 you are ever more ready to hear
 than we are to pray.**

**You know our needs before we ask,
 and our ignorance in asking.**

**Give to us now your grace,
 that as we shrink before the mystery of death,
 we may see the light of eternity.**

**Speak to us once more
 your solemn message of life and of death.**

Help us to live as those who are prepared to die.

**And when our days here are accomplished,
 enable us to die as those who go forth to live,
 so that living or dying, our life may be in you,
 and that nothing in life or in death will be able to separate us
 from your great love in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Amen.

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and/or

**Eternal God,
 we praise you for the great company of all those
 who have finished their course in faith
 and now rest from their labor.
 We praise you for those dear to us
 whom we name in our hearts before you.
 Especially we praise you for *Name*,
 whom you have graciously received into your presence.
 To all of these, grant your peace.
 Let perpetual light shine upon them;
 and help us so to believe where we have not seen,
 that your presence may lead us through our years,
 and bring us at last with them
 into the joy of your home
 not made with hands but eternal in the heavens;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.**

The following prayer of confession and pardon may also be used:

**Holy God, before you our hearts are open,
 and from you no secrets are hidden.
 We bring to you now
 our shame and sorrow for our sins.
 We have forgotten
 that our life is from you and unto you.
 We have neither sought nor done your will.
 We have not been truthful in our hearts,
 in our speech, in our lives.
 We have not loved as we ought to love.
 Help us and heal us,
 raising us from our sins into a better life,
 that we may end our days in peace,
 trusting in your kindness unto the end;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.
 Amen.**

Who is in the position to condemn?
 Only Christ, Christ who died for us, who rose for us,
 who reigns at God's right hand and prays for us.
 Thanks be to God who gives us the victory
 through our Lord Jesus Christ.

PSALM 130*

Out of the depths I cry unto thee, O Lord!
Lord, hear my cry.
Let thine ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplication.
If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou may be feared.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word do I hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord is great mercy.
With him is plenteous redemption,
and he will redeem Israel from all their sins.

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

PSALM 23**

Sung or said by the people standing.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou prepares a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

*For other versions, see Nos. 515, 516, and page 848

**For other versions, see Nos. 136-138, and page 754

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NEW TESTAMENT LESSON

PSALM, CANTICLE OR HYMN

GOSPEL LESSON

SERMON

A sermon maybe preached, proclaiming the gospel in the face of death. It may lead into, or include, the following acts of naming and witness.

NAMING

The life and death of the deceased may be gathered up by the reading of a memorial or appropriate statement, or in other ways, by the pastor or others.

WITNESS

Family, friends, and members of the congregation may briefly voice their thankfulness to God for the grace they have received in the life of the deceased and their Christian faith and joy. Signs of faith, hope, and love may be exchanged.

HYMN OR SONG

CREED or AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (Nos. 880-889)

If the creed has not been preceded by, it may be followed by, a hymn or musical response.

COMMENDATION

PRAYERS

One or more of the following prayers may be offered, or other prayers may be used. They may take the form of a pastoral prayer, a series of shorter prayers, or a litany. Intercession, commendation of life, and thanksgiving are appropriate here.

God of us all, your love never ends.
 When all else fails, you still are God.
 We pray to you for one another in our need,
 and for all, anywhere, who mourn with us this day.
 To those who doubt, give light;
 to those who are weak, strength;
 to all who have sinned, mercy;
 to all who sorrow, your peace.
 Keep true in us
 the love with which we hold one another.
 In all our ways we trust you.
 And to you,
 with your church on earth and in heaven,
 we offer honor and glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

O God, all that you have given us is yours.
 As first you gave *Name* to us,
 so now we give *Name* back to you.

Here the pastor, with others, standing near the coffin or urn, may lay hands on it, continuing:

Receive *Name* into the arms of your mercy.
 Raise *Name* up with all your people.
 Receive us also, and raise us into a new life.
 Help us so to love and serve you in this world
 that we may enter into your joy in the world to come.

Amen.

Into your hands, O merciful Savior,
 we commend your servant *Name*.
 Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you,
 a sheep of your own fold,
 a lamb of your own flock,
 a sinner of your own redeeming.
 Receive *Name* into the arms of your mercy,
 into the blessed rest of everlasting peace,
 and into the glorious company of the saints of light.

Amen.

The pastor may administer Holy Communion to all present who wish to share at the Lord's table, using A Service of Word and Table III (page 15). Otherwise, the service continues as follows:

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God of love, we thank you
 for all with which you have blessed us
 even to this day:
 for the gift of joy in days of health and strength,
 and for the gifts of your abiding presence and promise
 in days of pain and grief.
 We praise you for home and friends,
 and for our baptism and place in your church
 with all who have faithfully lived and died.
 Above all else we thank you for Jesus,
 who knew our griefs,
 who died our death and rose for our sake,
 and who lives and prays for us.
 And as he taught us, so now we pray.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Nos. 894-896)

HYMN

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

A Service of committal follows at the final resting place.

APPENDIX E

THE ISSUE
October 25, 2012

Presented to the LAC at the second meeting.

THE ISSUE

“And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.”

Persons are inseparable body, mind, and spirit. “We offer ourselves . . . as a holy and living sacrifice” for God’s use – God who is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. We offer ourselves in union with Christ’s offering for us. That is, we are offering ourselves in cooperation with the work God has begun in Christ. Our hope is “Christ will come again.” The purpose of this hope is that Christ will make all things new – bring a new heaven and earth – and resurrect us to inhabit this new creation.

Our bodies are a part of God’s creation. They are the physicality of who we are. Bodies are created from the dust of the earth. Our hope is not that God destroys creation, the earth, and the body. No, God’s creation is good. What God comes to do is not destroy, but to re-create and to resurrect.

This renews our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We are to invite people to offer themselves as a holy sacrifice and cooperate with God’s work of hope and resurrection – of bringing God’s kingdom to earth. We work for that in which we hope that Christ will come to us and bring a new heaven and a new earth.

Funerals are acts of worship and serve as a window through which to see our true theology. How we treat the body of the dead says a lot about what we believe of God’s creation, God’s work, and the physicality of our faith. In the funeral do we ignore, discard, or seeing the body as something no longer needed or something that is not good? Or do we see the body as the person inseparable from any other part of the person and thus honor and include the body announcing the good of creation, the physicality, and the whole person?

What is the Gospel we proclaim in the funeral? Is it a Gospel of hope that gives great comfort? Hope is about waiting. We don’t like to wait. We skip Advent and rush into Christmas for who like to wait for Christ’s coming and prepare, let’s just celebrate. Good Friday and Holy Saturday are almost ignored in most Protestant Churches. When Good Friday is acknowledged it is a gory reenactment without much Easter Proclamation at all or just a glimpse at the end. Many don’t know what Good Friday is all about or why we call it good. Our preference is just to skip Good Friday and Holy Saturday and rush into Easter Resurrection. We do the same with funerals. We skip the reality and pain of death and just tell everyone to celebrate this life that continues immortal with God. We go straight to resurrection from death with no living in Holy Saturday.

If we cannot proclaim the Christian Gospels at funerals (that is, we don’t know what to say or what to do); then what Gospel are we proclaiming at other times in our lives? The Christian Gospel is that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We acknowledge the pain of Christ’s death, proclaim the resurrection of Christ in bodily form, and wait in hope for Christ’s coming again. Death and

resurrection fit at funerals as much as anywhere. If this is not what we are proclaiming at funerals, then what are we living? What are we spreading? What are we inviting people to be a part of? Are we not asking people to follow Jesus who died and was resurrected and will come again to offer themselves that God might use them (body, mind, and soul) to make a difference in this physical world among physical people and creation?

How we view and treat our bodies at funerals speaks about how we see the connection between the Gospel and physicality. How do we treat our bodies? Can we have healthy spiritual lives while allowing our bodies to go to mush? Is our body a gift of God we should value as holy and sacred and offer to God to use?

It is not just our bodies, but the bodies of others. Sex is a gift from God. Yet when we devalue the body then exploitation is at hand. We fail to see the bodies of others as sacred and holy creations of God.

When does resurrection occur? This is a mystery. What is important is this. We cannot proclaim a faith of resurrection without the reality of death – no Easter without Good Friday. If death is not bad and a person just lives on in spirit, then why have hope of resurrection? If God's earth and creation is all bad, then why bring the kingdom of God here? Why hope for a new heaven and a new earth? If at death, we go in spirit to be with Jesus; then why are we in hope of his coming again. After all, let's just all stay with him in heaven.

How the mystery happens from God's point of view we'll not know in this lifetime. Yet from our point of view death is a reality and should be lamented. Good Friday is tough! Yet we believe this person (body, mind, and spirit) whom we commit to the dust from which it came will be resurrected by God. We have hope of resurrection to eternal life. We are looking forward to Easter Sunday which from our point of view has not happened – the body is still in the earth waiting resurrection. So for now we wait. We live in Holy Saturday – somewhere between the pain of death and the hope of bodily resurrection.

Our theology of death and resurrection is reflected maybe most prominently at worship services of death and resurrection. Therefore, we need to be certain of the Gospel we are proclaiming for it has implications to the Gospel we proclaim at other times and are inviting persons to be a part of. This is not just true of funerals, but of all worship services. During worship our theology shines brightly, thus deserving our best preparation and thought as to what we really believe and are to what we are inviting others to offer themselves.

APPENDIX F

PROJECT PROPOSALS
October 25, 2012

Presented to the LAC at the second meeting.

Project Proposals

OPTION ONE: Dr. Thomas Long

Dr. Thomas Long would come to South Georgia to do a clergy day apart. The cost of this would be \$1,500 plus travel. I would ask Bishop King to support this in the South Georgia Annual Conference. It would be open to the entire community. Local funeral homes would be asked to help support the expenses along with other local businesses. The registration fee would also help cover the cost.

We could do interviews with clergy before and after the event having them reflect on their theology of death and resurrection, how they proclaimed that theology and how they embodied it in the last funeral they conducted. Ask them what they would have changed in the last funeral they conducted if they were in total control of all decisions and why. After the session we could interview them again as to whether the presentation brought new insight or changes to what they would say and do in funerals.

DRAW BACK: Where does my teaching fit into this? I could say something in the advertising of the event. I could offer an introduction with Dr. Long. I could do a follow-up day apart for just those participating in the DMIN project. My colleagues feel a need for my input and not rely totally upon Dr. Long or another.

OPTION TWO: Matt

I could put together a day apart for just a small group of 6-8 clergy. I would present what I have learned and what I am still struggling to understand. There would be time for questions and answers, feedback, and discussion. The LAC would help do some interviews before and after the session. They would also be ears to listen to comments in the midst of group discussion and recording the comments.

OTHERS:

APPENDIX G

SECOND DAY APART AGENDA
March 21, 2013

Agenda and outline including questions for the second day apart.

LIVING IN HOLY SATURDAY: SESSION TWO
Thursday, March 21, 2013 – 10:00 AM till 3:00 PM
Lee Street United Methodist Church

AGENDA

10:00 Welcome and Distribution of Materials

10:15 SESSION ONE: KEEPING BALANCE BETWEEN WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION OF DECEASED

- I spoke of Long's view of the funeral as continuation of the **Baptismal Journey**. What link, if any, do you see between baptism and the funeral?
- Suggestions were given as to how we might emphasize the **worship of God** in funerals. These included:

* keeping the Basic Pattern of Worship	* keeping the service in the church
* encouraging the faith community to participate	* using the Pall
* using the Paschal Candle	* celebrating the Eucharist

Share your evaluation of these. How have you used them? How would you desire to use them? What benefits and/or problems do you see in using these? What others would you suggest?

11:05 BREAK

11:15 SESSION TWO: THE FAITH TO WHICH WE GIVE WITNESS

- Christians are resurrection people. What have been your thoughts and ponderings about **death and resurrection** in contrast to **immortality**? In what ways, have you been more conscious of what you believe and what you proclaim about your theology since the last session?
- In our last session, I presented three theories of resurrection: Paradise at death and Resurrection to come (Wright), Eschatological timing (Moltmann/Long), and Resting in peace awaiting the Resurrection. Share what you see as benefits/shortcomings of these.

12:05 LUNCH

12:45 SESSION THREE: CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF THE DECEASED

- Suggestions for celebrating the deceased included: honoring bodies, the body present at service of worship, and placement of the casket (honorary congregant)
 Have you embodied these or do you desire to embody these in the funerals you conduct? If so, how do you embody them? If not, why not?

1:35 BREAK

1:45 SESSION FOUR: LIVING IN HOLY SATURDAY

- Good Friday (Death and Pain) is a reality. Easter Sunday (Resurrection) is our hope. How do you see your own preaching of funerals proclaiming Holy Saturday's living between the two?
- For me, funerals are a time to acknowledge death and its pain; proclaim hope of Resurrection; and entrust the deceased into the arms of God without proclaiming emphatically that which I do not know for sure (like how/when Resurrection happens). Do you allow persons to live in this mystery in the funerals over which you preside?
- An Example of Service and Sermon: Ralph Thompson's Funeral
- Exegeting texts: If time, we will look at a few of the scriptural texts often used in talking about resurrection.

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