A photograph of a cobblestone path at night. The path is made of irregular, light-colored stones and leads into the distance. On the left side of the path, there are several small, glowing lanterns and some purple and yellow flowers. The background is dark with some blurred lights, suggesting an outdoor setting at night.

When you  
have lost  
a loved one

A GUIDE TO FUNERAL PREPARATIONS

Cover photo: Hietaniemi cemetery, Jani Laukkanen

Layout: Anu Ylä-Jussila

Parish Union of Helsinki, 2024

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THE LIFE OF MORTALS  
IS LIKE GRASS,  
THEY FLOURISH LIKE  
A FLOWER OF THE FIELD;  
THE WIND BLOWS OVER IT  
AND IT IS GONE,  
AND ITS PLACE  
REMEMBERS IT NO MORE.  
BUT FROM EVERLASTING  
TO EVERLASTING  
THE LORD'S LOVE IS  
(PSALM 103:15-17)

Before  
the funeral

## Funeral arrangements

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The death of a loved one is a hard and difficult event. Amid all emotions and questions, there are lots of practical matters to take care of. Funeral arrangements are the responsibility of close relatives, but remember you are not alone. You can always ask for help from your parish office or a funeral director.

All undertakers provide coffins and urns, transport the deceased and take care of many other matters related to the funeral as requested by the family of the deceased.

### Reservations

The funeral service is usually held two or three weeks after death. In Helsinki, funeral services can be held any day of the week except for Sundays and Mondays. The funeral service can be held in a cemetery chapel, a church or at the grave.

You can take care of a number of matters related to the funeral by visiting or calling the Burial Services (Hautapalvelut) of the Parish Union of Helsinki. Before burial, you will have to submit to the Burial Services a burial permit signed by a physician. At the Burial Services, you can also reserve a grave, book a chapel or a church, agree on the time of the funeral and arrange a cremation if you so wish.

Our online services ([asiointi.helsinginseurakunnat.fi](http://asiointi.helsinginseurakunnat.fi)) enables you to reserve either a chapel or a church for the blessing of the deceased. At the same time you may reserve the parish home for the memorial reception after the funeral.

If you wish to hold the funeral service outside Helsinki, e.g. in the birthplace of the deceased, but your loved one will be buried in Helsinki, you have to book the burial at the Burial Services. There you can also make a contract for grave maintenance.

If the deceased was a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the use of a church or a chapel is free of charge. Otherwise, a fee is charged. The services of the officiating pastor are free for everyone.

## **Contact with a pastor and a church musician**

In the Helsinki metropolitan area, the funeral ceremony is usually officiated by a pastor from the deceased's parish regardless of the location of the funeral service.

If you personally know a pastor, you can also ask him or her to officiate at the funeral. It is important for the family of the deceased to meet the pastor in advance. In the meeting, you can plan the programme of the funeral and tell the pastor about the deceased and your own expectations. This is also a good opportunity to confidentially discuss any matters that you do not wish to be brought up at the funeral. At the meeting with the pastor, you can also process your emotions about your loss.

The church musician of the chapel or your local parish is responsible for the music at the funeral service. You can choose the music together with the pastor or the church musician. They can help you choose suitable music.

You can choose funeral hymns, hymns or songs that the deceased enjoyed, or any hymns related to the time of the church year.

## Cremation and interment

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The Parish Union of Helsinki has six cemeteries: Hietaniemi, Malmi, Honkanummi, Maunula, Kulosaari and Östersundom. Urns can also be placed in the columbarium of Kallio Church. In Honkanummi, there is also a nondenominational cemetery.

If you wish to have a family grave for the deceased, and there is no family grave, you have to reserve a new coffin or urn grave. Ashes can also be interred or scattered in a memorial grove without a marked burial plot. In this case, a memorial plaque can be placed on a shared memorial monument. The memorial plaques for the deceased whose ashes are in the columbarium of Kallio Church are placed on the wall of the church hall.

When you pay for a grave, you will have it for 25 years. An additional fee is charged for opening and covering the grave. Price lists are available on the websites of Helsinki parishes.

In some parts of the Helsinki cemeteries, the lawns of the graves are tended by the cemetery staff without a separate agreement. A basic maintenance fee will be charged for the entire period of the exclusive burial rights when a grave is reserved in one of these areas.

### **Graves for coffins**

For the deceased resident in Helsinki, graves for coffins are available in the Malmi, Honkanummi and Östersundom cemeteries and in the nondenominational cemetery.

### **Graves for urns**

The Malmi, Honkanummi, Maunula, Östersundom and nondenominational cemeteries provide graves for urns. The Kulosaari cemetery is reserved primarily for Evangelical Lutheran parish members living in Kulosaari. All the new graves there are for urns.

The Kallio Church columbarium is only for the members of the Helsinki parishes. New graves for urns sometimes become available in the Hietaniemi cemetery and are for the residents of Helsinki.



## **Memorial groves and scattering areas**

It is not necessary to reserve a grave, but you can inter the ashes or urn in a memorial grove. In Hietaniemi, Honkanummi and Maunula, there are also separate areas where ashes can be scattered by the cemetery staff. Unlike in the interment of an urn or ashes, the family is not present in the scattering.

Apart from the anonymous memorial groves in Hietaniemi and in Maunula, memorial groves have a shared monument for memorial plaques. A memorial plaque is always optional.

## **Interment in a cemetery outside Helsinki**

Residents of Helsinki can also be buried in cemeteries outside Helsinki. In such a case, contact the local parish office.

## **Interment outside a cemetery**

According to the Funeral Act, ashes can also be buried or scattered outside a cemetery with the landowner's permission. No monument is allowed on such a site, however. Permission to scatter the ashes at sea or on a lake must be obtained from the owner of the water area. The City of Helsinki has designated water areas west of Harmaja and northwest of Rysäkivi islands for the scattering of ashes.

## War veterans

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War veterans and their spouses who are residents of Helsinki are provided a grave for a coffin or urn for 25 years without charge. If a war veteran or his or her spouse is buried in a family grave, it is possible to obtain a free extension to the exclusive right of burial. A fee is charged for the interment.

The Hietaniemi cemetery has an area designated for war veterans and their spouses resident in Helsinki. All the graves there are for urns.

Reserving a grave or extending the exclusive burial right is also free for veterans who served in minesweeping duties after the war and their spouses.

## Sharing the sad news

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### Obituary in a newspaper

Publishing an obituary in a newspaper is a general custom but not obligatory. An obituary usually includes the name of the deceased, family relations (for example, “my beloved spouse”, “our beloved father” etc.), profession or title, place and date of birth, and place and date of death. An obituary often includes a verse from the Bible or a hymn, a poem or other quotation related to the deceased.

Since this announcement also serves as an invitation to the funeral ceremony and reception, their times and places should be stated clearly. If the funeral is only for the immediate family, an obituary can be published after the ceremony to thank people for their condolences.

### Flags at half-mast


On the day of the death, a flag will be flown at half-mast for the whole day outside the deceased’s home. On the day of the funeral, the flag is at half-mast until the end of the funeral service but can also be flown at half-mast or full-mast for the whole day. If the funeral coincides with an official flag-flying day, the flag will be flown full-mast after the ceremony.

## **Prayers in the local church**

Prayers will be read for the deceased and the bereaved at the weekly services in the parish church. This will take place either on the Sunday following the funeral or as soon as the parish has been informed about the death. It is customary for the family to attend this service. You should confirm the correct time and place with your local parish.

## **Social media**

Facebook recommends that the family of the deceased report the death of a user to Facebook and send a death certificate. The account can then be memorialised or removed if the family so wishes.



THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD,  
I LACK NOTHING.  
HE MAKES ME LIE DOWN IN  
GREEN PASTURES,  
HE LEADS ME BESIDE QUIET  
WATERS,  
HE REFRESHES MY SOUL.  
(PSALM 23:1-2)

# The funeral

## The funeral service

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The Lutheran funeral service follows the same pattern regardless of whether the deceased will be buried in a coffin or an urn. The funeral service takes place in a cemetery chapel, in a church or at the grave. In the chapel or church, the immediate family is seated in the front on the right side of the aisle as seen from the door, and other relatives behind them.

The funeral service follows the order described in the Church Handbook. The service begins with a hymn or an instrumental prelude, which is followed by an invocation and introductory words by the pastor. Before the words of committal, the pastor gives a speech, for which it would be good for the family to meet the pastor in advance.

With the words of committal, the pastor pours sand on the coffin. The congregation stands during the Scripture reading and words of committal. If the deceased is buried immediately after the service in a coffin, the coffin is carried from the church during the postlude. In case of an urn burial, the coffin usually remains in front of the altar after the service.

The funeral service can also be held as a funeral mass with the inclusion of the Holy Communion.

A printed funeral service programme can also be used if the family so wishes. In addition to the deceased's name and birth and death dates, the programme should include the process of the service and the hymn lyrics.

## Flower arrangements

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Laying the flowers and approaching the coffin are the moment to pay one's last respects. Gratitude, memories and prayers are central to this. Silence or reading a greeting or a verse from the Bible can be used to convey the prayers.

Flowers are laid on the coffin either before or after the service. Agree on this with the pastor. Close family members lay their flowers on the coffin first, usually reading aloud the names and the greetings on the ribbons or cards attached to the flowers. Any longer speeches are best saved for the funeral reception.

Mourners only stay by the coffin for a short moment. Having laid their flowers on the coffin, they take a silent moment and then turn toward the family and make a small bow of acknowledgement before returning to their seats.

In case of a coffin burial, where the deceased is taken to the grave in a procession, flowers can also be laid at the grave if weather permits. If flowers are placed on the coffin in the chapel and the deceased is taken to the grave in a procession, people collect their flower arrangements after the final hymn and take them to the grave. Greetings are not read again beside the grave, but the flowers are simply laid on the grave.

In case of an urn burial, flowers are laid on the coffin in the chapel. After the funeral service, you can take the flowers to a family grave, if you like. Flowers left in the chapel will not be kept until the collection of the urn. You should ask what procedure is followed and agree on what should be done with the flowers after the ceremony.

## **The funeral procession**

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Mourners proceed to the grave in a procession, guided by an attendant and followed by the bearers of the coffin, then the immediate family and after them the rest of the mourners. The pastor walks either ahead of the coffin or behind it with the family. Mourners remain silent during the procession. Silence gives an opportunity to process your grief, show quiet respect and pray.

The closest relatives are customarily at the head of the coffin or furthest back, as the coffin is always carried foot-end first. If there are no suitable pallbearers in the family, you can ask the funeral office to arrange bearers. The coffin is carried out of the chapel during the postlude and placed on a hearse waiting outside.

Anyone unable to walk can join the procession in a car or go directly to the grave by car. When at the grave, the coffin is placed with the head-end toward the tombstone. When the coffin is lowered, male mourners take off their hats. The bearers do this only after having lowered the coffin into the grave, after which they stand for a moment at the graveside.

The pastor can say a short prayer. These days, the grave is not filled straightaway but covered with a lid. The family may want to throw some soil or flowers on the coffin before this is done.

If they so wish, the family can put enough soil on the grave to cover the coffin. This should be agreed on in advance. After the flowers have been laid on the grave, it is customary to sing a hymn. Then one of the mourners presents an invitation to the funeral reception, if one is to be held.

## The funeral reception

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The funeral reception can be held at home, in the parish hall, in a restaurant or any other suitable place. The use of parish halls for funeral receptions is free of charge for parish members. The family can take care of the catering themselves or hire a catering service.

At the reception, there is usually a table covered with a white tablecloth with a photo of the deceased, one or two candles and flowers. The pastor will attend the reception if invited. You can already invite him or her when arranging the funeral service.

The pastor can also help you plan the programme for the reception. Often the programme includes reading cards of condolences, singing together, a eulogy, other short speeches and musical performances.

## Cremation

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The crematoria of the Parish Union of Helsinki are located in Malmi and Honkanummi. There is also the private Finnish Cremation Foundation in Helsinki. You can arrange the cremation and the time for the interment of the urn with the Central Registry of the Parish Union of Helsinki. Ashes can also be buried without an urn.



## Interment

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The interment of the urn or ashes is usually only attended by the immediate family, under the guidance of an attendant. If you wish, you can also invite the pastor.

You can have a moment of prayers at the graveside. Brochures on interment with advice on prayers are available at chapels, or you can ask the pastor for a copy.

Such a moment of prayers can also be held when a coffin is interred separately from the funeral service, for example, when the grave is in a different town.

When the urn is placed in the Kallio Church, the parish will take care of its transfer from the crematorium in Helsinki. Before the urn is placed in the columbarium, the family can have a moment of prayers at the memorial altar. The space seats five people.

## Funerals for non-members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

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The cemeteries of the Helsinki parishes are public cemeteries for people who were resident in Helsinki at the time of their death. In Honkanummi, there is also a denominational cemetery for those who wish not to be buried in a Christian cemetery.

While there are Orthodox, Jewish and Islamic cemeteries in Helsinki, members of these religions can also be buried in Lutheran cemeteries. A funeral service can be held for a person who was not Christian if the family so request and the pastor thinks that there are grounds for a Christian funeral ceremony.

However, no funeral service is held if the deceased has expressed a wish not to have a Christian funeral. The funeral service for a non-member is the same as for a member of the church. Chapels can also be hired for funeral ceremonies of other denominations and nondenominational funerals, but in these cases the programme of the ceremony has to be delivered to the chapel for approval in advance.



I, EVEN  
I, AM HE  
WHO COMFORTS YOU.  
(ISAIAH 51:12)

After  
the funeral

After the funeral, the administrator of the estate of the deceased has to assess any life, health and accident insurances the deceased may have had. It is also worth asking whether the deceased's workplace or trade union provides burial grants for funeral arrangements. Also, any organisation that paid a pension to the deceased should be notified of the death.

The estate inventory has to be carried out within three months of the death. Certain official documents are required about the deceased and their heirs for the inventory. Extracts from the population register can be ordered from the Central Registry or, for non-members of the church, from the Local Register Office.

## **Management and maintenance of the grave**

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The Burial Services of the Parish Union of Helsinki is in charge of matters pertaining to the management of a grave and grave maintenance agreements. The term of the exclusive right of burial is 25 years. The holder of the right of burial right does not own the actual grave, however, but the agreement is similar to a rental contract that can be extended after the expiry date. The ashes placed in the Kallio Church columbarium are kept there for 25 years, after which they will be interred in a grave carved in the rock under the church.

There are strict rules about who can be buried in a certain grave. In general, the right of burial only extends to family members. These strict rules have been created to avoid any disputes over graves.

The care of the grave is the responsibility of the holder of the exclusive burial right. You can do it yourself or outsource it to the Parish Union of Helsinki for one or more years at a time. Maintenance for a grave can be ordered from the Burial Services or cemetery offices. In areas where graves are tended by the cemetery staff, they will be maintained for a separate fee. The Parish Union tends the gardens of remembrance. Further information about the fees is available on the Parish Union of Helsinki website.

### **Tombstones**

The tombstone placed on the grave must comply with the memorial regulations of the Parish Union of Helsinki.

## Bereavement

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People experience bereavement in different ways. We all let go of a loved one in our own characteristic ways. Losing a loved one is always painful. Some of us wish to mourn in solitude. But talking to someone usually helps you process difficult emotions and find new possibilities. The support of family and friends in such situations can be indispensable.

Pastors and other parish staff are also happy to help. Talking to people is part of their work and something they have been trained for. Do not hesitate to turn to them for help if you feel like it.

Many parishes also organise bereavement support groups where you can talk with people in similar situations and receive peer support. You can enquire about support groups at the parish office or from parish staff. There is also information about support groups on the Parish Union of Helsinki website.

### **A perspective of hope**

All life is transient, and our time on earth is limited: “Everyone is but a breath”. But Christian faith brings a perspective of hope to the transience of human life. Death is not the end: there is something on the other side. Faith in resurrection and eternal life is one of the cornerstones of Christianity.

This faith also gives meaning to this life, helping those who have lost a loved one to carry on with their lives. Everyone has a task on earth, and when we have fulfilled that task, we are called home to our Heavenly Father.

A Christian burial makes a full circle of the journey that starts with baptism and ends with departure from this world to be with God. It is a way of being part of God’s life that transcends time and death. Death cannot separate us from God’s promises, resonant with the message of love, comfort and hope.

## Contact data

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### **The Burial Services of the Parish Union of Helsinki**

Kolmas linja 22, 00530 Helsinki

Reservations of graves and chapels, grave maintenance agreements, tel. 09 2340 6000

Extracts from the population register for estate inventories, tel. 09 2340 5000

Online service: [asiointi.helsinginseurakunnat.fi](https://asiointi.helsinginseurakunnat.fi)

[www.helsinginseurakunnat.fi](http://www.helsinginseurakunnat.fi)

## Cemetery chapels

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There are two chapels at the **Hietaniemi Cemetery**. The new chapel seats 160 on the ground floor and 65 in the gallery. The older chapel seats 50 people.

**The Malmi Cemetery** has three chapels. The big chapel seats 100 people and the Eastern and Western Chapels 50 people each.

There are two chapels at the **Honkanummi Cemetery**. The big chapel seats 120 people and the small one 60 people.

You can reserve a chapel at the Burial Services of the Parish Union of Helsinki.

## Cemetery offices

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tel. 09 2340 1111

## Parish offices

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Haagan seurakunta .....	09 2340 3200
Helsingin Mikaelin seurakunta .....	09 2340 4800
Helsingin tuomiokirkkoseurakunta .....	09 2340 6100
Herttoniemen seurakunta .....	09 2340 3300
Kallion seurakunta .....	09 2340 3600
Kannelmäen seurakunta .....	09 2340 3800
Lauttasaaren seurakunta.....	09 2340 4300
Malmin seurakunta .....	09 2340 4400
Munkkiniemen seurakunta .....	09 2340 5100
Oulunkylän seurakunta .....	09 2340 5300
Paavalin seurakunta .....	09 2340 5400
Pakilan seurakunta .....	09 2340 5500
Pitäjänmäen seurakunta .....	09 2340 5600
Roihuvuoren seurakunta .....	09 2340 5700
Töölön seurakunta .....	09 2340 6300
Vuosaaren seurakunta .....	09 2340 6500

### **Parish offices of the Swedish-speaking parishes**

Johannes församling .....	09 2340 7700
Matteus församling .....	09 2340 7300
Petrus församling .....	09 2340 7100

Opening times available at parish websites.

Death of a loved one is a difficult and emotionally painful event. In the midst of various emotions and questions, many practical things have to be organized. This guide has been made to help those organizing a funeral in Helsinki.

Although the organization of a funeral might feel difficult and seem hard, it can also be part of the mourning process and a way to find strength to continue on in life.

The Christian faith provides a perspective of hope alongside the grief and sadness of facing funerals and death. There is something behind the border as well, and the road there is already signposted.



LUTHERAN CHURCH  
IN HELSINKI