

Presbyterians prefer cremation, no funeral: Memorial services favored

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A funeral complete with casket? Plenty of Presbyterian pastors and parishioners polled on the matter prefer a memorial service to a funeral, and want their bodies cremated rather than buried.

The periodic survey by the Presbyterian Panel measured pastors' and members' thoughts about death and dying in late 2002; the findings were released last month. The survey went to 3,000 members, elders and ordained ministers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Forty percent of members and 53 percent of pastors want to be cremated; about 20 percent of respondents weren't sure. Among those who want to be cremated, one-third of pastors and members want their ashes scattered, while 30 percent of pastors and 25 percent of members want their ashes buried. About 13 percent from both groups want their ashes placed in a memorial columbarium, while only 4 percent of members and 1 percent of pastors want the ashes kept by a loved one.

Only one-third or fewer of respondents want a traditional funeral with their body present, while about half of members and two-thirds of pastors want a memorial service where their body is not present. Substantial majorities want a closed casket at their services, with fewer than 16 percent wanting an open one. Well more than half want a eulogy delivered by a pastor, while only one-third want a family member to deliver a tribute.

On the afterlife, 87 percent of members and 92 percent of pastors believe in heaven, whereas only 57 percent of members and 64 percent of pastors believe in hell. -

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