

The Church of England
Guild of Vergers



Advice on Marking the Death of a Senior National Figure



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Implementation on hearing of the death

Plans to mark a death should be implemented only when a formal announcement has been made. So, for instance, if news agencies are saying that “reports are coming in of the death of” it must be treated with caution. If possible, wait for a more definite announcement (perhaps along the lines that “it has been announced by Buckingham Palace/Downing Street that”).

Flag flying (see also Proclamation Day)

You should identify which flags are to be flown at half mast (half mast is achieved by raising the flag to mast head, waiting a short time, then lowering to ‘half mast’ which is about one full flag width from the top).

On the formal announcement of Death, all flags are to be lowered to half-mast until 0800hrs. on the morning following the Funeral.

In the case of the death of the Sovereign, the day following the death will be Proclamation Day (the day when the new Sovereign is proclaimed). On Proclamation Day flags will, at the start of the day, be flying at half mast.

All Flags will then be flown at the Mast-head from 1100hrs. on D+1 (Proclamation Day) to coincide with the Reading of the Principal Proclamation and until 1300hrs. the following day, i.e., D+2. This is because the Proclamation, having been read in London on Proclamation Day, will then be read in Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff on the day following Proclamation Day.

Liturgical Colour & Services

It would be appropriate, during D Day until D +10 (or D +8 for a Senior Royal) to move to Black or Purple. **On the death of the Sovereign on D +1** any Services for the new Sovereign on Proclamation Day should be Gold (or White) and revert back to Black or Purple following Evensong, Remember to change the words to the Responses & Preces to ‘O Lord, save the King’.

Candles

Keep a good supply of tea-lights in reserve somewhere, perhaps in addition to whatever votive candles are usually used. Think of where people will be able to light them and leave flowers and tributes if a large amount of space is needed. Silver foil covering steps or surfaces in church could be one way to allow greater space for candles/flowers.

Condolence books

This is a thought especially in major churches: it is not clear whether all parishes would need to offer this but Books of Condolence should be opened as soon as is practical on the day following the announcement. The suggestion is to buy smart black A4 ring binders and good quality paper rather than official condolence books. Then these can be endlessly expanded/replaced (some defamatory comments occasionally happen, so these can be removed) before being finally collected and sent in. Some stationery shops have ring binders with curved spines which look less 'office-y' than most. A couple of these plus a ream of smart cream vellum laid paper put aside somewhere in the church office or sacristy would be a good start (but make sure that someone in addition to the Incumbent knows where they are kept – in case of being away when the time comes).

Consider the setting and what should be provided: e.g. a good-sized table, covered with a suitable cloth, a chair, a clean blotter, a supply of pens and a desk lamp if necessary. If a suitable photograph is available that might be in a frame on the table, or a small flower arrangement.

Your Incumbent may wish to agree a form of words for a message, expressing sorrow at the news of the death. This may be the form of words that is included in a Press Release, Twitter or Facebook message and on the home page of your website.

Dependant on local circumstances it is suggested that Books of Condolence should be closed at the end of the day following the day of the funeral (i.e. if the funeral falls on a Thursday, Books should close at 5.00 p.m. on the Friday). Such Books of Condolence are essentially a local record of the sentiments expressed by local people on the death of a national figure. As such, they should form part of your church's archive, so that future generations are able easily to gain access to them and find out the way in which national events were marked in the area. It is simply not feasible for every Book from all such sad occasions to form part of the Royal Archives. However, in any letter of condolence from the church reference should be made to the Book of Condolence and its existence in the archives which then ensures that when that letter goes in to the Royal Archives it acts as an effective cross reference.

Events during the period of Mourning

From the day of the death until the day after the funeral, careful thought should be given to the types of events and activities take place in your church as some may not fit with the mood of the nation and as a mark of respect may need to be cancelled or postponed. This is a local decision and one which need to be reached with great sensitivity. Where school visits are planned it might be helpful for the Incumbent to spend time with the children, talking about the events that are unfolding. This again will need to be done with great sensitivity and should not be pressed upon any person who does not feel comfortable taking on such a role.

Proclamation Day

As stated in above, Proclamation Day is set to be the day following the death of the Sovereign (Day of Death plus 1).

The Proclamation will be made at St. James's Palace at 11.00 (or 14.00 if it is a Sunday – but this is to be confirmed). The Proclamation is then “cascaded”.

At noon on Proclamation Day it will be read at the Royal Exchange in the City of London.

At noon on D+2 it will be read:

In Edinburgh by Lord Lyon King of Arms at Mercat Cross and at the drawbridge to Edinburgh Castle;

In Cardiff by Wales Herald Extraordinary at Cardiff Castle;

In Belfast by Norroy and Ulster King of Arms

Once those Proclamations have been made it is appropriate for the Proclamation to be read at County, City, Borough and Parish level. High Sheriffs will cause the Proclamation to be read at County level and it is likely that Lord-Lieutenants will be alongside them.

Most High Sheriffs are expected to make their Reading at 2.00 p.m. on D+2 It is hoped that the wording of the Proclamation to be read out will be easily available and a watch should be kept on the Buckingham Palace website (www.royal.gov.uk) and the Privy Council website (www.privycouncil.org.uk). The High Sheriff will also have a copy of the Proclamation.

Dress Code

A view should be taken locally on what is the correct dress in the event of the death of a Senior National figure. Whilst flags are at half mast, it might be appropriate for black ties to be worn by staff.

Marking a Silence

The death of a Senior National figure may be marked by a National Two Minute Silence.

On the death of the Sovereign there will be a Two Minute Silence at 11.00 a.m. on the day of the funeral (D+10).

It may be that Silence will be kept for other member of the Royal Family, perhaps on the day of the funeral as part of the funeral service. However, action on a Silence for members of the Royal Family other than the Sovereign should await an announcement from Buckingham Palace.

Two further points especially in relation to The Sovereign

Forms of Service

It is hoped that some of the prayers/liturgy planned for a Vigil service which will be broadcast from St Paul's Cathedral will be made available ahead of time, to be adapted for use in local situations. There will be at least one Sunday, and possibly two, between the news of the death and the funeral, and it is likely that a lot of non-regular worshippers will come to church on the Sunday, as well as immediately after the news is announced. Parishes might want to think about any additional services they would offer: a special Evensong of thanksgiving and remembrance, for example, or a local Vigil, as well as what form the Sunday services might take. Talk to the organist/music leader about what hymns/songs/ anthems/ music might be possible at short notice, if it seems appropriate to amend what has already been planned for regular services.

Immediately after the news is announced, an official 'suite of resources' including liturgical propers and suggestions for personal prayer will be available on the Church of England website, but it is unlikely these will be available in advance before the regnal name for the new King has been confirmed.

National Anthem

It might be appropriate sing this at the end of one of the Sunday services. The new form (God save the King) is technically correct, according to the College of Heralds, from the moment the announcement of Her Majesty's death is made. If using the National Anthem at any point, print out the words, so that people don't get the words him/her wrong out of habit and feel upset by the mistake. Some cathedrals have a set of National Anthem words ready to print out/hand out to use at the end of Evensong on the day of the announcement - printed out precisely so that people don't stumble over the unfamiliar new form of the words.

RECOMMENDED TIMETABLE.

D Day (Day of Death)

Formal announcement (by Buckingham Palace/Downing Street)
Flags flown at half mast
Vigil at St Paul's Cathedral (no vigil services at other
Cathedrals)

D +1 (aka Proclamation Day)

1100 1st public reading of the Proclamation
1100 Flags to be flown at mast head
Books of Condolence opened

D +2 (aka local Proclamation Day)

1200 Proclamation read in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast
1300 Flags to be flown at half mast

D +3 – D +7

Books of Condolence

D +8 Day of Funeral of Senior Figure

1100 Two minute silence on the death of Senior Royal (not the
Sovereign)

D +9

Books of Condolence

D +10 Day of State Funeral in London

1100 Two minute silence for the death of the Sovereign

D +11 (Day after state funeral)

0800 Flags at Mast Head
1700 Books of Condolence to close