

Funerals with Bagpipes

Music is an integral part of funeral services. For hundreds of years, people have commemorated their bereavement with the music of the pipes. Perhaps it is the ancient scale of the instrument, or its soulful, haunting sounds.

The association of funerals and bagpipes stem from what they do best: touch the deepest emotions where words fail to reach. Regularly I am called upon to carry out these saddest of piping duties, though I take pride in being a small part of the tribute to a family member or someone's treasured friend.

If you require a piper for a funeral, you can be assured of my professional and dignified approach. The laying to rest of a dear one is a difficult time, yet the playing of the pipes at a funeral can signal both hope and love to those gathered.



Each service is unique and requires expertise of an experienced piper committed to providing the requisite grace and dignity. Traditional highland attire is a must for a proper appearance.

Piping can occur almost anytime during the church service and/or at graveside. Your church may have restrictions, so consult your clergy. Most funeral homes have their own on-site chapel, and have no objections to the pipes being played there.

The most requested time during a church or chapel service is at the Recessional. I take the lead position in front of the minister and pallbearers, playing as they exit the facility and continuing until the deceased is placed into the hearse. I arrive early enough to meet family members and assure that I will be performing as instructed. At smaller churches, I've remained outside to keep the volume level comfortable.

In the MidSouth, piping usually occurs at graveside:

- 1) I lead the casket as it is carried to graveside by pallbearers.
- 2) Upon completion of the minister's words or his benediction, I perform something appropriate.
- 3) And at the Dismissal, from a distance I play something slightly more upbeat.

If a military detail is rendering honors, there will be a additions, but all else remains basically unchanged. Go to www.midsouthfuneralpiper.com/military.html for details of what to expect at a military funeral.

The most requested tune is *Amazing Grace*. My *modus operandi* is to perform it with three verses. Upon reaching the 3rd verse, I turn around and walk away, while remaining in sight of the family. This creates a fading effect that is quite moving.

Traditionally, bagpipes are thought to possess mystical powers. Supposedly they are the only instrument that can be heard in Heaven. A piper helps to direct the departed souls towards Heaven's Gates. The walking away symbolizes the piper leading the departed to the Hereafter, yet stopping short of the Gate through which he cannot pass.

Based on my experiences, I offer the following:

1. In the Memphis area and beyond, I am privileged to be the in-house piper for several funeral homes. Before going to the trouble of seeking a piper, ask your funeral director. There's a very good chance he will

know me personally and can make the necessary arrangements. If not, inform him you have hired me to perform at the service. He certainly will have no objections.

2. Include the above information into the burial pre-arrangements. The funeral director will notify me and remove the burden of the initial contact from the family.

3. In the event that I cannot be secured for the funeral, there are other ways the memory of a loved one can be honored. It is standard practice in many churches that people are allowed to place flowers in memory of deceased family and friends. I have been asked by families to play during a regular worship service. Most churches welcome the opportunity and it will be received by a host of appreciative listeners.

Special Considerations...

- There are countless tunes written specifically for the pipes for any occasion. Bagpipes have a narrow range of 9 notes without accidentals and an odd scale, so many popular tunes are impossible to play. I possess a collection of over 350 hymns transcribed for the pipes though. Should you desire a specific hymn, I probably can perform it.

- If you personally contacted me to perform, it is especially considerate to inform the funeral director that a piper will be present. They go to great lengths to organize the service, so it is important they are aware of my attendance so they may include me in their Order of Service.

- If you are a family member or friend who wishes to hire me, I urge you to seek the family's permission of your intentions. Graveside is hardly the place for a "Surprise!"

- Funerals often have little notice and it's not unusual for me to have 1-3 services scheduled the same day. Please provide me as much advance notice as possible, and even better, do so before final plans are made so that details can be worked out with you to insure my presence.

Our weather can be extreme. Memphis can be scorching in July, or frigid in January. I have performed at gravesides when air temperatures rose above 100°. I've piped at wintry services with temperatures as low as 11°. And I've piped in drenching rains and thunderstorms - all successfully.

Please do not deny yourself my services at a loved one's service because of extreme weather and concern for my well being. I have the expertise, seasonal gear, and years of experience to make certain I am well prepared to perform as asked.



Kind regards,

J. Stephen Sanders

J. Stephen Sanders, Piper

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvxQJ5wvGwg>

