

Attending a Greek Orthodox Funeral

A Guide for the Non-Orthodox

Greek Orthodox funeral traditions are rich in faith and meaning. For those outside the faith, understanding these customs can bring comfort and confidence as you support a grieving family.

What to Expect

Greek Orthodox funerals center on the belief that death is not the end, but a passage to eternal life. Services emphasize prayer, community, and reverence for the body, which is seen as the temple of the Holy Spirit and always buried, never cremated.

A traditional funeral follows these steps:

- 1. Wake (Trisagion Service):** A prayer service led by a priest the evening before the funeral. Family and friends gather to pray and share memories.
- 2. Funeral Service:** Held in the church and lasting about an hour. Hymns, scripture, and prayers are offered, asking God to grant eternal rest to the departed. The casket is open, and mourners are invited to say goodbye.
- 3. Burial:** The priest leads final prayers at the gravesite. Guests may place flowers on the casket as a farewell.
- 4. Makaria ("Meal of Mercy"):** A shared meal—often including fish—brings loved ones together to remember the deceased and comfort one another.

Commemoration services are later held one week, 40 days, and one year after the funeral.

What to Wear

Dress modestly and in dark colors. Men typically wear suits or dress shirts and slacks; women often choose dresses or skirts and blouses that cover the shoulders and knees. Modesty honors the sacredness of the service.

Etiquette & Participation

- The casket will be open before the service. Orthodox attendees may kiss the icon or the deceased; as a guest, you may simply pause for a brief moment of reflection.
- Stand and sit when others do—simply follow the lead of those around you.
- You are welcome to attend the burial and meal afterward but are not expected to.

Supporting the Family

Your presence means a great deal. After the funeral, you may send a sympathy card, call, or visit briefly. White flowers or charitable donations are appropriate gestures of care. Food is generally not brought unless the family requests it.

Grief transcends faith traditions. Showing respect and compassion is the most meaningful way to support your friend or neighbor in their time of loss. For questions about a specific service, reach out to Horan & McConaty at (303) 745-4418.