# Lesson Element

# Funerals

### Learning outcome

This lesson element relates to ‘Beliefs and teachings and practices – The role of the church in the local community and living practices’ and in particular:

* Common and divergent attitudes of different Christian denominations towards and practices connected with funerals.

Learners will need to:

* Know some of the key elements of a Christian funeral and how the church supports those who are grieving.
* Understand that different denominations have varying attitudes and practices regarding funerals.
* Be able to create a guide to funerals using the information learnt during the lesson.

The following teacher instructions cover the learner activity section which can be found on [page 6](#_Student_Activity). This Lesson Element supports OCR GCSE (9‒1) Religious Studies.

**When distributing the activity section to the learners either as a printed copy or as a Word file, you will need to remove the teacher instructions section.**

### Introduction

Background:

Within Christianity, funerals can vary slightly according to denomination. Funerals also vary depending on their Eschatological beliefs. Some Christians believe that their body will be resurrected, as in the Apostle's Creed it says: *I believe in...the resurrection of the body...* and will therefore choose burial. However, some Christians will prefer cremation as they don’t believe in the resurrection of the physical body as St Paul said that:

*'on earth it is a physical body but in heaven it will be a spiritual body.'* (**1 Corinthians 15:43**)

There are many different elements to Christians funerals, these elements have religious and spiritual significance and also bring comfort to the bereaved. Some elements include: the singing of hymns, the saying of prayers, the use of flowers (often white), the use of candles and the saying of specific phrases that are universal to funerals ‘*ashes to ashes, dust to dust’.* The Church provides a place to conduct funerals or ‘celebrations of life’ and a place of closure for the bereaved. The church chosen to conduct the task is often the ‘home’ church of the deceased.

Prior Learning:

Rites of Passage and their significance, prayer. It would also be helpful if learners have considered Eschatological beliefs and teachings.

### Teacher preparation

Things to consider:

This is often a sensitive subject, many learners will have attended a funeral of some sort. It may be helpful to spend a little time at the beginning of the lesson allowing learners to discuss their experiences of funerals. As this is an emotive subject, please prepare yourself for unexpected questions here, for example ‘will I see \_\_\_\_\_ again in Heaven?’

Materials: Sticky notes, card sort, funerals information sheet, resources for learners to create a guide to funerals (this could include: card, pens and felt tips, computers or laptops).

### Activities

Four activities are suggested below, with the associated worksheets in the learner activity section on page 6.

**Activity 1: Starter activity**

It is valuable to encourage learners to consider not only what happens at funerals but to consider **why** we have them in the first place. If we were to assume the atheist stance that the deceased is simply ‘dead’ and there is no afterlife, why do we still conduct funerals? Write the question ‘Why do we have funerals’ on the board. Give learners one minute to think of an answer in silence. Learners write it on their sticky note after the minute and then share their answer with a partner. Give them two minutes to discuss their answers. Ask learners to bring their sticky notes up to the front and stick them onto something visible for the whole class (eg a whiteboard). Spend a few minutes going through their answers and discussing any issues that may arise from their thoughts (eg are their any views that are contentious? Do any views reflect learners spiritual and religious beliefs?)

**Activity 2: Thinking further**

Whilst watching the following video, learners are to further consider why funerals may be important to Christians, they may wish to make notes whilst watching. Learners can also make notes about what actually happens during a funeral service.

<https://www.truetube.co.uk/film/christian-funeral>

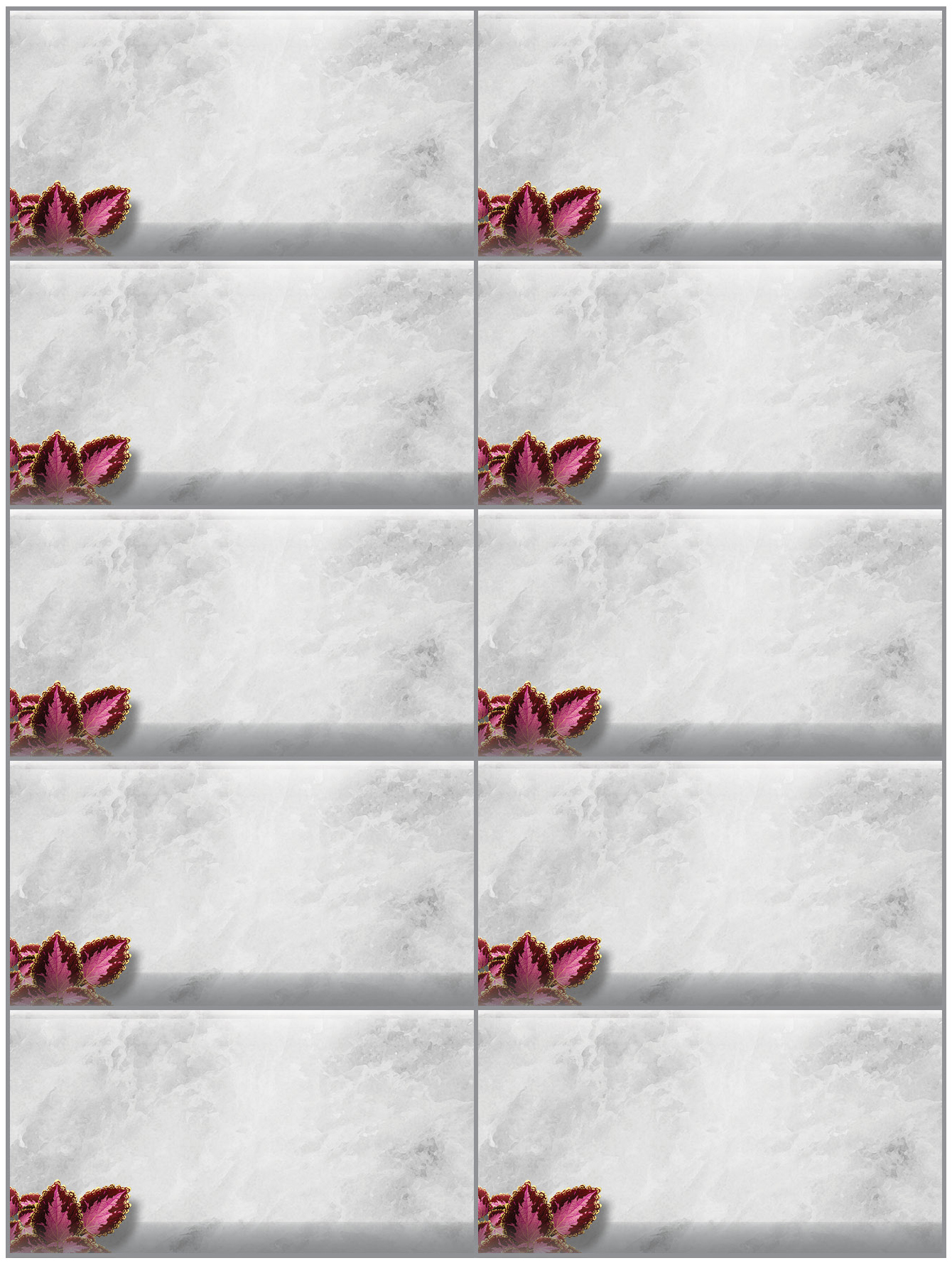
**Activity 3: Development task**

This activity is designed to teach learners about what happens in funerals and what the spiritual/religious significance of these actions are. Hand out card sort to learners. Learners must connect the element of the funeral to its meaning or connection to religious/spiritual belief.

To further develop their understanding, ask learners to discuss the statement ‘Funerals are more for the living than for the dead’. What do they think this means? Using the information they have learnt, do they think this is true – they must use their learning to support their answers.

Correct answers for the card sort are provided on the following page.

### Answers

**Element of the funeral:**  **Significance:**

Some Christians believe that their body will be resurrected, as in the Apostle's Creed it says:   
‘*I believe in...the resurrection of the body..’.* The grave also provides a place for mourners to visit to remember their loved ones.

Some Christians don’t believe in the resurrection of the physical body. This is because St Paul said that: *'on earth it is a physical body but in heaven it will be a spiritual body.'*

(**1 Corinthians 15:43)**

This is believed to shorten the deceased’s time in purgatory.

This reminds the grieving friends and family that God is in control of all things – that He will protect and guide them. It also reminds them that the deceased are now at peace.

This is to allow the cleansing of the soul. This purification process potentially shortens the deceased time in purgatory allowing them access to Heaven sooner.

The body is buried.

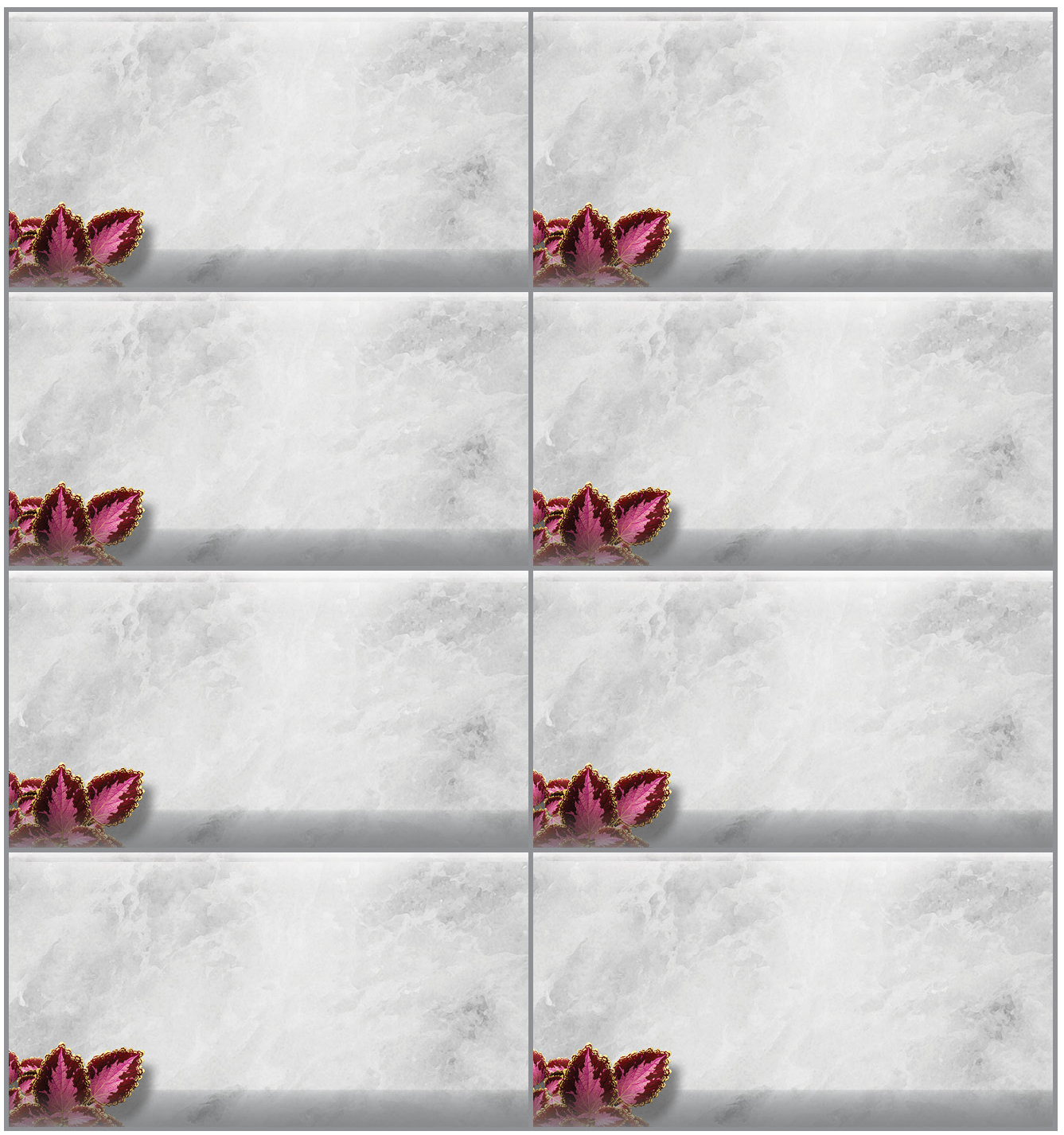
The body is cremated.

Requiem Mass – in the Catholic Church, intercessory prayers are said for the soul of the deceased.

Bible Readings – eg **Psalm 23:** *‘The Lord is my Shepherd … though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death I shall fear no Evil’.*

Last Rites – in the Catholic denomination, the priest visits the dying. They will pray with the dying, hear their last confession and anoint them with oil.

Flowers, often white, are laid on the coffin.

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This helps the mourners to grieve   
and helps them to remember the deceased. It allows them to demonstrate their love and to have closure and peace.

This shows that Jesus is the light of the world. It says in **John 8:12** “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

This demonstrates to those attending the funeral that God decides the time when we are born and the time that we return to the ground. It also reminds them of the creation story where Adam was formed out of the dust of the ground.

This represents the purity and peace of Heaven. They are also used to signify the hoped cleansing of the soul of the deceased, which, if pure, will be able to reach Heaven.

A eulogy is read. This is a description, often read by a loved one, of the deceased. It may include poems, images, stories of their life or music.

Candles are lit.

The priest sprinkles soil onto the casket as it is lowered into the ground whilst say ‘*ashes to ashes, dust to dust’*.

**Activity 4: Securing understanding**

This task seeks to secure the learners understanding and it can also be a useful revision tool for them closer to their examination. Learners read through the information on the webpage on their own in silence. They are to highlight key information, eg information about what happens in a funeral and the religious and spiritual significance of that action. Using the information from their card sort and the webpage, learners are to create a guide to funerals. Suggested success criteria for the guide could include: to include a detailed description of a funeral service, to include varying practices from two different denominations, to include at least two Bible Verses.

### Supporting/further information

<https://www.churchofengland.org/weddings-baptisms-funerals/funerals/the-funeral-service.aspx> - Additional information about funerals in the church of England which learners can use for the construction of their ‘guide to funerals’.

<http://request.org.uk/life/rites-of-passage/what-happens-at-a-christian-funeral/> - Additional information about funerals which learners can use for the construction of their ‘guide to funerals’

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/overview-of-catholic-funeral-rites.cfm> - Additional information about funerals in the Catholic church which learners can use for the construction of their ‘guide to funerals’.

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# Lesson Element

# Funerals

### Introduction

Within Christianity, funerals can vary slightly according to the denomination. Funerals also vary depending on beliefs about what happens after we die. For example, Catholic funerals involve a vigil for the deceased (prayers for the soul of the deceased), as they believe in purgatory. Some Christians believe that their body will be resurrected, as in the Apostle's Creed it says: I believe in...the resurrection of the body... and will therefore choose burial. However, some Christians will prefer cremation as they don’t believe in the resurrection of the physical body as St Paul said that: 'on earth it is a physical body but in heaven it will be a spiritual body.' **(1 Corinthians 15:43)**

There are many different elements to Christians funerals, these elements have religious and spiritual significance and also bring comfort to the those who are mourning. Some elements include: the singing of hymns, the saying of prayers, the use of flowers (often white), the use of candles and the saying of specific phrases such as ‘ashes to ashes, dust to dust’. The Church provides a place to conduct funerals or ‘celebrations of life’ and a place of closure for the bereaved. The church chosen to conduct the task is often the ‘home’ church of the person who has passed away.

**Activity 1**

Consider not only what happens at funerals but **why** we have them in the first place.

Think about this for one minute in silence. Write your thoughts on sticky notes and after the minute, share your answers with a partner.

You have two minutes to discuss your answers.

Bring your sticky notes up to the front and stick them onto the whiteboard for the whole class.

Spend a few minutes going through the answers and discussing any issues that may arise from all the thoughts.

**Activity 2**

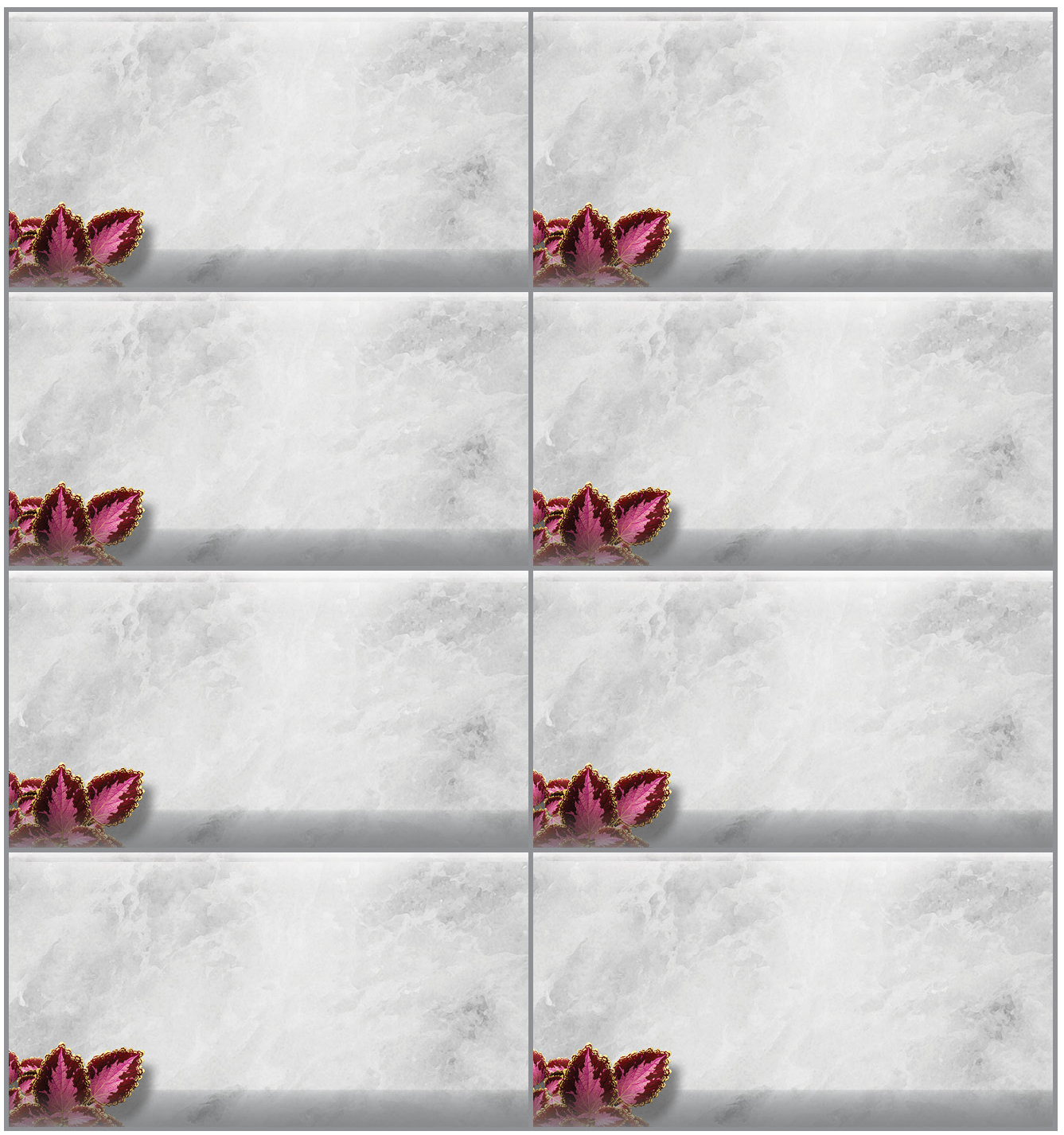
Watch the following video whilst making notes on why funerals may be important to Christians and what actually happens during a funeral service.

<https://www.truetube.co.uk/film/christian-funeral>

**Activity 3**

Information: Funerals have different elements, all of which have specific religious and spiritual importance. Some elements are only within the funerals of certain denominations, some elements are either/or: for example you cannot both be buried and cremated! Sort the cards provided by connecting the element of the funeral to what its significance is.

**Element of the funeral: Significance:**

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This is believed to shorten the deceased’s time in purgatory.

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and helps them to remember the deceased. It allows them to demonstrate their love and to have closure and peace.

This is to allow the cleansing of the soul. This purification process potentially shortens the deceased time in purgatory allowing them access to Heaven sooner.

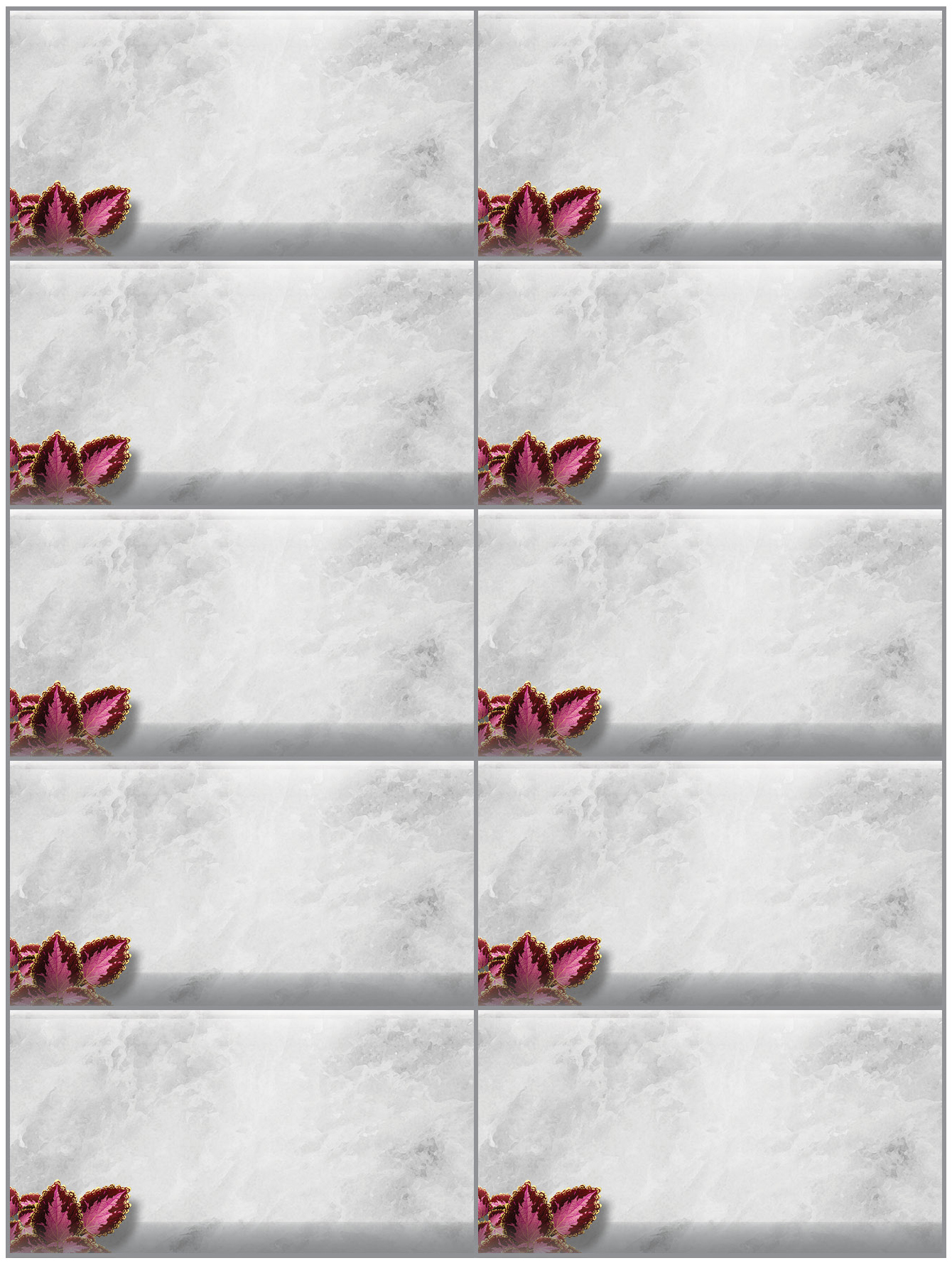
Some Christians believe that their body will be resurrected, as in the Apostle's Creed it says:   
‘*I believe in...the resurrection of the body..’.* The grave also provides a place for mourners to visit to remember their loved ones.

Flowers, often white, are laid on the coffin.

A eulogy is read. This is a description, often read by a loved one, of the deceased. It may include poems, images, stories of their life or music.

Candles are lit.

The priest sprinkles soil onto the casket as it is lowered into the ground whilst say ‘*ashes to ashes, dust to dust’*.

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This reminds the grieving friends and family that God is in control of all things – that He will protect and guide them. It also reminds them that the deceased are now at peace.

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(**1 Corinthians 15:43)**

The body is buried.

The body is cremated.

Requiem Mass – in the Catholic Church, intercessory prayers are said for the soul of the deceased.

Bible Readings – eg **Psalm 23:** *‘The Lord is my Shepherd … though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death I shall fear no Evil’.*

Last Rites – In the Catholic denomination, the priest visits the dying. They will pray with the dying, hear their last confession and anoint them with oil.

**Activity 4**

Read through the information on the following webpage on your own in silence.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/ritesrituals/funerals.shtml>

As you go through highlight key information eg information about what happens at a funeral and why. Imagine you are creating a leaflet to guide Christians in the planning of a funeral. You need to inform them of what needs to be included in a funeral and why.