Preparing Vibrant Funerals and Memorial Services

*With Changes Everywhere!*

Missouri Hospice and Palliative Care Association
Chaplaincy Level One

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Anything Can Be Appropriate Today
From clowns to ice cream trucks to strippers... The things that happen at funerals today are totally foreign to the old traditional funerals.
Traditions are Changing

The Old and Traditional

The New and Weird
Trends in Funeral Service

• As a leading voice for funeral service, NFDA has been tracking trends and working with funeral directors and consumers for 125 years. Today's families are bringing new values, preferences and opinions that are changing the world of funeral service. They are thinking differently about how they want to honor their loved ones and have new perceptions of the funeral service profession.
Some Changing Approaches

• The Popularity of Personalization
• Advance Funeral Planning
• Cremation on the Rise
• Meeting Consumer Needs Through Technology
• Green Funerals

Times are Changing

• Funerals are a difficult time, regardless of your relationship with the person who has died. Funerals aren't what they were a decade ago, however. Increasingly personal and unique, with an increase in non-traditional funeral services, it is oftentimes challenging to determine what is or isn't appropriate, from how to express grief to funeral etiquette in changing times. There is no right or wrong answer, but the guiding principle should be your concern for the wishes of the family.
• http://www.infinitycremationsociety.com/blog/funeral-etiquette-in-a-changing-world
While there may be no “right or wrong” ways to do a funeral there are certainly personal tastes to consider. As you plan a vibrant funeral or memorial service you should consider the following key steps:
Personalization

• Values are different with different generations.
  – Music
  – Faith
  – Dress
  – Hobbies and Interests
  – Passions
  – Family
Advance Funeral Planning

• An increasing number of adults find preparing in advance for the inevitable is a wise decision.
  – Pre-planning can be done with or without pre-paying.
  – Some people are intent on what they want to happen on their behalf.
  – Other people want to help guide their families through that which is normally a hard time.
Advance Funeral Planning (2)

• Some people want nothing to do with planning their own funeral.
• Others also want nothing to do with the planning of a loved one’s funeral. They would prefer that someone else do it.
• The minister or celebrant’s preparation must be as thorough as possible.
Cremation is on the Rise

• Nearly 50% of Americans are now taking the option of Cremation.
  – Direct cremation without viewing. Often there is a Memorial Service either immediately or later.
  – Viewing and funeral service with cremation afterwards.
Meeting Consumer Needs Through Technology

• Seeing the new mourning trends -- and the potential to create new revenue streams -- the conservative funeral industry is cautiously entering the digital arena.

• "Funeral homes are looking to reinvent themselves in many ways," said Tributes.com's Haney. "You're hard-pressed to go to a wake anymore where there isn't video tribute on a flat panel, vs. pictures on a bulletin board."
Green Burials

• Green burials are a relatively “new” practice based on techniques used by some cultures for thousands of years. Green burial generally means that the body, which is not embalmed, is buried in an eco-friendly casket or shroud in a manner that allows it to return to the earth as quickly as possible. That is why green burials are also called natural burials or eco-burials.
A Vibrant Funeral?

Vibrant: having or showing great life, activity, and energy; very bright and strong.

How in the world can a funeral or memorial service be “vibrant”? 
Planning is the Key!

• **Be true to yourself.**

• You can reach outside your comfort zone, but it is hard to make a funeral meaningful if you do not believe in what you are doing.

• Have some general personal guidelines as to what YOU think should be in a funeral service and then be very flexible.
Ask Questions

• Ask them of yourself. Ask questions of the family. Ask questions of the hospice staff.
• Don’t presume or pretend to know that which you do not.
  – What is your relationship with the deceased and their family?
  – What do you hope to accomplish in this phase of your spiritual care?
  – What does the “next of kin” desire from the service?
  – How well do you know the deceased? Sometimes you will find out more about them after their death than you did during their life.
Questions to ask the family about their deceased loved one:

• Ask, “What is your favorite experience or story about the deceased? Look for humor, compassion, hobbies, music, pets, jobs, work, and relationships.

• How would you briefly describe the unique person the deceased was? How did they influence you and others?

• Had the deceased expressed any final wishes concerning his/her funeral?

• Did the deceased or do you have any favorite scripture verses, poems, books, stories or songs.
Will there be Music?
Music

• Has the family chosen music for the service?
• What is it?
• Remember, in today’s society, if it was meaningful to the deceased or to the family it is usually appropriate. You may not be familiar with the music. You may even find it personally repulsive, but this is not your funeral.
What Kind of Music?
Commonly Requested Songs

- 1 – My Way (Frank Sinatra)
- 2 – Wonderful World (Louis Armstrong)
- 3 – Time To Say Goodbye (Andrea Bocelli and Sarah Brightman)
- 4 – Unforgettable (Nat King Cole)
- 5 – The Wind Beneath My Wings (Bette Midler)
- 6 – Amazing Grace (various artists)
- 7 – We’ll Meet Again (Vera Lynn)
- 8 – Over The Rainbow (Judy Garland)
- 9 – Abide With Me (Harry Secombe)
- 10 – Danny Boy (various artists)
Actual Songs Used

• **Most unusual funeral songs:**
  • 1 – The Show Must Go On (Queen)
  • 2 – Stairway To Heaven (Led Zeppelin)
  • 3 – Highway To Hell (AC/DC)
  • 4 – Another One Bites The Dust (Queen)
  • 5 – I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead (Bon Jovi)
  • 6 – Always Look On The Bright Side of Life (Monty Python)
  • 7 – Ding Dong The Witch Is Dead (The Wizard of Oz)
  • 8 – Hit The Road Jack (Willie Nelson)
  • 9 – I’m Too Sexy (Right Said Fred)
  • 10 – Australian Football League club songs of the South Australia.
Jazz Funeral in New Orleans

And the music swings!
Will there be a family member who wants to give a Eulogy?

• If not, would the family members like to write down their memories to be read by the clergy?
• Some families want to open the “floor” to any and all comments by friends and family members.
• Remember that you will be the moderator and that there will need to be moderation. If a family member gives a prepared eulogy you will want to know if the obituary is also to be read. Sometimes there is needless repetition.
Participation

• Will family members participate in any other way? Music, flowers, balloon/butterfly release, etc.

• If you do not know the family well you might ask, “Are there any family dynamics I should know about before the service?”
Will there be a military, lodge or club participation.
Ask, ask, ask!

- You should probably ask the family what they expect from you for the service. It may range from “whatever you think is best”, to, “keep it short and sweet.” Or, they may be ready to tell you exactly what they want.
The Celebrants Preparation

• If possible attend the wake, or visitation, to provide bereavement condolence and to get to know the family and to be known.

• Use the information you have collected and your own personal experience with the deceased to make the service personal. The message should honor the deceased and encourage the bereaved. The message will become a paradigm of all your preparation and the people’s response. It should include part or all of the information collected arranged to provide the greatest comfort.
The Order of Service

• In many circumstances the minister will provide the order of service. This would include placement of the service elements such as the music, club participation, eulogies, etc. Consider the placement of items as to their effect. A particularly emotion invoking song might not be best at the close of the service and certainly might not be best just before the funeral message.
Immediately Prior to Service

– Your script or outline is ready.
– You have prepared personally by your own “centering” or “focus” method. For many it will be prayer for God’s help and for some it might be a cup of tea, or both.
– Arrive at least 30 minutes early and arrive calm and collected. Thirty minutes gives you time to meet and exchange instructions with the funeral home staff and to greet the family and allow information and ministry exchange.

• Be ready to start on time.
The Graveside Service

• Be considerate of personal comfort during the graveside portion of the service. Elements to consider are weather, age of attendees and convenience of the cemetery. A veteran’s cemetery often has a very short window of time between graveside services.

• Know ahead of time if a memorial activity is planned.
During the Funeral or Memorial Service

• Turn off your phone and other electronic devices which might cause interruption.
• Pay attention to what is happening with participants.
• Pay attention to what is happening with the attendees.... Read your audience and be ready to make modifications. This particular audience has never been assembled before and their interaction is vital to vibrancy.
• Speak clearly to be understood. Honor the deceased, honor the traditions and encourage the bereaved.
Close the Service and Graveside

• Bring a closure to the service. In other words, close it smoothly in such a way that the attendees know “this is the end” of the service.

• Follow prearranged ending design with the funeral home staff.
Memorial Release
'For pity's sake. Will somebody switch off that Tina Turner racket? I'm trying to rest in peace!'
Ivan Blatt, worst casket salesman ever....

“Now, what’s it going to take to get you into one of these today?”
Happy Trails Funerals

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