

## **Planning A Funeral Service**

As ideas and conventions linked to the type of funeral people want change, so too have many people's attitudes to the type of funeral or memorial service they want. One of the fundamental aspects of many of the rites associated with world religions is the celebration of the person's life and more and more people want a service that reflects this and helps create a lasting memory.

People are beginning to request services that are more personal and that adequately reflect the person and the sort of life they led. Favourite music, both classical and contemporary is increasingly common, particularly at crematorium and people now often incorporate photographs or mementoes

Because of the taboo that is associated with discussion, planning or preparation for death by anybody other than those closest to it, any expression of preference or forward planning is considered macabre and untimely. It seems that we plan for so many things in life, some of which may never happen, such as taking out travel, accident or terminal illness insurance cover, so it must strike us as absurd not to plan for the one thing guaranteed to happen to us all.

### **Some Useful Facts**

1. There is no legal requirement to have any kind of funeral ceremony at all
2. There are no legal statutes governing what form any ceremony should take
3. You are not required to use a clergyman
4. The funeral service does not have to be in a licensed building - it can be held in your home (unless you want an Anglican service in England)
5. You are not required to use a coffin (but may be required to use one by local bylaws if using an official cemetery or crematorium)
6. You can be buried on private land, such as your garden (see page on Organising a Green/Woodland/ Alternative Funeral)

### **Simple Ways to Personalise a Funeral Service**

1. Consider the music - you may not want to use the organ, but prefer a CD or cassette player, or even a live musician. Discuss it with relatives, the minister officiating and the cemetery/ crematorium staff.
2. Think about individual contributions such as an address, a reading, poem or favourite story. Plan a running order so that those contributing know when to do so.
3. Consider personal items that might help to reflect the person who has died, or that might make the ceremony more special, such as scented candles, a special throw to drape over the coffin or a photograph of the person
4. Consider the seating. It may be that if it is not fixed, seats can be placed in a semi-circle for a less formal atmosphere.
5. Hand people a memento as they leave - after a service I attended, everyone was handed a sprig of rosemary which is an emblem of remembrance.

### **Music**

Whilst many traditional hymns can be quite comfortingly familiar, they are essentially religious and may not always be appropriate. Traditional church services may be more difficult to personalise, but certainly crematoriums and other private ceremonies offer a much wider scope for musical choice. The broad range of music performed at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, including Elton John's rewritten version of 'Candle in the Wind' cleverly reflected the wide range of tastes and ages of her many admirers around the world. It also showed that it is possible to vary from the traditional and still be dignified and uplifting.

However, it is important when choosing music to remember that what to one person might be fun and a statement about the person that has died, others may find it offensive.

If you would like to share the music you have found inspiring or that you have specially chosen for yourself or a loved one, then please email us on [info@ifishoulddie.co.uk](mailto:info@ifishoulddie.co.uk)

### **Readings**

The use of W H Auden's poem in the film 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' showed how powerful the written word can be at a funeral, and how a reading can make a lasting impression. There are many readings and poems that are appropriate and can be used to personalise a traditional church service or make a service less religious. Keep in mind whether the service is trying to convey a sense of the celebration of life or reflecting the agony of loss. It is also worth checking that the reader is able to cope with what will inevitably be a highly emotional moment.

See our page on poems and do contact us and let us know whether you have come across a quotation, poem or reading that has been particularly moving or comforting to you, on [info@ifishoulddie.co.uk](mailto:info@ifishoulddie.co.uk)

<http://www.ifishoulddie.co.uk/planning.htm>