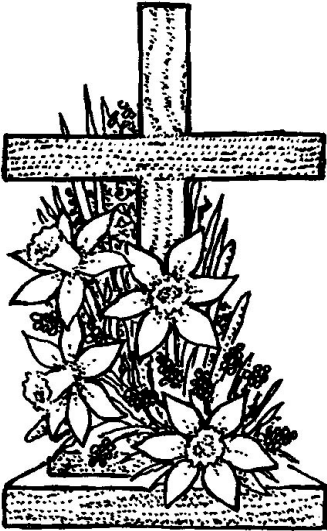


The best time to plan your funeral is ... NOW!



Introduction

November is when we remember the dead (All Saints and Remembrance).

But what about your own funeral?

It will happen sometime, whether soon or years in the future. Some preparation by you now will save your loved ones a lot of uncertainty later.

So this month, as a one-off special, we offer you the following insert on how to plan your own funeral.

Most funerals in England are Christian, though the officially recorded number of Church of England funerals tends to be limited to those which are conducted by parish clergy and Readers. The minister at others may be retired, or a hospital or military Chaplain.

A few funeral events are led by nominees of the British Humanist Association or the National Secular Society. A growing number are conducted by civil celebrants, who tend to devise a format concentrating on the story of the person who has died, with God as an afterthought, though Christian prayers or texts from other religions may be incorporated.

Parishioners may not realise that they have the right to the services of the Vicar, even if they don't go to church. They also have the right to be interred in the churchyard if it is open for burials.

The trend in funerals at the moment is to make them a celebration of the life of the deceased person. Although your wish – and that of your family – may be to make your funeral a joyful occasion, it does no one any good to suppress grief. A Christian service should make room for sadness as well as gratitude. It is also an act of worship, in which reverence should be paid to God, the source and goal of life. His judgment, generosity and mercy and the Christian hope in resurrection through Jesus Christ should be central.



A sensitive funeral service will also help mourners to contemplate the most fundamental issues of our existence. The Christian hope can be an unexpected encouragement, not least when people claim to have little faith of their own.

You can talk all this over with your Vicar in confidence. You don't have to be terminally ill to do so! He or she knows you are precious to God and will be able to explain all the options and share some ideas.

Now for some practical considerations:

First of all, if you are an organ donor, where can your consent form be found?

(Find out more from www.organdonation.nhs.uk/how_to_become_a_donor)

Do tell your Executor and next of kin where your Will is kept. Details of your funeral wishes can be kept with it or in a more accessible place. It is useful to maintain a list of family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances and former colleagues who should be notified of your death and the funeral arrangement.

IT'S YOUR FUNERAL – Check List

You may like to fill in the blanks below and keep these pages.

Who is your Executor?

Which funeral director?

Cremation or burial?

If cremation, what do you want done with your ashes?

If burial, where?

Will it require re-opening an existing grave?

Do you want a headstone?

Note: churchyard memorials must respect diocesan regulations.

Funeral Service: in church or crematorium, or both?

What sort of coffin? Have you considered an eco-friendly one (eg cardboard, bamboo, wicker)?

Do you want flowers, or donations to a (named) charity, or both?

Who should conduct the service?

Do you want someone else to give a tribute?

Would you like some of your favourite music played before and after the service?

What hymns and readings do you want?

Wake/reception: any suggestions for the place and type?

Is there anyone who needs to know that you have forgiven them?
Do you owe an apology to anyone?

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU AFTER DEATH?

Whether your body is buried or cremated, the remains degenerate and go back into the earth. That's where they belong, for our bodies are composed of the earth's elements. Your dead body expressed the real 'you' during your lifetime.

But once it has done its job, that is not the finish! When Christians say, "I believe in... the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting", it means that we await the new destiny which God has opened for us, with a transformed body apposite for its new environment.

Some claim that the human soul is immortal, but that is not a Christian belief. We do not become disembodied spirits floating around the ether, but will be refashioned as recognisable human beings. This will be as momentous an event as the emergence of the human race from its primitive beginnings.

St Paul faced hard questioning on the subject. If you have a look at the whole of 1 Corinthians 15 you will see how he couples our bodily resurrection with the Resurrection of Christ. Resurrection was central to the apostles' preaching and teaching: try to find a sermon in the New Testament which ignores it! The Christian faith would be valueless without it, for Christ demands that we live our lives sacrificially – some will be martyred as a consequence – with our hope beyond the horizon.

All this is much more than a collection of statements of faith. They could seem arid to a dying person. It is an invitation to take a conscious decision to trust Jesus the Christ. Our life before and beyond the grave belongs to Christ. He is the pioneer who charted the course through death; He accompanies us on our journey; He is our advocate at the Last Judgment; He is worshipped in heaven and He alone is the Saviour who bore the brunt of human sin and gave his life to overcome its consequences. Trust him!

With thanks to the Ven. John Barton for permission to use his helpful guide.