

# What's so great about a Church of England Funeral?

A mother talks about the funeral of her son Daniel Sullivan

Across the globe, funeral services are used to mark the end of a person's life on Earth. Often, family and friends come together to express grief, give thanks for the life lived and commend the person into God's keeping.

Everyone in England is entitled to a Church of England burial service or to have their ashes buried in their local parish churchyard by their local parish priest (as long as the churchyard is still open). This is true for everyone irrespective of whether they are regular church-goers or not.

When Daniel Sullivan died suddenly at 43 from a heart attack, it was a terrible shock for his family and his new wife Carly. Dan was at work on what should have been a normal day, so his family and friends were completely unprepared.

Dan's mother Gail explained, "Dan worked in the family business and there was a lot of stress in his life. He was a bit over-weight with high cholesterol and he was a smoker. He had been planning to move to Norfolk with Carly, to have a quieter life with less pressure. That day, he had said that he didn't feel very well, but he wasn't specific. He died in October 2013 and we were all completely devastated. He was at work and just put his head on the desk. People thought he was just resting, but he

was actually suffering a heart attack. He did make it to hospital but died two weeks later. He was my eldest child and without my other children, I think I would have cracked up."

Not really church-goers, Gail, Carly and the family visited Hever after his death because that was where Dan and Carly had been married. As they looked across the historic village, they saw the church

and decided to contact the Vicar (the Rev Jane Weeks) because her details were on the church notice board. Half expecting Jane to refuse to conduct Dan's burial service because they were not known to her, they were pleasantly surprised when Jane readily agreed to help them plan the funeral, saying that she would conduct the service. She also offered them pastoral support which they were glad to receive.



If you would like to know more about planning a Church of England funeral, please visit: <https://www.churchofengland.org/weddings-baptisms-funerals/funerals.aspx>

Gail said, "The Rev Jane Weeks has been absolutely amazing. If there is such a thing as a cool vicar, then she is one! I still see her every three or four weeks or so and she has offered a lot of back up and support. It's been very hard. We are not really church people but we try to go each Christmas and Easter. Jane does such a wonderful job and she works really hard. I took my grandchildren at Christmas. They enjoyed it."

Arranging Dan's funeral so that it was personal and meaningful to the family was very important to Gail. She explained, "Dan used to sing Elvis songs – he sang at his own wedding and at my daughter's wedding. We chose to have 'The Wonder of You' at his funeral because he would have liked that and it reminded us all of his singing. He was wonderful and had a gift for cheering people up even if they were having a rough time. I had a chat with Rev Jane about the service and

what to include because we were all still in shock and on auto pilot. She was brilliant! She helped us to choose the hymns and readings and my daughter-in-law read the eulogy and did a wonderful job."

There are lots of hard decisions to make after someone dies, and one of those is about whether to have your loved one cremated or buried.

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Gail decided to have Daniel buried in the churchyard at St Peter's Church, Hever. She said, "It's a lovely little churchyard. The headstone can't be positioned yet, so it is marked with a cross and a beautiful border for now. We also have a tree at Hever for him and Rev Jane was kind enough to bless that for him. I'm sure all vicars are different, but we have been tremendously lucky. We have had such wonderful pastoral support from Jane and I have also had some bereavement counselling. I used to think you just go to a funeral service and that's it; the end and you just leave. But I can't praise her enough. Her services are fantastic. She puts her heart and soul into it – and this is from someone who was never a church-goer! She is a real people person with her own family doing a job she loves. She has a real calling."