
A Guide for Planning

Chances are that if you're reading this, someone you love has died. As you navigate through all of the feelings that brings up, know that we're so sorry for your loss and we're here for you.

One of the ways we can be here for you is by helping you create a ceremony to both mourn and celebrate your loved one. We believe that one way we can experience healing, solidarity, and peace is by taking time to cry, grieve, and lament your loss, and to celebrate and give thanks for the gift they were and will always be.

This can be overwhelming. We'll walk you through every step of this and help you create a service that's personalized, meaningful, and helps you find a bit of comfort and peace.

These guidelines are to help you get started. In it we'll cover some of the main questions people have and offer some suggestions to assist you in planning a service.

Two things to start with:

Take some deep breaths and know that you're not alone in handling this. We believe that God, that the Source of Life that holds the world together and keeps it moving forward, is most present at times of grief and loss. So there's that comfort in this.

Our minister and our staff are also here to help you get through this difficult time. Our goal is to not only help you craft a beautiful, meaningful and reverent service, but also do what we can to take some of that stress off your shoulders so that you and your loved ones can simply show up at the service and be present in whatever way all of you need to be. This isn't all on you to pull off.

Second, there's no right or wrong way to do these

When it comes down to these ceremonies and sacred events, there is no right or wrong way to do them. You can't do it wrong so let that anxiety fall away.

It's not about doing certain things but rather about finding a balance between creating a service that honors your loved one, your needs and grief. It's less about creating a service that looks a certain way than about creating a service that allows people to mourn and celebrate.

Mourn and celebrate

Even though there is no right or wrong way, there's still something to be done at these services.....and that is.....taking the time to mourn and celebrate.

It's about taking time to let out the emotions we may be experiencing: grief, anger, sadness, despair, loneliness and confusion. It's about taking time to do this because grief, if it's anything, is love persevering. It's an expression of the love we still have for those who have died.

So, as we plan this service, these are the things we'll make sure we do, in some way or another. But again, try not to stress - we're here to help you figure it out.

Helping People Arrive: Welcome, Prayer & Music

We begin by welcoming and thanking people for being here and helping them be present by framing what it is we're doing and offering some grounding practices. Sometimes this is a prayer and a hymn, other times it's a breathing exercise and a favorite song. Whichever way, it's a time of helping people arrive and to be present so we can mourn and celebrate together.

Sharing Our Stories

This is the most important part of the whole service.

While it doesn't *have* to happen, we do encourage it. Traditionally this would be a eulogy where a biography is offered, but what we tend to encourage is a sharing stories, of who this person was and the impact they made. This way we get to know the person, celebrate them, hear about the loss, and remember that we all have a story to share. This should be no more than 2-3 people sharing with a maximum time of 15 to 20 minutes.

Photos

This is an optional part of the service but a nice follow up to the stories. It's a chance for the family to put together a slideshow of photos to some meaningful music. This should be no longer than 8 minutes.

Reflection

Typically the Minister would say a few words at this point. This is a chance for them to offer some helpful words and wisdom about what you can do with your grief and what you should remember as you celebrate and mourn your loved one.

Prayers and Music

This is another good spot for some music, prayers or spiritual practices to be offered. Whether it's their favorite song, a prayer, poem, or reading, this can be a chance to end the service on the right note, whatever that happens to be.

Invitation and Blessing

At the very end of the service there will be an invitation to a reception (if there is one) and a blessing over the urn, casket or photo and those in attendance. After that, some music can play and the family will leave when they are ready.

Again, it's just a template but this may be a helpful guide for you as you begin to think about what can be included in the ceremony. If you wish to depart from this, that's totally okay. This is to help get things started.

Other things to consider

The best way to show your love and respect is not through expensive caskets, urns, flowers or a big party, but through the words and grief you offer.

The aesthetics and receptions are beautiful and wonderful tributes to offer, but what will make the biggest difference in the service and in your own healing, will be allowing yourself space to mourn and celebrate. If it comes down to choosing between flower arrangements and looking after yourself, always, always, choose you.

That's where funeral homes can be very helpful. It will be an expense, but it will allow you to focus on you by allowing them to take care of the details.

You aren't hosting. We can't say this enough. If a friend or family member dies and it falls to you to arrange and plan the service, when it comes to the day - you - are - not - hosting. That can't be your job. Lean on some friends to help with the hospitality and arrangements on the day of so you can do you and be however you'll be that day. Again, this is where a funeral home can be very helpful.

"Do we cremate?" We get asked this a lot. People ask if God cares whether it's a burial or a cremation, and they're also trying to figure out what their loved one would prefer. The answer is pretty straightforward: God doesn't care and your loved ones will understand. Do whatever you can afford.

Another big question is "when a service is held"? The answer is "whatever works best for you." Sometimes it's best to hold it within a week or so and sometimes it's better to hold off and wait upwards of a couple weeks or months. We can talk this through with you but know that it's better to wait and be in the right frame of mind and space than to rush.

Who creates the funeral cards? We suggest this is done by the funeral home. They have the technical equipment to create these in a professional manner that exceeds our ability here. We'll take over from there.

Guest Book? If you'd like a guest book, please select and purchase one based on your preference. You just need to bring it to the service and we'll set that up for you.

What now?

The first step is getting in touch with us and having a discussion. Together we'll walk through all of this and get started. The goal of that first discussion will be to let you know that you're not alone in this and get the ball rolling.