PROVIDING COMFORT CHonoring Your Legacy

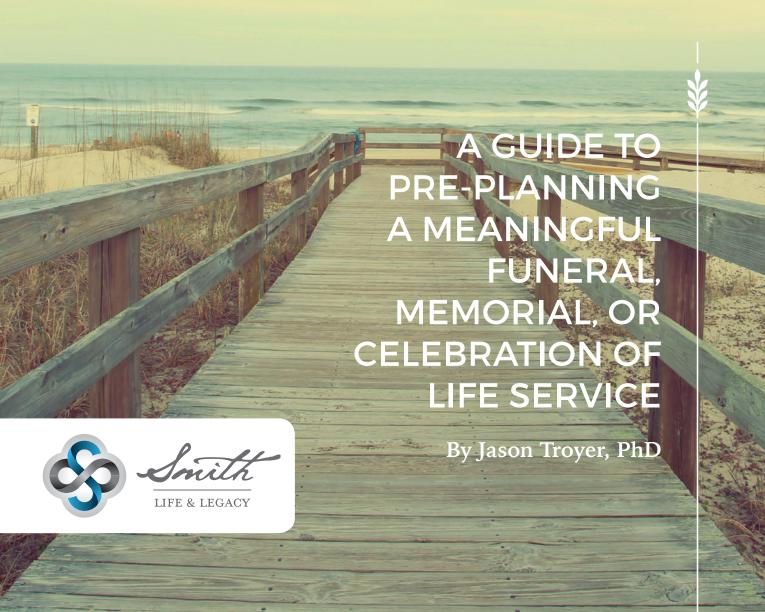


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The Benefits of Using this Booklet

- Plan a service that brings healing to your loved ones.
- Create a service that attendees will find comforting, memorable, and meaningful.
- Discover the wide variety of funeral service options available.
- Generate ideas and questions to explore with your pre-planning counselor or funeral professional.



To the Reader,

Pre-planning your funeral, memorial service, or celebration of life event is a valuable gift for your loved ones and yourself. As a psychology professor and former counselor who studies grief, I have seen firsthand how pre-planning your service can benefit you and your family.

There are 3 significant benefits to pre-planning your service:

- 1) It provides comfort to your grieving family by allowing time to design personalized rituals that will ease their grief.
- 2) It removes the financial and decision-making burden from your loved ones at a time when they are overwhelmed and helps avoid emotional over-spending.
- 3) It allows you to have a voice in creating a custom event that honors your values and shares your legacy.

Because there are so many different ways to create a service that accomplishes these benefits, I have written this booklet to help you plan a service that will be of most benefit to your loved ones.

I encourage you to take some time to think about your options, discuss them with your loved ones, and then put your plan into action. Be sure to create a list of questions and preferences to discuss with your pre-planning counselor or funeral professional.

Let me assure you that pre-planning your service is a gift for your loved ones. I hope this booklet answers your questions and helps you create a funeral, memorial service, or celebration of life that brings healing to your loved ones and commemorates your legacy.

Sincerely,

Jason Troyer, PhD

BENEFITS OF PRE-PLANNING

Your Funeral, Memorial Service, or Celebration of Life Service

Easing Your Loved One's Grief

The most important reason for pre-planning your services is that it allows you to create an event that will bring healing and support to your loved ones. Unfortunately, we have all attended funerals where the family was not comforted by the funeral service. This is not a flaw of funerals – this is what happens when funerals are planned without considering the needs of the bereaved. Throughout this booklet I will guide you through the important questions that will help you plan a funeral, memorial, or celebration of life service that is a comfort to your loved ones.

Peace of Mind

Pre-planning your funeral, memorial service, or celebration of life can give you peace of mind in knowing that you are looking out for the needs of your family. You can rest assured that your family members will be able to focus on their grief and supporting one another instead of worrying about money or what you would like them to do. Upon your passing, your family members will grieve you; their grief and sense of loss is inevitable and nothing can change that. However, by pre-planning your service you have the opportunity to remove many unnecessary burdens.

Have a Voice in How You're Remembered

Pre-planning your services gives you the opportunity to share your life story and make important choices regarding how you will be remembered. While some people are not concerned with this, others want to have a hand in crafting their service. This could include the items (e.g., flowers, casket, etc.), the details of the service (e.g., selecting songs, readings, etc.), and the location of the event.

Removing a Financial Burden from Your Loved Ones

Surviving family members consistently mention that having the service pre-paid is incredibly comforting and helpful. Given that funerals, memorial services, and celebration of life ceremonies occur within days after the loss, it can be very stressful for your family to be worried about how they will pay for the service. Even worse, some families will be forced to take high interest loans (credit card cash advances, signature loans, pay-day loans, etc.) to pay your final expenses. You can remove this financial burden by pre-planning and pre-paying for your service, and your family can focus on supporting one another and healing.



Cremation and Your Service Options

If you choose cremation, your family can still receive the benefits of all 5 components of funeral, memorial, or celebration of life services. For example, you can arrange to have a private viewing, a public visitation, a ceremony, and then choose to be cremated before being placed in your final resting place (e.g., burial, columbarium, scattering, etc.), and conclude with a reception.

You may choose to be cremated before other services are conducted. In these cases you may plan to have an urn at the various service components including the public visitation and the funeral ceremony. It is important to remember that your loved ones can still have the benefits of a private viewing prior to cremation.

As you can see below, cremation provides additional options for your final resting place. As with all service choices, this is a very personal decision to be determined by you and your family.

DISPOSITION OPTIONS

Casketed:

- Burial
- Entombment above ground in mausoleum crypt

Cremation:

- Burial (in traditional cemetery plot)
- Entombment above ground in mausoleum crypt
- Placement in a columbarium niche
- Scattering
- Cremation jewelry or other keepsakes
- Urn for display

Cremation and the 5 Components of a Funeral, Memorial, or Celebration of Life Service

Ask your funeral director about the options in your community.

EMBALMING & Preparation for Viewing

PRIVATE FAMILY TIME & Private Viewing

VISITATION for Family & Friends

CREMATION

FINAL RESTING PLACE
Burial or Mausoleum
Urn, Columbarium, Scattering, etc.

RECEPTION

ANSWERING COMMONS QUESTIONS ABOUT PRE-PLANNING

How Will a Funeral, Memorial Service, or Celebration of Life Help My Loved Ones?

You may question if you even want to have a funeral or remembrance service. Perhaps you are uncomfortable having others "make a big fuss." You (or your spouse) may even have said something like, "Don't have a service" or "Just put me in a cardboard box." I know you have good intentions. I suspect you believe a service would only cause your loved ones more grief. However, I believe this is actually the opposite of the truth.

As a psychology professor and counselor who studies grief, I earnestly believe that a personalized, meaningful service or event can be the best way for your loved ones to receive support and begin their grief process. A well-designed service will provide your family with a unique opportunity to learn more about your life, receive support from others, and begin a healthy grief process.

A meaningful service can give your loved ones an opportunity to:

- Receive condolences from friends and community members
- Take time to support one another
- Experience healing rituals that facilitate a healthy grief process
- Learn more about you and your life from family, friends, co-workers, etc.
- Honor a sense of commitment to care for you until the very end
- Share your life story and values with others

Your family will not have these benefits if you choose not to have a service. But make no mis-

take, they will still grieve you. Instead they are likely to grieve alone and without the support of helpful rituals. In other words, after your death your loved ones are inevitably going to experience grief — there is no way to avoid this reaction. However, by having a meaningful service or event your loved ones can benefit from support and structure as they begin to adjust to a world without you.

What if I Want to Have a Party Instead?

Similar to those people who don't want to have a service at all, I think most people who say they want a party want to relieve their loved ones from feeling any grief or sadness. This is admirable, but misguided. As I have mentioned, your death will cause your loved ones to experience grief. There is no getting around this. Grieving people don't want a party — they want to talk about you, they want to hear stories about what you were like as a 5 year old, they want to drink sweet tea and remember how you couldn't get through summer without it. They want to take some time with others to cry, laugh, and share.

While I do not think that parties should replace funerals and memorial services, I do believe that you can arrange a Celebration of Life that promotes a hopeful and positive focus on your accomplishments and contributions. I believe a well-planned celebration of life event is one that can support your loved ones in all of their emotions and reactions. This would include some time for crying and laughing, time for talking and listening, time for moving and for sitting still.

Doesn't My Family Already Know What I Want?

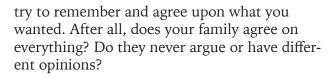
Upon your death, your loved ones will be grieving. This is not the best time for them to

MISCONCEPTION:

Funerals cause grief; therefore, if I don't have a funeral my loved ones won't have to experience any grief.

REALITY:

Loss causes grief. A meaningful service or event provides an opportunity to begin a healthy grieving process and give and receive support from others. Not having a service or event limits opportunities for your loved ones to receive this support.



By pre-planning you can reduce the chance that your services will become a source of disagreement and arguments. You can even have your children attend your pre-planning appointment. Given that your children and other loved ones will be carrying out your wishes later, it is important for them to understand your choices and the reasons and meaning behind them.

What if My Family Wants to Make Changes Later?

In some cases, you may have pre-planned your services decades in advance and the needs of your family have changed. Therefore, you might consider adding a statement like this to your pre-planning arrangement:

"I have planned these funeral services for your support and well-being. If you would like to make choices that better help you mourn, you have my blessing."

Many surviving family members and children feel guilty making any adjustments to your pre-planned service, even if your original plan



doesn't fit the current situation. A statement like this helps them make adjustments that best serve their grief needs – after all, a major part of any funeral is to provide comfort to your family.

I Want My Service or Event to be Different — What Are My Options?

Some people believe that a traditional funeral or memorial service will not be meaningful for them and their family. (Of course, others will find a more traditional service or event to be their preferred option.) Customization may vary from adjusting a traditional service (e.g., live music at a reception) to having a completely non-traditional event (e.g., a Hawaiian-themed event at an outdoor pavilion or a scattering of cremated remains on the 18th green).

I recommend that you talk with your family about ways to customize and personalize an event that will be meaningful for everyone. Then you can ask your funeral director for help in planning the event. Funeral directors can often provide the services you will need, or they can connect you with event venues, caterers, and other professionals and services. Don't be afraid to bring up questions about non-traditional options.

CORNERSTONES:

THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON TO PRE-PLAN

I believe the most important reason to preplan your final arrangements is to provide your loved ones with experiences that will offer comfort, promote healing, and surround them with support. As a psychology professor and former counselor who studies grief and healing, I believe that bereaved family members need 6 key things to help deal with the loss of a loved one. These 6 things are so important that I refer to them as the "Cornerstones of Care*." The Cornerstones of Care are experiences that will help your bereaved loved ones:

- begin their grief with the greatest possible support
- participate in personalized, meaningful events and rituals that promote healing

- learn more about you and the values you would like to pass on
- feel comforted in knowing they have carried out your wishes with dignity and care

The good news is that you can build Cornerstone of Care experiences into your final arrangements to ensure your loved ones will receive these benefits. Let's review the 6 Cornerstones and examine ways they can assist your loved ones in their time of grief.

*Note: The Cornerstones Model was developed in conjunction with Dr. Lynn Gibson

THE 6 CORNERSTONES OF CARE



DIGNITY: Because they will be serving your loved ones after your death, it is imperative to choose funeral professionals with a strong reputation for treating families with dignity and respect. Signs of funeral businesses that exemplify dignity are funeral professionals who take their time to clearly answer all of your questions, refuse to rush your decision-making process, and go the extra mile to ensure that your final arrangements will be personalized and fulfilled correctly. If they treat you with dignity and respect as you are making your final arrangements, you can be assured they will take care of your loved ones during their time of grief.



ACCEPTANCE: Virtually all grief experts and counselors place importance on the bereaved recognizing and accepting that their loved one has died. I know that some people believe that they are being kind to their survivors by avoiding a viewing, but most family members actually find a viewing of their deceased loved one to be an important part of beginning their grief. One example of how important it can be to view the deceased can be seen in situations where the deceased are not recovered and loved ones are unable to view them. Whether you plan for burial or cremation, I would encourage you to provide your loved ones with time to be with you,

share personal stories, and provide comfort to one another.



RITUAL: In times of grief, people will often have many feelings and thoughts; rituals are simply actions that allow us to express these feelings and thoughts. The rituals may be traditional and religious or nontraditional and contemporary. I would encourage you to plan events that give your loved ones the opportunity to express their grief, connect with spiritual traditions, and share your legacy. Examples of rituals include: singing favorite songs, reading meaningful texts, sharing a meal, lighting candles, carrying the casket, and many others. When there are no rituals available to your loved ones, it can leave them feeling isolated and make it more difficult for them to express their thoughts and feelings about their loss. Rituals can occur during a visitation or wake, a service, graveside or interment service, or reception.



SUPPORT: Grief is not something your loved ones should deal with alone. Plan for opportunities where they can receive the support of their family, friends, co-workers, and other community members. In our modern society that tends to rush through grief, taking the time for funerals, memorial services, visitations or wakes, and receptions are some of the few opportunities where your loved ones can receive support from others and hear stories about your life and legacy.



MEANING: Even if a loss is expected, a death forces the survivors to reflect on their values, consider their priorities, and generally reexamine the meaning in their lives. It is important to reconnect with one's spiritual and religious traditions, and take some time to reflect on life's meaning. Without a funeral, memorial, or celebration of life service, these important opportunities to consider these big questions can be lost. I suspect you have attended a funeral or memorial service and have left with a fresh appreciation for life and some renewed priorities; I encourage you to provide your loved ones with a service that will allow them to have the same experience.



LEGACY: Some people are uncomfortable at the idea of being the center of attention at their own funeral. Or put another way, they do not want others to "make a big fuss" over them. I would encourage you to view funeral rituals another way: funeral rituals are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to pass along values and stories. We all want to feel connected to something bigger than ourselves. That can include a family legacy, stories, and values. Perhaps you would like to take one last chance to express values that you learned from your older family members. You can pass along a sense of legacy, for example, by displaying pictures of multiple generations of loved ones, retelling family history, and sharing a much-loved family recipe.

Won't my family receive the benefits of the Cornerstones of Care without a funeral?

After a death, there is a short period of time when friends, co-workers, and others will extend their support, share stories, and participate in funeral rituals. However, in today's busy society, most of that support evaporates within a few days after the loss. Yes, your loved ones will likely receive some notes and emails offering support. But, the amount of support will be drastically reduced if there are no services or rituals.

But I have been to funerals before — and I didn't think the family received those benefits

I suspect everyone has attended a funeral where it felt like:

- everyone was just going through the motions
- the officiant's message was not tailored to the deceased's life, personality, or values
- the family was not receiving support or healing

Unfortunately, these types of services happen all too often. But I believe these meaningless funerals happened because someone wasn't planning a service with the Cornerstones of Care in mind. I believe if you take some time to consider your wishes, talk honestly with your loved ones, make adjustments that personalize the service, and plan your final arrangements with the primary goal of providing healing to your loved ones – then you are virtually guaranteed to have a service that is meaningful and helpful. Please review the other sections of this booklet for practical tips on how you can create a memorable and healing service for your loved ones.



Do I Have to Pay When I Pre-Plan? What are the Steps to Pre-Planning?

Although there are many benefits to pre-paying for your services, you are not required to pre-pay when you pre-plan your service. You can think of pre-planning as a simple 2-step process. While you can take each step at different times, I would encourage you to complete both steps in the near future. Individuals who do this can be assured that they have done everything possible to make life easier for their loved ones upon their death.

Three Steps to Pre-Planning

1) Record Vital Information and Choose Services and Merchandise

The first step is to meet with a pre-planning counselor or funeral professional and indicate that this will be the funeral home of your choice. You can record your vital information for various documents (e.g., death certificate, obituary, etc.).

2) Choose Services & Merchandise

You can also make choices about the services and merchandise you wish to use. The second half of this booklet provides information about different options and how they can be comforting to your loved ones. Your funeral professional can answer your questions about choices that fit your budget and preferences.

3) Arrange Payment

Each funeral home has different options and each state has different regulations for how you can pre-pay for your final expenses. You can either pay in installments or with a lump sum. Your funds will be protected by being placed in an insured product or a secure trust. It is best to talk directly with your pre-planning counselor or funeral professional to learn about options in your state. These professionals can explain the benefits of various choices and help you decide which one works best for your circumstances.

As mentioned, you do not need to complete both steps immediately. However, people are often concerned with how their final expenses will affect their loved ones, and by pre-paying you are often able to "lock-in" today's prices on the merchandise and services you select. Please do not put off planning for how you will pay for your service.

Questions to Ask During the Pre-Planning Process

The professional working with you should answer your questions in clear, understandable terms. Be sure that you thoroughly understand the specifics of your plan.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your pre-planning professional:

- What services and merchandise are part of this agreement?
- What services and merchandise are not part of this agreement?
- Which prices for services and merchandise are locked in and which are not?
- What options are available for pre-paying?
- Can I pre-pay for my services in installments?
- What if I die before paying all installments?
- How is my money protected?
- What happens if I move?
- What happens if the funeral home goes out of business?

THE COMPONENTS

of a Meaningful Funeral, Memorial, or Celebration of Life Service

To help you plan a meaningful event, I have provided a brief overview of the 5 most common components to a Funeral, Memorial, or Celebration of Life Service. Each component offers distinctive ways to comfort your loved ones and share your life story. Although each component may not be critical for every family, I would encourage you to review all of them and determine if they may be valuable for yours.

While it may seem unusual or even morbid to discuss these options, my goal is to show how each component will assist your loved ones as they grieve. After all, they can either grieve alone and unsupported, or they can grieve with the benefit of support, guidance, and the aid of healing rituals.

A PRIVATE FAMILY TIME

Private family time — also called a private viewing – provides your close loved ones with time together. This experience gives them an opportunity to see you in a peaceful state and to begin to recognize the full extent of the loss. Many families find this to be a treasured, private time to come together, share stories, and support one another before the more public components begin.



A VISITATION FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS

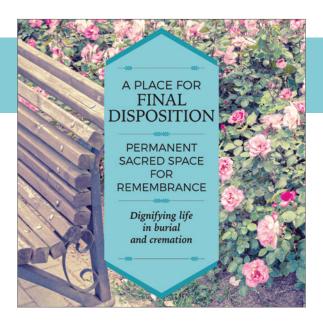
A visitation — also called a viewing, receiving of friends, or wake — is a chance for your family to receive support as friends, extended family, and community members pay their respects. A visitation also aids your family by allowing them to learn more about your life and to hear how you had a positive influence on others.





A CEREMONY TO HONOR LIFE

The ceremony is time to focus on your life and legacy. It may include elements such as a review of your major life events and accomplishments, songs, readings, pictures or videos, and meaningful rituals. The ceremony may be traditional or non-traditional, large or small, religious or secular, celebratory or somber. The event may be led by a clergy person, a non-religious officiant, a family member, or trusted friend. The ceremony provides all attendees with a special time to learn more about your life and values and to participate in rituals to honor you.



A PLACE FOR FINAL DISPOSITION

Many family members will find comfort in visiting your final place of rest. Therefore, choosing the location is important. Furthermore, many family members feel that they have fulfilled their responsibility only after accompanying you to this final location. There are numerous options for a final disposition including burial, entombment, scattering, and others. Rituals as part of a graveside or scattering service can help ease the transition for your loved ones.



A GATHERING AND RECEPTION

A reception can provide your family and friends with an opportunity to come together for a meal and share support. This event can also provide a transition from the focus on loss to celebrating a life. Given that family members are often spread across the country, a gathering after the services can be a rare chance to reconnect and share stories. Options include anything from a formal reception to a relaxed outdoor picnic or barbecue.



For Your Loved Ones

OPPORTUNITY to express their feelings and thoughts

TIME for the closest family members to come together and support one another

CHANCE to be near and view their loved one

TIME to recognize the finality of the loss

A PRIVATE FAMILY TIME

Often the first component of a funeral, memorial service, or celebration of life is a private family time in the form of a private or first viewing. A private viewing is an opportunity for your loved ones to spend time together, draw support from one another, and focus on their grief needs.

A Private Time for Close Family & Loved Ones

Because most components of a funeral are public events, many families find a first viewing to be a treasured private time to support one another. This is also an ideal time to tell personal stories and share feelings, memories, and reactions. For example, adult children may use this time to reconnect with their siblings, share private memo-

ries from growing up, and tell their children stories as a way to remember their parent or grandparent.

Although you may think you do not want your loved ones to experience a viewing, many grief therapists and researchers agree that a viewing is an important step in fully recognizing the loss and beginning a healing grief process. Many families find that it is one of the most meaningful parts of a service of remembrance. If you pre-plan a viewing, you will want to authorize embalming so that your appearance is comforting to your family. It can be very helpful to give your loved ones this private time to come together and share support.

For Your Loved Ones

OPPORTUNITY to hear about the positive influence you had in the lives of others

ABILITY to meet people who were important to you (e.g., co-workers, old classmates, friends, etc.)

CHANCE to thank people who had a positive impact on you (e.g., caregivers, teachers, friends, etc.)

TIME to share your life and legacy with others

OPPORTUNITY to receive condolences from the community



A VISITATION FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS

A visitation or public viewing is an opportunity for your loved ones to receive support from the community. A visitation (also called a receiving of friends or wake) is time set aside for the family to receive the condolences of family, friends, co-workers, and other people who knew you. If you choose not to have a post-service meal or reception, the visitation may be your family members' only opportunity to have time to interact with extended family and friends who attend.

Rare Opportunity to Learn about You

One of the reasons I encourage families to have a visitation is to learn more about the deceased. They may hear stories about your childhood, your accomplishments in work or volunteer settings, or other stories that they otherwise would have missed. After all, if you do not have a visitation most people will not take the extra effort to call or write to your survivors. I would encourage you to have a public visitation if your goals are to help your loved ones to learn about and remember you.

Challenges of Not Having a Visitation

After a loss, your extended family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other people will want to pay their respects to your survivors. If you choose not to have a public visitation, some of these people will still seek them out to offer their condolences. Therefore, they may approach your survivors wherever they run into them – in the yard as they are raking their leaves, at the grocery store, in line at the post office, etc.

While you may think that the idea of receiving friends at a visitation would be emotionally exhausting, at least your loved ones can be prepared for what is going to happen and they know when the reception will end. Conversely, when you don't plan for a public visitation your survivors will have to encounter these well-meaning people at unanticipated times and in unexpected situations. Most people prefer having one event for which they are prepared.



For Your Loved Ones

OPPORTUNITY to share your story and celebrate your accomplishments

SPECIAL time to slow down and remember the preciousness of life

CHANCE to share your legacy and values

OPPORTUNITY to participate (by singing, sharing, praying, being a pallbearer/casket bearer, etc.)

A CEREMONY TO HONOR LIFE

The ceremony is designed to share your legacy. This is in contrast to a private family viewing and a public visitation where the focus is to support your loved ones. The ceremony is a time for your family and attendees to actively participate through readings, singing, and other methods.

A ceremony may follow or precede a public visitation. The ceremony may be combined with the interment (i.e., placement in your final resting place). There are no rules for having a service; it can be a traditional event with lots of people in a religious setting or it can be a small, brief gathering in a beautiful outdoor location.

Elements of a Ceremony

Choose the elements of a service that are meaningful to you and will be helpful to your family. These elements may be religious or secular, traditional or non-traditional. Common elements of a ceremony include:

- Readings (poems, letters, inspirational writings, religious verses, etc.)
- Songs (secular or religious)
- Pictures and/or videos
- Displays (pictures, personal items, etc.)
- Symbols (cross, candles, flags, etc.)

Do I Have to Allow a Minister, Priest, or Other Clergy Person to Lead the Ceremony?

One of the most common reasons people give for not wanting a ceremony is that they have attended a funeral or memorial service where the officiant did not talk about the deceased and did not provide the family with comfort. There is an easy way to avoid this – have a trusted family member, a friend or a celebrant (a professional officiant) lead the service. When

a family member, friend, or celebrant leads the service, you can give them specific instructions regarding the content and tone of the ceremony. This assures you and your family that the ceremony will be tailored to your preferred style, will focus on honoring your values, and will be meaningful to your family.

Does the Ceremony Have to be Traditional?

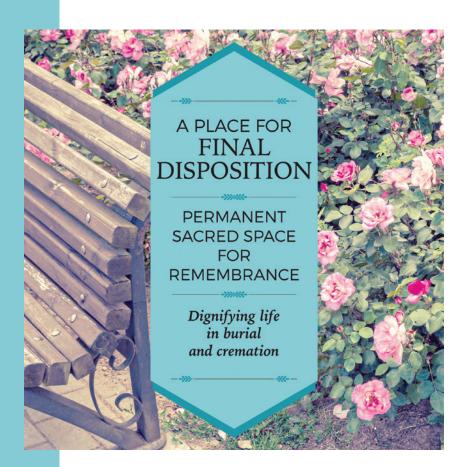
While some people find comfort in a traditional service led by a religious leader, others prefer an event that is customized to their needs. A ceremony could simply consist of a video montage with music, or you could choose to have a family member read a poem and/or provide a brief overview of your key life milestones. There is no rule that a ceremony must involve a sermon or religious message (although some will want this) or that it needs to last a long time.

Furthermore, the service does not need to be held in a traditional location. For example, you could plan a very meaningful service with 10 people by a lake.

Opportunities for Loved Ones to Participate in a Ceremony

You may want to plan for specific family members and friends to participate in the service or event. Many survivors find that this is a very meaningful way to honor their loved one. Some ways your family and friends could actively participate include:

- Reading during a service or interment
- Placing something in the casket (note, memento, etc.)
- Being a pallbearer or casket bearer
- Singing



For Your Loved Ones

FEELING comfort from caring for you all the way to your final place of rest

PROVIDE a natural conclusion to the ceremony or services

HELP them fully acknowledge their loss so healthy grieving can occur

PROVIDE opportunities for symbolic gestures (dove or balloon release, readings, placing flowers on the grave, etc.)

A PLACE FOR FINAL DISPOSITION

People have carefully selected their final resting place for centuries. For your family, placing a deceased loved one there with care and respect can bring them comfort and provide a natural conclusion to the services. There are many options for the final disposition including burial in a cemetery, entombment in a mausoleum, placement in a columbarium, scattering of cremated remains, and others.

Choosing a Permanent Location in a Cemetery or Memorial Garden

There are many benefits to having a permanent location in a cemetery or memorial garden. These benefits include knowing the location will be professionally maintained and that your loved ones will be able to easily return for visits. Many bereaved family members find comfort in being able to frequently visit their loved one's final place of rest and having a permanent marker. Another benefit of choosing a cemetery or memorial garden is that your descendants can use genealogy records to find the site decades later.

Cremated Remains in the Home

While having an urn in a home is a short-term option, I would encourage you to begin thinking about a long-term plan for a final place of disposition. Often urns begin as being prominently and proudly displayed in the home, but unfortunately they may eventually get moved to a closet or garage. Children (and certainly grandchildren) rarely want to have the longterm responsibility of an urn with a family member's cremated remains. If your loved ones don't feel ready to part with you, talk with your funeral director about options such as cremation jewelry, thumbprint keepsakes, etc. These can give your loved ones a permanent keepsake while still allowing you to have a permanent and dignified place of rest.

For Your Loved Ones

OPPORTUNITY to share stories and memories with family and friends

CHANCE to transition from sadness about the loss to celebrating your life

RELAX in a comfortable setting and share food and refreshments

RECONNECT with loved ones



A GATHERING AND RECEPTION

For some people, leaving immediately after a ceremony or interment service will feel incomplete. Many people will want an opportunity to continue to fellowship with others. A reception is a valuable time for family and friends to come together in a relaxed setting to eat together, share stories, and socialize. It also provides a time of transition from focusing on the loss to celebrating life. Given that many families are geographically spread out, funeral services are one of the few times they have to actually see one another and reconnect. Therefore, a reception may be particularly appreciated if there are a lot of out-of-town family and friends in attendance.

A pre-planned and pre-paid reception is one of the best gifts you can give your survivors. It is so rare for extended family to get together. Unfortunately we often hear some say, "We only get together at funerals anymore!" Often the reception turns into an impromptu family reunion. A reception provides your loved ones with an opportunity to slow down, reconnect, and fellowship with one another.

Location of the Reception

The location will set the tone for the reception. If you want a casual event, then an outdoor pavilion or picnic may be best. If you would like a more formal event, then an event reception hall, church, or restaurant banquet room may be ideal. Your funeral director knows the local venues and can help you review your options. Some funeral homes have their own event spaces for receptions.

Furthermore, I would encourage you to plan for this event to not be at a family member's home. The challenges of dealing with grief and services can be overwhelming without also asking them to host and prepare for a reception. Instead, leave the preparation, logistics, and cleaning to someone else.

PERSONALIZING

the Funeral, Memorial Service, or Celebration of Life

No one wants to plan or attend a meaningless service or event where it feels like everyone is just going through the motions. Personalizing the various service components will help create a more fulfilling experience for your family and the attendees. There are many ways to personalize your service or event by sharing your life and legacy, choosing meaningful locations or themes, and providing opportunities for participation.

Sharing Your Life and Legacy

- Play a photo slide show or video
- Play music that is meaningful to you and your family
- Have someone read a meaningful section from your favorite book
- Supply mementos that your attendees can take away (golf tees for a golfer, memorial bookmarks for an avid reader, etc.)
- Serve food or drink that you and your family enjoy

Participatory Actions

- Sharing stories (this may work best at a reception)
- Provide paper and pens for attendees to share a memory (may be given to the family or placed in the casket)
- Releasing balloons, doves, butterflies
- Singing songs
- Reading selections
- Praying
- Placing items in the casket
- Placing a handful or shovelful of dirt in grave



Communicate the Meaning Behind the Personalization

Help the attendees recognize and understand why you have personalized the service by having someone communicate the meaning behind these actions and items. They will appreciate knowing the significance of the choices you made. This can be done through brief announcements or through information printed in a program. For example, have the officiant tell the attendees that you chose a particular song because it was played at your wedding or that a favorite poem was in a book given to you by your grandparent.

Does the Ceremony Have to be Traditional?

While some people find comfort in a traditional service led by a religious leader, others prefer an event that is customized to their needs. A ceremony could simply consist of a video montage with music, or you could choose to have a family member read a poem and/or provide a brief overview of your key life milestones. There is no rule that a ceremony must involve a sermon or religious message (although some will want this) or that it needs to last a long time. Furthermore, the service does not need to be held in a traditional location. For example, you could plan a very meaningful service with 10 people by a lake.

KEEPSAKES & MEMENTOS

Provide a small item that attendees can take with them. For example, if you love to fish and have hundreds of lures, have someone place them in a bowl with a sign: "Take a lure and remember his love of fishing." If you are a knitter or quilter, have someone place your unused material (yarn, quilt squares, etc.) in a basket and encourage others to incorporate the items into their projects.

Opportunities for Loved Ones to Participate in a Ceremony

You may want to plan for specific family members and friends to participate in the service or event. Many survivors find that this is a very meaningful way to honor their loved one. Some ways your family and friends could actively participate include:

- Reading during a service or interment
- Placing something in the casket (note, memento, etc.)

Benefits of Having a Reception at a Separate Location

- Loved ones can come and go on their own schedule (don't have to host the event)
- Leave the cooking and clean-up to someone else
- Can be assured that there is plenty of room for all guests
- Location can be meaningful (e.g., special park or lake, golf course or country club, etc.)
- Being a pallbearer or casket bearer
- Singing

Why Life Insurance Isn't the Best Source of Funds

Most life insurance companies take 1-2 months to pay your beneficiaries, yet most funeral homes require payment of services immediately. Pre-paying for your funeral can help your loved ones avoid dealing with the gap between benefits and funeral payments.

Why You Should Not Keep Your Funeral Plans in Your Will

You may think that the best place to notify your family of your wishes is in your will. This is a common misconception. Most wills are not read or distributed until weeks after the funeral. If you want your wishes to be followed, it is best to discuss them with your loved ones and place them on file with your chosen funeral home.

SLIDESHOW

A slideshow of pictures can be a touching way to show attendees your accomplishments, hobbies, and life. Furthermore, it helps spark conversations and stories.

I would like to commend you on being proactive and thinking ahead to pre-planning your service. Following through on planning this event will remove an immense burden from your loved ones. I hope this booklet has helped you plan a service that honors your life and provides comfort for your family.

Planning your funeral, memorial, or celebration of life service will ensure that it is personalized and meaningful. It will help share your values with the next generation and aid your loved ones in receiving support. Your family will remember this precious gift and it will make their grief easier to bear.

Sincerely,

Jason Troyer, PhD



Providing Comfort and Honoring Your Legacy: A Guide to Pre-Planning a Meaningful Funeral, Memorial, or Celebration of Life Service By Jason Troyer, PhD

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Disclaimer: This booklet discusses general funeral options and therefore does not include prices for specific service choices. You may request a General Price List (GPL) that includes a complete price listing of all the funeral options for this establishment.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

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