



# Memorial Planning Guide

*How to organize a  
commemorative event*

 **basicFunerals**<sup>®</sup>  
AND CREMATION CHOICES

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We would like to encourage those ambitious and creative families to lend their innovative minds to the arrangements of a truly unique memorial event.

This guide was designed to help families plan and realize successful and meaningful tributes for their loved one.

The information included is an amalgamation of questions, lists and tools used by our very own funeral professionals.

# Introduction from the Founder of Basic Funerals

Hello,

Basic Funerals and Cremation Choices was founded on the principle of helping families feel a more empowered approach towards funeral and memorial planning. We aim for complete transparency and ease at the time of need.

Funeral service today has shifted from the authoritative voice of the traditional funeral home back to the family to plan personalized arrangements. We composed this how-to guide to help families memorialize their loved one by planning a commemorative event on their own.

We would like to invite families to use this guide to help them personalize an event in remembrance of their loved one. With attention to everything from calling the caterer to the most sentimental touches.

We welcome you to reach out to our team of funeral professionals if you have any questions.

We are here to help.

**1-877-229-7077.**

## The team of Basic Funerals and Cremation Choices

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*In Ontario, an 'Executor' is referred to as an 'Estate Trustee'. The terms 'Estate Trustee' and 'Executor' will be interchangeable in the document.*

# Service Ideas

There are many ways to honour a loved one upon their passing. Services can be as simple, or as elaborate as the family would like. Here are a few service options to help inspire you to structure the event you wish to plan.

## **Memorial Service:**

A Memorial Service is a short ceremony planned around the traditions of your faith. Consider coordinating a clergy, a place of worship, any floral arrangements, design memorial cards, and a memorial table with a picture or urn, along with other meaningful ways to enhance the service.

## **Celebration of Life:**

Realize a meaningful Celebration of Life event catered to your family's specific wishes. This is a creative option for those looking to hold a less traditional commemorative event. A Celebration of Life can be formal, or less structured. The gathering should be representative of the person being celebrated by incorporating their unique attributes and interests to the event. This event offers the opportunity for friends and family to come together to memorialize and pay tribute to your loved one. It is a time to share memories and give thanks for their contribution to your lives and remember a person's personality and the unique life they lived.

## **Anniversary Commemoration:**

Celebrate a loved one's memory on or near the anniversary of their passing, their

birthday or other important milestone.

An Anniversary Commemoration may be preferred by those families who were unable to celebrate their loved one at the time of their passing. This event is like a celebration of life; but may take place in a more informal venue, such as a favourite place of the deceased, or a family member's home. It can be more personalized, without time constraints often surrounding more formal memorial celebrations.

## **Memorial Circle:**

A Memorial Circle is an alternative to formal celebrations. It allows family and friends to share an individualized tribute outside the more formal bounds of a traditional service or venue. This gathering helps people to engage and share their loss, and to release their grief in community. It is advisable to seek the assistance of a specialist in grief counselling for this service.

## **End-of-Life Celebration:**

Families can also consider holding an intimate gathering for your loved one's final moments. An End-of-Life Celebration could be a thoughtful event for those with a loved one who meets the legal requirements in Ontario for Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), or for an Expected Death in the Home (E.D.I.T.H.). This celebration might involve a special meal or other meaningful activity. After the passing, our team will coordinate the transfer when the family is ready to have them brought into our care.

# Planning Questionnaire

Here is a list of questions to help you plan some necessary steps in the planning process:

■ Will there be a **clergy** or **celebrant** present to perform the service? Yes  No   
*Consider an honorarium of approximately \$350+ for the celebrant or clergy.*

■ Will there be **speakers**? Yes  No   
*Consider religious readings, eulogies, or a Master of Ceremonies.*

■ Will the gathering have a **theme**? Yes  No

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*Think about the interests of your loved one. Would they want everyone to wear something pink or would a pub theme be reflective of the person?*

■ Will this gathering be private? Yes  No   
*Families have the option to keep the event private for close family or friends, or to have it open to their extended community.*

■ Where will the event take place?

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*Facility fees can vary. Some churches will rent their halls for free or in exchange for a donation.*

■ Will the **urn** be present? Yes  No

■ When will the event take place?  
*Coordinate with funeral home about cremation timeline expectations.*

■ How many **guests** are expected to attend?

■ What is your **budget**?

*It is important to work within a reasonable budget.*

■ Will a reception be held following the service? Yes  No   
*The time of day will help determine what sort of catering will be necessary. This can greatly impact budget.*

■ What style of food will be served during the reception?

# An Analysis of Famous Funeral Foods

As Benjamin Franklin so aptly put it, there are only two certainties in life: death and taxes. We'd like to argue that the need to eat ranks high up there as well. Historically, funerals have been associated with post-service receptions, a time when people can gather, share memories, and eat tea sandwiches prepared by dutiful parishioners. Nowadays, funeral services come in all shapes and sizes but it's hard to argue the healing qualities of a good meal. That's why we've managed to uncover so many traditional forms of funeral fare. From Utah's finest to funeral pie, we cover the spectrum. Bon Appetit!

## Funeral Potatoes

How many casseroles can you think of that merited their own commemorative pin at the Olympics? Say hello to funeral potatoes, a curious combination of cheese, hash browns, mushroom soup, sour cream, and potato chips. Typically prepared by members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints Relief Society, funeral potatoes are a crowd-pleasing comfort food that hit the spot during times of sadness.

## Cabbage Rolls

Should you take part in a graveside service in Estonia, don't be surprised if mourners produce cabbage rolls, desserts, and vodka in the moments following the burial. Do not, however, be tempted to save some for later. To take any of the food out of the cemetery is considered inauspicious. Instead, conserve your appetite for the larger post-funeral feast which takes place later in the day.

## Funeral Pie

We have the fine folks in Pennsylvania to thank for funeral pie, a custard and raisin gem of a dish that will satisfy even the

sweetest of teeth. The dark filling seems suitably appropriate for a post-funeral reception and the fact that it tastes pretty good doesn't hurt either.

## Irish Wake Cake

Irish funerals have a reputation of being boozy affairs, making the need for a hearty cake all the more important. Wake Cake (which actually looks more like a loaf) includes lemon juice, dried currants, and plenty of sugar. We'll toast to that!

## Chow Mein and Lau Lau

If you should find yourself at a Hawaiian funeral, chances are you'll come across a plate of laulau and bowls of chow mein. The former is a little packet of chicken or pork, wrapped in a taro leaf and steamed and the latter is likely familiar to any carryout aficionado.

## Funeral Meat Sandwiches

Maybe not the most appetizing name, funeral meat refers to a deviled ham concoction served up post-service in South Dakota. Served alongside your classic bars, cakes, and pies, these hearty nibbles are portable, tasty, and can withstand sitting on a serving dish sans refrigeration.

## Colaci

Served in Romania, colaci is a ring-shaped bread that holds tremendous significance. Often, a coin is baked into the colaci and placed in the casket to accompany the deceased on the final journey. In other instances, small loaves are prepared and handed out to funeral guests.

So, there you have it, inspiration from funeral feasts from around the world.

# Rules for Planning a Commemorative Event

It's a time to **REMEMBER**

**R**emember there are no predetermined rules on what a commemorative event needs to be. If it feels right, go with it!

**E**mbrace your creativity! This event is to celebrate the life of a special individual with unique tastes, likes, manners, and habits. Incorporating these things into your planning will create a truly meaningful tribute.

**M**any hands make light work. Ask for help. Funeral directors work as a team and therefore so should you. Planning a memorial is not a one-person job and should never feel like a burden.

**E**very memory counts. Consider having a memorabilia table.

**M**unchies. Consider the value of pairing food with your event. Keep in mind that grieving and eating go together. The use of food for grief goes far back in human history. At a time of loss, eating together is about community and human connection. Think about serving your loved one's favourite foods during the reception. We also encourage you to accept food when it is offered. For the person making the food this is a personal and honest expression of sympathy.

**B**e open to help. We know we're repeating ourselves, but we really want to drive this point home.

**E**vents can happen anywhere. Consider non-traditional locations. If you have a place in mind that works for you and is special to your loved one, then it's probably the ideal spot to have the event.

**R**epeat:  
If it feels right, go with it!

Notes

# Budget-Friendly Tributes for Your Loved One

Following a death, families often rush out to spend thousands of dollars on a monument. Monuments are used to memorialize the deceased and can be used to mark the area where remains have been buried. As lovely as these strong, ever-lasting tombstones may be, there are other ways to memorialize your loved ones that are far more budget-friendly.

## Photographs

Pictures are treasures that we keep in many places – our phones, framed on our walls, or in albums. Putting a collection of pictures together in a way that suits your lifestyle is a popular way to remember those we've recently lost. Scrapbooking, putting together a memorial slide show, or even making ornaments with photos are just some of the ways to remember your loved one.

## Cremation Jewelry

For those requiring something to always carry with them, jewelry is another option for people to always keep their loved ones with them. Whether it's cremation jewelry or just a locket with a photo or lock of hair, these items often bring comfort to those grieving.

## Memories of Our Loved Ones

We can't always depend on our memories alone to bring us comfort during difficult times. We often must reach out to others to hear stories and share memories of those we have lost. Try placing a jar for guests either at the service or in your home and ask friends and family to write their most favourite story about your loved one and place it in the jar. Refer to this jar on special occasions or on days when you just need to remember. An

alternative for our tech-savvy friends, try a video compilation of friends and family members sharing their cherished memories. If you are really organized, it can be shared on social media, or a copy can be made to distribute as a keepsake.

## Re-Purposing Belongings

In an age where we need to be far more conscious about recycling, re-using, and reducing, why not re-purpose some articles of clothing of your lost one into a pillow, a blanket, or a stuffed animal? These items can be cherished by guests or by younger members of the family for years to come.

## Our Own Memorial Garden

There is usually at least one avid gardener in each family. Why not plant your loved one's favourite flowers and plant a memorial tree too? Some families choose to scatter or bury some cremated remains in the garden as well. It may also be nice to include a memorial bench or a personalized steppingstone to make the natural tribute more special.

## Be Charitable

There may have been a cause that was special to your loved one and families may choose to establish a charity to help that cause. It's a great way to create a legacy. However, this type of work may not be for everyone. Instead, to commemorate an anniversary, family and friends can also volunteer as a group or even raise funds for a charity that would bring them joy.

## Music is Meaningful

An integral part of any funeral service is

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## Budget-Friendly Tributes, continued

music. We find great comfort in music as it gives us time to reflect and reminisce. Lyrics also have a way of verbalizing things we can't find a way to say ourselves. As a keepsake, it may be nice to share a 'mixed tape' or a playlist of all your loved one's favourite songs. Share with family and friends. Music has a way of bringing all of us together in love and loss.

### Writing a Memorial

For those skilled with a pen or keyboard, it may be nice to put together a poem, a memoir, or a series of short stories. Share them on a memorial page set up on social media for everyone to embrace.

### Memorial Stationery

Our Team can help design and print memorial stationery for your special event. We offer memorial cards, bookmarks, and prayer cards, along with a variety of other keepsakes.

Funeral professionals are here to help facilitate the process in the days following a death. We are here to help you move forward in any way that we can by directing you to services and products that may be of use. Sometimes though, great comfort comes from creativity and knowing what is right for you. We respect that. Let us help you along the way.

*What's right for you and your family?*



# Venue Considerations

There are many details to think of when selecting a venue for your commemorative event. Here is a list of considerations:

What is the size and maximum capacity?

What are the overall venue fees?

Do they have wheelchair accessibility?  
Yes  No

How many washrooms?

Are washrooms accessible for those with physical limitations?  
Yes  No

Do they have AV equipment (speakers, mic, digital projector, etc.)?  
Yes  No

If yes, who's responsible for tech setup?

If applicable, does the outdoor event space offer a contingency plan for inclement weather?  
Yes  No

Is there cost for contingency plans (tents, etc.) that the family may have to incur?  
Yes  No

Do they have tables and chairs? Yes  No

Do they supply plates, cups, napkins, and cutlery?  
Yes  No

Do they have their own catering or a required preferred caterer?

If not, list alternate caterers and their contact information here:

Do they have a kitchen area with a fridge (if you are providing your own food and beverage)?  
Yes  No

Who is bringing the food and beverages? List delegated helpers here:

Do they allow alcohol service? Yes  No   
If yes, will you require a separate license?  
Yes  No

To apply for a special occasion permit, visit:  
<https://www.agco.ca/alcohol/special-occasion-permits-private-event>

Will there be someone present at the venue beforehand to accept flower and catering deliveries?  
Yes  No

Will you have early access to the facility?  
Yes  No

We recommend arriving at least an hour before the service to allow yourself enough time to set up prior to guests arriving.

# 6 Reasons to Have Music Play an Integral Part of Your Funeral

One of the most prominent parts of any funeral or memorial service is the music. Whether religious practice is present or not, music's significance is universal.

Here are the top 6 reasons to have music play an integral part of your service:

## 1. Music is a meaningful way of honouring our loved ones.

We often associate music with recollection and remembrance. Choosing pieces of music that reflect the life, interests, and hobbies of a person is an eloquent way to personalize the service. If you're having a difficult time choosing music, check the deceased's personal music library or ask others for input. They may be able to recommend hymns, instrumental pieces, or some contemporary songs.

## 2. Music is actually good for you.

When we listen to music, dopamine, a feel-good neurochemical typically associated with pleasure, is released. Music is mesmerizing and it changes moods and attitudes. Music can reduce tension, anxiety, and pain. Good music can also regulate your pulse and heartbeat as well as relieving nausea and easing depression.

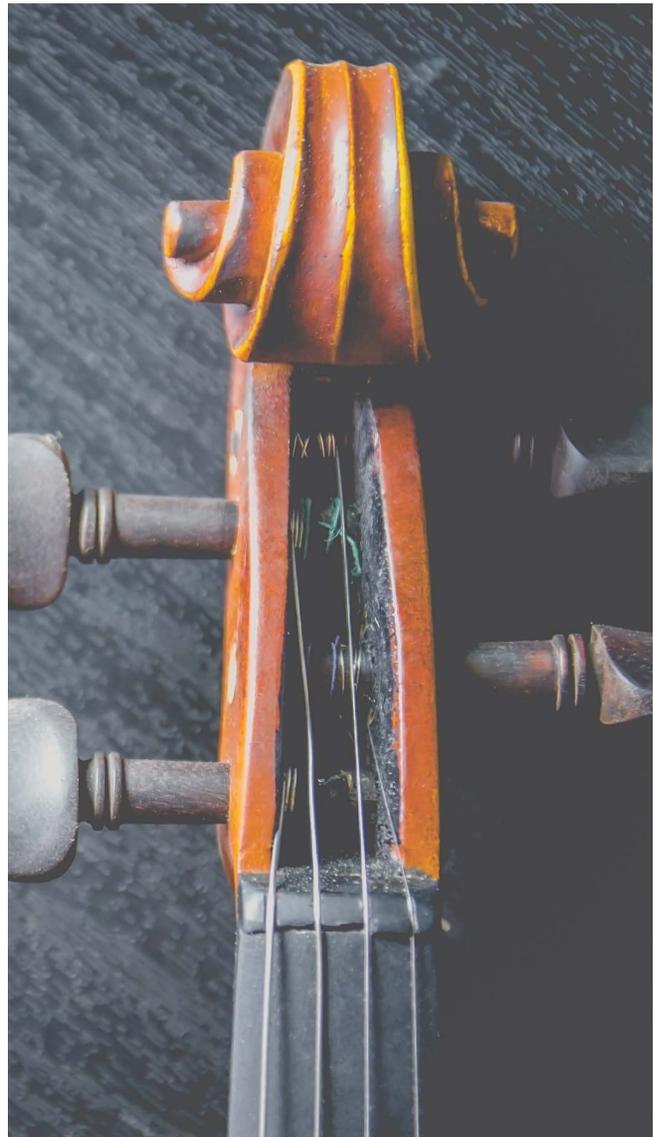
## 3. Music is associated with memories and emotions.

Listening to music during a time of loss can help us recall meaningful moments. Strong connections are made to music – its lyrics, its performers, its significance. Taking the time to listen to music can give us a chance to reflect and the opportunity to process our feelings.

## 4. Music is a 'Companion to Grief'

Music can accompany us throughout our journey through grief as a way of remembering our loved ones. It can help us process feelings about the passing of a loved one when our own words just seem inadequate. Music allows us the time to listen and reflect, perhaps giving us an increased appreciation for life.

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## Music, continued

### 5. Music is a Communal Experience.

In life and death, families and friends come together to celebrate. Music allows groups to come together with one purpose, one focus. Music can be observed by listening as an audience, singing as a congregation, or even performing together.

### 6. Music is Even Better When It's Live.

Do you have any musicians in the family? Inviting them to perform a meaningful piece could offer a time for healing and an increased amount of personalization during service time. Hiring a professional musician can also add a great deal of artistry to the service. Live music has the power to evoke emotion in a way that no USB drive can. Consider a talented vocalist, an authoritative bugle, or a heavyhearted cello. Their expertise will offer sophistication to a sentimental day.

Music is a vital part of honouring our loved ones and helps us process our feelings. When we grieve, our thoughts are often hard to unfold naturally. Music gives us structure, a way to manifest our mourning.

*What are some of the musical pieces that bring you comfort or reminds of your loved ones?*

## Here is an inspiring list of popular funeral songs:

*Amazing Grace*, Hymn  
*Canon in D*, Pachelbel  
*Wind Beneath My Wings*, Bette Midler  
*You'll Never Walk Alone*,  
Gerry and the Pacemakers  
*My Way*, Frank Sinatra  
*Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*,  
Eric Idle, Monty Python  
*Hallelujah*, Leonard Cohen or KD Lang  
*It's a Wonderful World*, Louis Armstrong  
*Lay Me Down*, Sam Smith  
*Supermarket Flowers*, Ed Sheeran  
*Abide with Me*, Hymn  
*How Great Thou Art*, Hymn  
*Angel*, Sarah McLachlan  
*Dance with My Father*, Luther Vandross  
*We'll Meet Again*, Vera Lynn  
*You Raise Me Up*, Josh Groban  
*I Will Remember You*, Sarah McLachlan  
*Slipped Away*, Avril Lavigne



# Checklist

- Book venue/location
- Apply for all necessary licenses (if applicable)
- Find/schedule clergy or celebrant
- Notify family and friends
- Create the service outline (with assistance from clergy/celebrant):
  - ◇ Select opening and closing music/hymns
  - ◇ Readings
  - ◇ Speakers
- ◇ Video/photo slides
- ◇ Tributes (i.e., lighting of candles or placing roses on altar)
- Find an appropriate caterer:
  - ◇ Notify of food allergies
  - ◇ Determine required quantity of food
  - ◇ Request plates, cups, napkins, and cutlery (if not provided by venue)
  - ◇ Set up desired delivery time/place
- Alcohol (if served):
  - ◇ Follow the venue's regulations
  - ◇ Obtain liquor license
  - ◇ Purchase alcohol

## Checklist, continued

### Find florist:

- ◇ Choose appropriate floral arrangement(s)

- ◇ Place your flower order

- ◇ Coordinate delivery

### Memorial Cards:

- ◇ Email picture to Basic Funerals (high resolution and not cropped too closely to head and shoulders)

- ◇ Provide your selected theme

- ◇ Provide your selected poem or prayer

### Additional Tasks:

- ◇ Coordinate with Cemetery (if applicable)

- ◇ Select music/make playlist

- ◇ Upload pictures and music to USB key (always bring a backup)

- ◇ Ask someone to be responsible for music during service/reception

- ◇ Memorabilia:

- ◇ Bring photographs and meaningful objects to display

- ◇ Design and set up the memorial table prior to arrival of guests

- ◇ Arrange with Basic Funerals for pick up (or delivery for an additional fee) of:

- Urn

- Memorial Cards

- Guest Book

- Necessary documents and supporting resources to help settle the estate

## **Our care and expertise extend well beyond the funeral....**

In addition to planning your loved one's legacy, please reach out if you require assistance with settling an estate. We offer extensive resources and support for executors, including assistance with notifying government agencies, closing affairs, time and money saving tips. Please speak to one of our Basic Funerals professionals for guidance.

**Visit [www.basicfunerals.ca](http://www.basicfunerals.ca) for more information or call us at 1-877-229-7077.**

**We know that it's a complicated time -  
we're here to make it easier.**

***At Basic Funerals, we specialize in simple, affordable services. This do it yourself guide is designed for families who wish to go beyond our basic offerings and plan their own memorial service or personal celebration of life. It provides helpful information and ideas to support you as you organize a meaningful tribute in your own way.***

***We are grateful for the trust you have placed in us to care for you and your family at this time.***





*The simple and affordable choice  
for cremations and funerals*

**1-877-229-7077**

**information@basicfunerals.ca**

**basicfunerals.ca**

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