

This article is intended to increase your confidence in your ability to plan a meaningful tribute for others – or, for that matter, yourself. A funeral honours a life that has been lived; shares the burden of loss and mourning with others; and allows people to reflect on their own beliefs and mortality. Culture, personal beliefs and circumstances all affect our decisions.

Often, the best place to start is to contact your local funeral home and/or your clergy. Most funerals contain some or all of the following elements, with room for changes to celebrate the life of the individual in your own unique way.

Planning Mea

1 Visitation

This is the opportunity to be with those who grieve, and to be with the person who died. It can be the hardest thing to do – but many experts agree that the visitation is the most personally meaningful step in coming to terms with the death. Consider:

- Special music
- Placing a private letter or special object in the casket
- Sharing favorite memories
- Special clothing that best depicts how you remember the deceased
- Photos

2 Service Opening

This is the start of the ceremony, which states the purpose of the gathering and sets the tone for the ceremony. Consider:

- Family members/friends light candles
- Special processional music
- Placing a flower by the urn or on the casket
- Special person acts as the urn bearer
- Formal religious receiving and processional
- Meaningful opening statement

3 Readings

These may be readings from religious scripture or from other inspirational sources. Consider:

- A passage or poem which captures the unique life and philosophies of the deceased
- Something the deceased has written, such as a poem or cherished letter
- Reading by a friend or relative
- A recording of a reading, such as an excerpt from a play
- Responsorial readings, which allow those in attendance to participate

4 Music

Music, like the readings, expresses our emotions and beliefs. It is a powerful medium which is both personal and universal. Consider:

- A performance, such as an instrumental or vocal selection
- Various types of music throughout the service
- A recording of a favourite song

5 Tribute

The eulogy pays tribute to and recalls the life of the deceased. It is a very important aspect of the funeral and its focal point. Consider:

- Frequently use the name of the deceased
- Consult with others to include memories from many different people and aspects of the life of the deceased
- Invite others to share their memories
- Include upbeat, even humorous, memories
- Include a memorial display with items such as photos, trophies, special objects, music and video

6 Closing

Just like the opening, the closing might be just a few sentences. The closing needs words that are chosen carefully (e.g. those which are set forth in religious rites) which leave a lasting impression. Consider:

- Family members may carry a flower from the service
- Selection of special people to be pallbearers or urn bearer
- Special, meaningful processional music
- Military or fraternal last rites

7 Committal

Following the service, the guests may proceed to the

a Meaningful Tribute



committal, which is the placing of the casket or urn in its final resting place. A very emotional time of "letting go", the committal acknowledges the reality and finality of death. Consider:

- Lowering the casket or urn into the earth
- Participant placing earth on the casket in the grave
- Taking a flower from the committal as a memory
- Moment of silence
- Placing flowers, releasing balloons
- Reciting prayers
- Special music, such as bagpipe or solo trumpet

8 Gathering

This is the opportunity following the service and/or committal for the mourners to get together in a social setting, to provide support through the sharing of food and conversation. Consider:

- Sharing stories
- A memory table with special items to recall the life of the deceased
- Special music
- Reinforce friendships and relationships through tears and laughter.

Ten Freedoms for Creating Meaningful Funerals*

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| You have the freedom: | during |
| ■ to make use of ritual | the funeral |
| ■ to plan a funeral that will meet the unique needs of your family | ■ to plan a funeral that will reflect your spirituality |
| ■ to ask friends and family members to be involved in the funeral | ■ to search for meaning before, during and after the funeral |
| ■ to view the body before and during the funeral | ■ to make use of memory during the funeral |
| ■ to embrace your pain | ■ to be tolerant of your |

With this general outline in place, you can see there are many opportunities to personalize the service. Your clergy and the professional staff at Saskatoon Funeral Home, Battlefords, Prairie View and Westwood have a great deal of experience in this regard, so don't hesitate to ask for their assistance.

Remember that you have the right to mourn the way you wish. Exercise your freedom to follow your beliefs and traditions, to embrace the pain of your loss, to recall the memories of the one you have lost, and to have anyone you wish in attendance to share your grief. What is meaningful will vary from family to family. For some, the comfort of cultural and religious rituals will play a large part. For others, the location of the ceremony, such as a park or special church, will be significant.

For you and others, the funeral is only the start of the healing process. Don't expect the funeral ceremony to be, and don't try to make it be, all things to all people. Take comfort in the thought that there will be other times to recall special memories with friends, grieve with your immediate family, or visit a special place to be alone with your thoughts.

The Purpose of a Funeral Ceremony*

Funerals are as much for the living as for the deceased.

A funeral ceremony should help you:

1. Acknowledge the reality of death.
2. Move toward facing the pain of the loss.
3. Remember the person who died.
4. Develop a new self-identity created by the loss.
5. Search for meaning.

*For more information on funeral planning in Dr. Alan Wolfelt's book, *Creating Meaningful Funeral Ceremonies*, contact the Edwards Family Centre at 244-5577.