



Before – During – After

ARRANGING A FUNERAL

Things to consider before signing off

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this very emotional time. Anne

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Here are some ideas, guidelines and suggestions that I have gathered during my funeral celebrant journey. I hope they are helpful.

This document is for your information and consideration only – it is NOT legal advice.

THE PERSON HAS PASSED AWAY – WHAT NOW?

Depending on the circumstances, the deceased has been taken into the care of a funeral director as a preliminary measure. There is NO obligation to engage that funeral company from thereon.

Before making any further commitments, **please** read through this document. Assess your options. If you decide you prefer a different funeral company than the one who has transported the deceased to their premises, you can request this through your preferred director to transfer the deceased into their care. There may be a small transfer fee.

THE FUNERAL COMPANY CONTRACT

THERE SHOULD BE ABSOLUTELY NO PRESSURE TO SIGN OFF until you are completely satisfied with all answers to your questions. If you feel pressured, walk away and look further. This is not a rehearsal, this is final.

Anne Young ©

CHOOSING YOUR FUNERAL DIRECTOR/COMPANY

- ❖ **NEVER EVER** feel pressured to sign off with a funeral director on the spot – (would you shop and buy a car at the first car yard?) If possible, leave and discuss with your family what your options are.
- ❖ We suggest you allow yourself **at least 48 hours** before making **ANY** firm decisions – let the emotions/shock/family pressure dissipate to enable a logical approach to arrange the service.
- ❖ We encourage families to speak to a second funeral company (bearing in mind that some are interlinked). Pricing can be quite different with the same options. While this can be very emotional and overwhelming, asking someone who is not as connected to the deceased may be a more suitable approach to do the research. Few people know that some funeral companies are under the same parent company e.g. InvoCare Victorian brands are: White Lady, Le Pine, Simplicity, Southern Cross, Charles Crawford, Lester & Sons, Tuckers, Giannerelli, Harrison and Joseph Allison.
- ❖ There are several independently owned funeral companies, and the larger more corporate mainstream funeral companies can average 3000 funerals annually.
- ❖ Families often contact the same funeral business that conducted “Dad’s” service because they were ok... they know us.
- ❖ People often choose a funeral company in the same suburb where the deceased lived. Just because it's close doesn't mean they can support the family better. Most funeral companies are more than happy to offer you their full services regardless of where their business is located.
- ❖ Ask the funeral companies: What are our options? What costs are involved? Is there a more affordable option? How can we keep costs to a minimum? Ask what the company can offer to make this emotional time as painless as possible. Do they have any suggestions to enable the family to say goodbye respectfully with more of a relaxed (but professional) service that can still be fitting for the family (especially the younger ones)?
- ❖ Consider approaching an independent funeral director who may be more in tune with assisting the grieving rather than being all about profit. However, be alert that some Independents cut corners which may result in being distasteful – ask for feedback/reviews from others.
- ❖ Do you want one funeral consultant managing your funeral all the way through? From the interview to the actual service? Some companies use different staff at various stages which can create further distress if colleagues are not communicating about your situation and requirements.
- ❖ Is cost a (major) factor?
- ❖ Would you like green, eco-friendly options?

Give thought and consideration to all options regarding choosing a funeral service provider and what they offer you as a family.

THE FUNERAL STYLE

The last farewell is all about remembering an incredibly special person who is no longer with you. The best way to remember them is to reflect on what they were really like. For example, if the person was fun, loved Hawaii, and abhorred all things depressing, you could request that funeral guests dress in Hawaiian shirts.

Perhaps your family is more traditional or conservative and would prefer a more subdued funeral. Guests may feel more comfortable dressed in subtle colours like black or darker hues.

Tailor the funeral for the deceased, especially if you know their style and preference for a respectful and fitting farewell which will always stand out in the minds of those present for all the right reasons.

SIGNING WITH A FUNERAL COMPANY

- ❖ When you have meet with your preferred funeral director, if possible, have ready the clothing for the deceased at that meeting. This eliminates an additional trip.
- ❖ You could bring a coloured photograph of the deceased and if possible, some of their favourite soap, perfume or aftershave to go with the clothing. This enables staff to ensure your loved one is prepared as their true self – a great comfort for the family whether or not there is to be a viewing. Sometimes the family are adamant there will be absolutely NO viewing, but closer to the service (even just before) someone may change their mind and want to see the person one last time. Knowing that they have properly presented the person removes the distress around this.
- ❖ Is it important to you that your Grandmother/Mum/Sister/Daughter etc is cared for by a female mortician?
- ❖ Is it important to you that your Grandfather/Dad/Brother/Son etc is cared for by a male mortician?
- ❖ Do you have some specific requirements or personal ideas that you want to include as part of the farewell event - never hesitate to ask the question (no “if onlys” after the event)
- ❖ Whoever signs the contract with the funeral directors has the final say in the service i.e., the final directive is from the payee.

SETTING A DATE AND TIME FOR THE SERVICE

If the family agrees, I strongly recommend a minimum of five (5) days before the service – 10 days may be a better option if you prefer. This allows more time for the family and friends to be contacted and to adjust to what has happened. Arranging the date further out allows more time to put together a beautiful, memorable service for all the right reasons, in honour of the person who is no longer here.

NEVER feel pressured to set the date earlier than you would wish. Some funeral directors may recommend, “it would be best to have the funeral as soon as possible so the family can get back to normal.” There is no law that stipulates that a funeral must take place as soon as possible (however some religions may request an earlier funeral).

Never forget YOU are the client – whoever is paying/signing off has the final say.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

- ❖ When a funeral is rushed, there is often regret later: “I wish I thought of this/that”, “I just remembered they didn’t like that type of flower that they loved”, “I wished I had mentioned the time when ...”, “Oh, we forgot to let their long-term friend know when the funeral was”. And many other flashbacks after the service.
- ❖ Allowing time for family, friends, and colleagues to re-arrange their schedule, international and/or interstate people who would like to be there to say their final farewell.
- ❖ There are no rules or regulations to have the service at a certain time if it is not convenient for you. Regardless of whether the funeral company “encourages” you to have it early in the day to get it over with. This is YOUR choice.
- ❖ If the service is scheduled for the morning, this may create additional emotional pressures like traffic issues, rushing around, no time to adjust to this last goodbye and a long day for the family. Scheduling an early afternoon allows time to prepare yourself, as well as any last-minute adjustments, dress without rushing, get the family together (especially the young and frail), and time to eat and keep hydrated (this prevents light-headedness or fainting at the service). People with work commitments can plan for half their day rather than a whole day’s absence.
- ❖ Having the service mid-afternoon may also mean that your family service is the last one for the day which may give you a little (extra) time at the end of the service without the next funeral waiting on the sidelines with staff hovering to move people along for the next service.
- ❖ Having the service at a church/chapel usually means a strict timeframe of 45 mins to 1 hour max. Additional time usually requires a higher charge by the venue and Funeral company. Depending on the venue, those in charge may not allow a time extension.

MEDIA NOTICES

- ❖ The trend is alerting friends and family via social media and digital notices that you or the funeral company provide on your behalf (as part of their fee) and sometimes the newspapers (the Herald Sun and/or the Age). You may not be aware that including the Funeral Company’s logo is an additional cost to you and free advertising for them. You can place your notice yourself if you prefer. There are usually two parts, one the death notice and the second the funeral notice advising date, time and venue and any personal requests (dress in colour, no flowers, donations etc). Check your contract to see if notices are part of your package.
- ❖ Funeral directors may have service notices on their website where people can insert their condolences to the family.

FUNERAL OR MEMORIAL?

- ❖ A funeral is when the coffin is present.
- ❖ A memorial is with the cremated ashes in a container or as a gathering of mourners without the ashes (tragic circumstances when remains are not available) or when the deceased requested no funeral however family would like closure – hence a memorial.
- ❖ You can hold a funeral or memorial service near the time of burial or cremation or later.
- ❖ Having a viewing service or wake is (entirely) the family's decision.
- ❖ The family may have decided on no viewing before the service. Sometimes a family member may request the opportunity for one last private goodbye. That person can arrange this by contacting the Funeral Company (or your Funeral Celebrant) before the day of the funeral or the start of the funeral service (others do not have to be advised if it would be a sensitive matter). This Funeral Celebrant can assist and support the family if this is a concern.

COFFIN OR CASKET?

- ❖ A coffin is tapered at the head & foot, wide at the shoulders (and can be cheaper than a casket). A casket is rectangular and made with high-quality timber (with pricing to match).
- ❖ DO NOT feel pressured to choose the most expensive coffin/casket e.g. because of expectations from the extended family to “keep up appearances”. The funeral industry is focused on profit (it is a business). Prices can range from \$3,000 to \$15,000 (sometimes more) for the same product depending on the company.
- ❖ Instead of a traditional casket/coffin, you may prefer a shroud in an open basket (no timber coffin), reducing environmental issues, i.e. veneer polish used on coffins is very toxic to the earth.
- ❖ There are many options for “different” coffins e.g. woollen, bamboo, cane baskets, and sustainable materials that may appeal to the family.

CREMATION OR BURIAL?

- ❖ Do you know what the person preferred?
- ❖ Cremations are best arranged by the funeral director.
- ❖ The cremation fee is arranged by the funeral director and invoiced to you.
- ❖ Cremations are less expensive than burials.
- ❖ The funeral director usually contacts the family when the ashes are ready for collection unless there are special prior arrangements. The usual turnaround time is 10 days, but if the funeral director does not notify you by then, contact them to check on the timeline. There have been rare incidences when their system lets them down and families have not been advised.
- ❖ The choice of whether to have the casket or urn present at the service is entirely yours, not the funeral director's.

- ❖ Some people request to have their ashes scattered around the world, at a favourite special place etc – you may need permission. If the ashes are going overseas, a special letter of permission (from the funeral director) is required for customs.
- ❖ Some places may require you to get permission before you scatter there.
- ❖ For those who would like a “greener” scattering – check the environmental impact.
- ❖ There is a company “Scattered Ashes” that will record the date and place of the scattering for future family tree records.
- ❖ Some families request the ashes be divided. The funeral director needs to be advised BEFORE the cremation takes place (this usually incurs additional charges).
- ❖ It is possible to have ashes made into memorial balls or paperweights with some ashes inside the container. See <https://memorialglass.com.au/>.

BURIALS

- ❖ Burials need to be conducted by the funeral director. This is a legal requirement to bury a person.
- ❖ If the family already has a plot – it is vital that a reliable family member visit the cemetery the day before the service to ensure the right site has been prepared. A recent personal experience with the wrong site having been opened was traumatic & distressing for all.
- ❖ Burials and cremated ashes that are placed within a cemetery incur an initial fee with an ongoing fee (usually every 25 years). Some cemeteries offer a perpetual plot with a once-off fee. Make enquiries before signing off.

VENUE

- ❖ Are you aware that you can (legally) have a funeral service (including a coffin present) in your home (reducing the cost)?
- ❖ There are independent funeral companies that offer many different venues to have the actual service (not restricted to a church or chapel). For example a yacht club, football rooms, reception rooms, rotundas – and many more choices, subject to the management of the chosen venue. Most venues are very obliging, plus you can arrange refreshments without moving to another venue.

REFRESHMENTS

Refreshments may include a cold and hot food selection after the service. Funeral companies can often arrange catering as part of their fees. This may prove worthwhile when you consider family or friends rushing around to arrange catering along with transporting and delivery, creating more pressure on the day. Even if catering is arranged by the Funeral company, I recommend ringing the caterers yourself the day before the service to confirm ETA, catering numbers, contact name and phone number on the day in the case of some mishap.

THE ORDER OF SERVICE

This is the printed order of service for attendees, with photo and text. funeral directors usually offer this service as part of the package. Some families prefer to do this themselves to reduce costs. As this can be very time-consuming for the family, consider using the funeral company who have the equipment and skillset to format and print this quickly. Choosing this, reduces pressure on the family – this cost is very worthwhile. If budget constraints are an issue, this is an important area to consider allocating funds to.

LENGTH OF SERVICE

I highly encourage you to keep the service length to under one hour.

When you have chosen your preferred funeral director, enquire as to the time limit for the service. Some venues e.g. Altona Memorial Park have 45 minutes with others have one hour. When co-ordinating the service programme, this limitation can create pressure on the family to rush the service. For example, if you have five or more speakers, a single service time may not be long enough.

If you do need to go longer, you can choose to have a “double booking” for a service at a chapel/venue. Additional costs may apply.

SPEAKERS

- ❖ The Eulogy (the person’s life story) is usually read by the Celebrant.
- ❖ Having about three speakers to pay tribute is a good number (5-8 mins each is ideal).
- ❖ Are there people who you (or more importantly the deceased) would like to speak or let the family know of what they did together when growing up/going overseas/before they settled down etc.

MUSIC

- ❖ Usually three sections of music for the entry, the slideshow and walking out. If there is a Committal service following the funeral at a second location (Cemetery or Crematorium) a piece of additional music could be played.
- ❖ The funeral director can put this together, (usually an additional cost – but minimal) however as a backup have a song list on your phone or a USB by you or a friend and test it the day before at the venue. Some venue equipment is not always compatible with your backup.
- ❖ Selecting appropriate music and readings/poems (read and listen to **ALL** the words of the song/poem before the funeral day – may not be as appropriate as first thought).
- ❖ Play the selected pieces of music before the day of the service over and over (around the house, in the car, everywhere before and up to the time of the service) – this gives you time to “de-sensitise” the raw emotion of hearing the music at the service.

PHOTO PRESENTATION/REFLECTION TIME

- ❖ Photo presentation is usually screened during the service, sometimes before and after.
- ❖ It is not uncommon that the (deceased) person or their family prefer not to have a photo presentation – this is quite OK – this allows mourners to listen and reflect on the person who is no longer here.
- ❖ Photo presentation – most funeral directors assist and do a very good job (unless you have someone who knows what to do without too much hassle) It can be very time-consuming and is additional pressure for the family or the maker with time constraints. There are private companies that provide this service with excellent outcomes, and this takes the pressure off the family with one less task to do. Once photos are gathered, they go straight to them, and they set everything up including the music embedded into the slide show. These professionals have the right equipment and skilled staff. It can be a big relief for the family. I HIGHLY recommend considering this option. **It is well worth the cost (big time).**
- ❖ If you prefer to “do your own thing” and put the photos together yourself, I STRONGLY encourage you to take your CD/USB to the venue the day before the service. There have been many moments on the day when the recording was not compatible with the local equipment. I recommend you contact the venue before putting your photos and music together to ensure your approach will work. Taking this time to investigate will eliminate stress and frustration on the day.
- ❖ Reflection time – allow 5-15 minutes only (an extended time can be challenging).
- ❖ Photos can be set up to be on repeat after the service during refreshments.

LIVE STREAMING

- ❖ Live streaming is another option for those who cannot attend, plus a keepsake for the family to watch later.

FLOWERS

Flowers – the arrangement for the coffin can be ordered direct by the family – a caring funeral director/florist might encourage the family to include flowers from their garden – a very personal and comforting gesture for the family.

- ❖ With medium to large floral arrangements (approximately 1.2 to 2 metres in diameter), ask for more flowers and less “filler” greenery. This is usually part of the funeral company’s package.
- ❖ There is no requirement to have flowers on the coffin. You may prefer to “invite” people to bring flowers from their garden to be placed on the coffin.
- ❖ You may prefer no flowers – there are other (more affordable) options, e.g. soft organza fabric bunched and curled across the top of the coffin with a candle in a glass jar (a battery-operated candle looks authentic without the fire hazard) – a framed photo of the deceased positioned on a decorated book stand, positioned on the organza (different, beautiful and affordable).

DELEGATE

- ❖ Delegate family/friends to be co-ordinator of music, co-ordinator of slide show (collating photos), catering co-ordinator (needs to be very organised, work under pressure and deliver!)

Would the deceased have approved of their funeral/farewell?

Personalise the service as much as possible.

A beautiful and memorable send-off is the best tribute to your loved one.

BEFORE THE PASSING

- ❖ This is often overlooked – It can often be helpful to discuss with your loved one before their passing what their wishes would be for a funeral. What favourite music? A prayer? No religious service? Who would they like to escort the coffin out? A special poem or story and much more.
- ❖ If possible, the Power of Attorney or a trusted family member should get computer and phone passwords from the person and details of any patents or credentials for designs, papers, publications, academic papers etc. This will help avoid difficulties down the track.
- ❖ The role of the Power of Attorney ceases immediately upon death.
- ❖ Steer clear of ALL funeral insurances (pre-paid is a far better option).

CELEBRANTS AND THE FUNERAL INDUSTRY

- ❖ Are you aware that the funeral industry (within Victoria) is not regulated? This risk exposes vulnerable families to information or advice that may not always be in the best interest of the family.
- ❖ Celebrants are not required to have training to conduct a funeral (scary!).
- ❖ Please note – dedicated Celebrants take pride in improving their knowledge by ongoing training and being a member of relevant Celebrant Associations to ensure they are current in what is happening within the funeral industry.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

I am an independent Celebrant not aligned with any one funeral company.

Most of my work comes from referrals from families I have helped in the past.

Contact Anne Young, End of Life Celebrant on 0403 540 099

www.youngceremonies.com.au

The content of this document is purely my view and observation of being involved with assisting families during a very emotional time – to be used for information only – this is not a legal document – you are most welcome to use and share.