

# PREPARING FOR A GOOD DEATH

***“It’s more difficult to go out than it was to come in!”***

(a remark made in the midst of our 3 sessions in the Spring of 2016)

The course was instigated by the concern that we should, as Christians, order our lives as well as our funerals to help and support those around us. More generally, there has been added interest in ‘end of life’ issues and funeral arrangements which have featured in the Church of England Grave Talk initiative and in the ‘Death Cafés’ which have become quite popular! The pastoral care which involves the dying and the bereaved is a critical aspect of parish ministry. Preparing people to live well and die well, to share anxieties, hopes and fears is, in fact, the very core of the priest’s task.

## **Before your death**

The preparation of your funeral, clearly stating your wishes will make this task much easier for your next of kin/power of attorney. Work out who your executors are to be and make sure that your signed wishes are given to the appropriate agencies – solicitor, vicar, funeral director, power of attorney/executors etc.

Consider your Last Will & Testament including any legacies which you might wish to leave, remembering the penalties surrounding Capital Gains Tax and Inheritance Tax.

Those who have carried out a funeral plan or who have paid into an insurance scheme will greatly reduce the financial responsibility and time-scale of the administrative task.

## **At the time of death**

2 doctors have to agree and verify your death. The first doctor at the time of death and a second doctor as an independent witness will be called to assess the cause of death. A great deal of administration is required, including the possibility of a post-mortem, a death certificate and the arrangements regarding the funeral etc.

Those who die abroad will normally be repatriated, and those arrangements will be overseen by your funeral director, except when specific arrangements have been made and agreed legally for burial abroad.

## **Preparing for the funeral**

You will need to consider cost which will determine the style of coffin. You can choose between the standard wooden coffin, a wicker coffin or a cardboard coffin decorated with elaborate designs. You can also determine what you would like to wear in the coffin. All jewellery will be removed if you have chosen cremation.

## **Your funeral service**

A typical template of a Christian funeral service (whether church or crematorium) has been provided as an attachment. You might wish to use this to help shape your own funeral service. Please feel free to take time to see a member of the clergy in order to plan this service to your own requirements. The sort of choices you have include:

- ✓ Church or crematorium and in what order – many different options to consider including crematorium committal followed by memorial service in church.
- ✓ receiving the coffin in church and keeping it there overnight;
- ✓ having asperges (holy water) sprinkled on the coffin (as a reminder of your/our baptism);
- ✓ Requiem Mass, esp. if the Eucharist has been central to your faith in life;
- ✓ Hymns;
- ✓ biblical readings, poetry (bible translations – King James, Good News etc);
- ✓ prayers (who to mention, or not!);
- ✓ tribute, eulogy (who to read it, what to say);

- ✓ music (live or CD), choir, organist;
- ✓ order of service (photos, colour?);
- ✓ donations to charity;
- ✓ reception after the funeral.

### **Burial of the body**

There is generally a lack of space in Council cemeteries for burials. Some people have made a reservation in a family plot and these will still be honoured. If burial is a preference, there may well be more space in two cemeteries in South Oxfordshire – Wallingford and Kidmore End – the cost of which is £263 for a single plot (excluding grave stone). The principle of ‘first come, first served’ is applied here!

- Natural burial grounds are becoming more popular and plots can be reserved.
- Burial in churchyards is at the discretion of the present incumbent of a church. Obviously St Michael’s, Summertown is not licensed as a place for burial and many churchyards are now full and closed.

### **Burial of ashes**

This method of committal is used in licensed burial grounds where a gravestone or memorial marks the place of burial. The ashes are contained in a wooden casket and placed in the ground. We do not bury ashes in St Michael’s Garden of Remembrance. We are not licensed to do so. Ashes can be buried at the Crematorium or at a Council cemetery. If ashes are buried in a private property there is a legal requirement to name this on the deeds of the property.

### **The interment of ashes**

This is where the ashes are poured into a pre-dug hole which is subsequently covered up. There is no marking or memorial of the plot. It is important to arrange with the incumbent of the parish if this is your preferred choice. If you do request this form of disposal, there is usually a pastoral connection between the deceased and the church or parish.

### **The scattering of ashes**

There is a lot of confusion about this. If the scattering is to be done in a public place, permission MUST be granted by the council. The disposal of a body requires sensitivity. Again, scattering of ashes in private property means that special thought should be given if that property is sold.

### **Gravestones and memorials**

These have to comply with Council regulations if buried in a Council cemetery or Church regulations if buried in a churchyard. Sometimes a faculty will need to be submitted if the wording, design, size, shape of the monument is in danger of infringing Church law.

### **Donating your body to medical science**

Many myths and assumptions exist here. There is a distinction to be made between organ donation and body donation. Body parts are usually examined and used and then transferred back to the body. The body is always contained in a coffin which can then be buried or cremated depending on your wishes. It would be advisable to seek out more information about this from your donating agent. Please note, not all bodies are accepted at the time of death, for various reasons, even if this is your will.

### **Costs of funerals**

Again the best way forward is to seek advice from your local Funeral Director. In Summertown we have an excellent undertaker in the Cooperative Funeral Services in Rogers Street. Please refer to the attached sheet which provides a full chart of the possible fees and associated costs.

***The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope and faith; death is not the last word!***