

Building Memories

Planning a Meaningful Funeral



Doug Manning

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Third Edition

In-Sight Books, Inc.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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Three Candles on page 37 - Zach Burns, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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When I die
I want my funeral to provide reality,
memories, and permission to
grieve to my family.

For in those three things there is
healing and my prayer is that,
above all, the family will be drawn into
a closer bond of love.

Because a death in the family either bonds
or it divides the family relationships,
if the family is helped, and the
bond is strengthened,
Then I have had the best of funerals

— *Doug Manning*

The Family Facing a Loss

When we face the loss of a loved one, we feel lost and alone no matter how many family members and friends are with us. We can't seem to focus on anything for very long, and it all seems unreal. There is an overwhelming sense of not knowing what to do next. We know there are decisions to be made, but any decision seems more than we can possibly face. There is a sense of fear that we will not remember everything, or we will do it all wrong. This book is written to take away those fears and help you relax.

You can trust your funeral directors to take care of most of the details. They are here for you. They will remember what you forget and take care of putting together any plans you might want. The funeral should be a time of healing, not a time of worry. They are committed to producing a meaningful time of healing for you and your family.

When a loved one dies the family must make some very hard decisions while under tremendous stress. Emotions are in a state of upheaval and feelings so tender, the slightest misunderstanding can become a major issue.

Some families have maintained a close enough relationship, they know how each member of the family responds to such times. Other families have not had the chance to spend a great deal of time together and must make these decisions with family members that are almost strangers to each other.

Over the years I have observed that families can become divided at times like this, and those divisions can last for

years. This guide is written with the hope of leading you and your family through these decisions in unity and peace.

The First Step is to Have a Family Meeting

Usually one or two people will be looked upon as the leaders in this family decision. These people should find a time and place where just the immediate family can have a meeting without interruptions. The funeral home or a church can offer such a place for this meeting. If no other place can be found, a back bedroom can suffice if arrangements are made for no one to interrupt the meeting. Phone calls can be returned later and friends can wait while this vital meeting takes place. This is a perfect opportunity for that special friend who wants to help in some way to be at the house to field phone calls and meet people who come to call.

Far too often the family never has a private time together throughout the whole funeral process. They need time alone to express their grief to each other as well as this time of planning.

When the group is together, someone should take this planning guide and walk through each question in order. This leads to a full discussion of the major points and hopefully leads to a sense of unity in planning. No one should feel like they were not consulted or heard.

The Number One Priority Must be Family Unity

This must take precedence over our own desires. It must take precedence over established traditions. At times we must even put the unity of the family above the desires and plans expressed by the deceased. We will want to do as much as possible to meet the requests of our loved one, but we must have the freedom to change anything that is necessary for the good of the family. The most important concern is for the family to come through this time with togetherness and peace.

Pre-Planning a Funeral

If this guide is used in pre-planning a funeral there is still a need for a family meeting. Use this guide in the same manner to walk the family through this meeting.

I have always loved the story of an elderly gentleman who had burial plots on both coasts. The family kept after him to tell them where he wanted to be buried. He thought for a moment and then said, "Surprise me." We walk a fine line between knowing what we want to happen at our own funeral and forcing some hard decisions on our family. Conditions change, situations become altered and suddenly the family cannot fulfill all of the requests we have made. Many a family lives with long-term guilt over failing a loved one in this area.

The answer to this is to make general plans. Have a family meeting so everyone has a voice in the plans and understands what is to happen, and then make it clear that it will be all right if changes have to be made.

I cannot emphasize enough that family unity is priority number one. The only way to avoid misunderstanding is to have an understanding. A family discussion is in order.