

Helping Seniors with Funeral Planning



Funerals are among the most important and meaningful services you plan. Not only do they honor your faith tradition, they can open doors to spiritual discussions with the dying as well as their friends and family. Each tradition is different and not everyone will be familiar with the particulars. You may need to educate people on nuances of various services, such as the difference between memorializing a person versus worshipping the divine, and make sure their wishes work within the parameters of your tradition. As you walk through the process of funeral planning, here are a few things to consider.

Advance Planning

Not everyone will have the luxury of advance planning — and not every senior will want to prepare ahead of time. However, having the opportunity to discuss an older adult's wishes can help ensure the service reflects his or her personality. Advance planning can also provide additional comfort to the grieving, as they will know they're honoring the wishes of their loved one. It also takes the burden off them to make major decisions when they are dealing with grief.

Whether you think your older congregants will make time to plan ahead or not, simply inviting them to have those conversations can open

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“Funerals are an important part of what we, as faith leaders, do. There’s so much that goes into them, energetically and logistically. I find them to be a meaningful time as a way to give care to family and residents on their journey.”

Rev. Dr. Patty Brown-Barnett,
Chaplain, Meadowlark



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doors to more meaningful discussions – and might even plant a seed for future planning. At the very least, it will give you an opportunity to be an emotional and spiritual resource as they contemplate their final chapter.

Planning After Death

If you didn't know the deceased personally, try to engage as much of the family as possible to hear their stories and details. Ask questions about what they will miss the most, funny/meaningful/memorable stories (stories are very important as we process grief), what they were like when they were younger, favorite songs/hobbies/places/sports. Ask for photos to help you visualize the person and his or her life. These little things are very meaningful.

“A funeral service is devised for the mourners and it’s not judgmental. It’s supposed to be a time for healing. It’s all about comforting, welcoming, inviting, celebrating this person’s life and giving thanks to God. It’s common for people to want to make up for lost time and lost words. Try to be flexible and listen for what people need.”

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Additional Tips

- Keep a record of any preparatory discussions. Even if someone doesn't make a full funeral plan, you'll have some thoughts to help the family with planning down the line.
- Create a starting point with options for frequently used scripture and music. This is especially helpful for situations when you don't have much time to plan. Add personal details with input from the individual, family and friends to expand on your starting ideas. Then let the person or family make the final decision about which components to include. You can also serve as a guide to help ensure there's a good pace and balance of elements.
- Be sensitive to how guilt may shape a family's response. Family members may feel guilt as part of their grieving process. For example, if they didn't visit as often as they might have liked, they might feel compelled to overcompensate. Try to be reassuring and focus on honoring the deceased.

