

## **Funerals don't have to be so traditional**

Posted By Josh Harris, Special to the Herald-Leader  
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The death of a family member or loved one can be one of the most difficult times of a person's life. To make matters worse, those left to mourn are often left with the burden of sorting through wills and estates, as well as planning a costly funeral.

Pre-planning your funeral not only helps remove the financial burden on your family, but can also end up saving you money and ease the stress that comes with organizing a proper funeral.

"It doesn't hurt to have the small details laid out," said Owen McKenzie, funeral director at McKenzies Funeral Chapel in Portage. "Our role is the details and carrying through with a person's final requests."

There are countless advantages when it comes to preparing the details of your funeral in advance. In fact, many funeral homes offer fixed costs as well as a tax benefit for those who pre-plan. Preparations can include everything from the clothes you'd like to be buried in, to the addresses of those who are to be notified of the funeral. McKenzie says it's the small details that are hardest for family members to track down without stirring up emotions.

"It's always a good idea to have a plan in place .... People feel more comfortable (and) families can be more involved with the process, rather than the details," said McKenzie. "There's a lot more people nowadays who are doing this younger just to prepare their family for anything."

McKenzie explains there are many cases when a person's vital statistics can become difficult to track down, so any level of pre-planning ends up saving family members and the will's executor time and grief. This can include everything from the deceased's social insurance number, to the names of their parents and birthplaces, as well as the individual's date and place of birth.

Once the details are covered, planning for the actual service can begin. Above all else, this takes into consideration how the deceased will be remembered.

“‘Director’ doesn’t always feel like the right word to describe what we do,” explained McKenzie. “I think it would be better called (funeral) ‘facilitator’ .... I’ve guided, I’ve informed, I’ve enlightened ..., but I’ve never said, ‘This is how it’s going to be.’”

“That’s what’s so invigorating about it. Each service is different when it comes to celebrating the life .... Part of the energy that you receive from this work is the connection you make with folks.”

McKenzie says today’s funeral acts as a way for loved ones to remember the lives of those who have died, as well as provide a variety of options to explore a proper tribute. This could include anything from booking musicians for the service, to securing a memorial tombstone. Of course, these options depend on what type of service is chosen. Earth burials are still considered more traditional when it comes to funeral services. However, there are a growing number of people who are looking at the option of cremation.

“Cremation comes with more decisions to be made ...; some people believe there’s less stress involved, but that’s not always true,” said McKenzie.

No matter what the outcome, the decision to explore traditional and non-traditional options always comes down to the request of the individual.

“It comes down to personal choice,” said Ronald Moffit of Ronald Moffit Memorial Services in Portage. “There is a difference in cost because it’s not necessary to buy a \$1,000 casket.”

Without a coffin and an earth burial in a large plot, customers can end up saving cash all the while adding an extra special touch by personalizing an urn.

“You can supply your own (urn), or select one of the many we have on display,” said Moffit. “We just finished a service for a man who worked for United Grain Growers, (so) we had a small wooden grain elevator built to hold his ashes.”

Moffit has been in the business for more than 40 years, starting with Toby Trimble Sr. at Trimble Kains Funeral. He noted there have been many changes in the industry since he first started.

“It used to be the clergyman and funeral director who arranged the service ... now it’s the other way around,” said Moffit. “Each service is different because there are so many options for people to choose from.”

A proper venue is another option that can be explored. Most funeral homes provide a chapel and hall for services. However, Moffit chooses to utilize locations within the community.

“There are alternative funeral service providers in many communities that use local chapels, local theatres and local halls,” said Moffit. “It allows us to offer a more personalized service at a reasonable cost.”

Bob Clarke, owner of Clarke’s Funeral Home in Gladstone and MacGregor, agrees the option of holding a service in the community should always be available to clients.

“We do have a chapel (and) full facility, but we try to provide people with a lot of options.” said Clarke. “Most of our services are held in churches or halls.”

Clarke opened the funeral home in Gladstone back in 1969, and it has been 17 years since he expanded his business to include MacGregor. Since that time, he says he has been able to establish many connections within both communities.

Clarke noted some people choose to set money aside to pay for the entire service, while others who don’t have as much access to funds can sign up for a finance plan and pay off the costs over a number of years. Either payment method helps alleviate the financial stress that can come with planning a funeral.

“There is more pre-planning happening nowadays because it’s something that’s talked about more and promoted ... people have done it and seen the benefit in it.” said Clarke. “Some people know exactly what they want, while others may come in just for information.”

Clarke says most rural residents opt for a typical earth burial, as it coincides with tradition.

“In most cases in the area, services are still very traditional .... I’d say around 99 per cent still involve the clergyman,” said Clarke. “In the city, it may not be the case, but in the rural area, the clergy is still a very important part of the service.”

The bottom line is that pre-planning your funeral can provide peace of mind to you and your loved ones, while ensuring that no one is left footing the bill.

How can you begin making preparations? It all starts with a visit to your local funeral home.

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