

Humanist Memorial Services

Birth, marriage, death. Celebrants are asked to assist at life's big transitions. Celebrating a child or a marriage tend to be light, happy occasions, despite the anxieties and stresses of planning. The death of a loved one, however, generates anxiety and stress without the compensatory lightness.



Ideally, the celebrant brings calm to the storm. All it takes is a little planning and a lot of empathy.

This course introduces Humanist Celebrants to the process of working with families in order to plan memorial services from a Humanist perspective.

by Rev. Dr. David Breeden

Rev. Dr. David Breeden began his service as Senior Minister of the First Unitarian Society in August 2013. He holds an MFA degree from The Iowa Writers' Workshop, a Ph.D. from the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi, and a Master of Divinity from Meadville Lombard Theological School. Prior to joining at First Unitarian, Breeden was the first settled minister at the Minnesota Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Bloomington, MN.



Introduction

Birth, marriage, death.

Celebrants are asked to assist at life's big transitions. Celebrating a child or a marriage tend to be light, happy occasions, despite the anxieties and stresses of planning. The death of a loved one, however, generates anxiety and stress without the compensatory lightness. Ideally, the celebrant brings calm to the storm. All it takes is a little planning and a lot of empathy.



When You Get That Call

When a celebrant gets the call that someone has died and the family wishes to have a memorial service, a good outline to keep in mind is the good old reporter's mantra: Who? What? Where? How?

If you have some connection to the person who has died or to some of the people requesting a memorial, you as the celebrant immediately have some connections to follow up on. If not—as is often the case with secular people—the celebrant needs to get up to speed fast.



Meeting with the family as soon as possible after the death is the best policy. Often details and potential issues become clear after only a short discussion.

The first question: where's the body? The family has almost certainly already made the decision as to what to do with the body. If not, it is wise to have some suggestions and resources close to hand. My first recommendation is always reasonable and honest cremation services. I keep a list.

Here are some options for the family to choose from:

- A coffin, open or closed.
- A coffin for the service, then cremation.
- A cremation, with the urn present or not.
- No remains, usually due to a donation to science, though sometimes due to other circumstances.

This detail matters, since it will affect the way a memorial service will be conducted. Find out.

Then, discuss a venue for the service. I discourage holding services in funeral homes due to the expense to the family. As time goes on, fewer and fewer people choose funeral homes for services.



I am fortunate enough to have a building at my disposal. It can be rented by anyone and is rent-free for members of the congregation.

Many graveyards have chapels. These tend to be expensive and the time allotted for each service is usually limited.

Military cemeteries have very specific rules concerning memorial services. Many of the larger ones allow only fifteen minutes for the entire service. If the family chooses this option, find out the details.

Increasingly, memorials for older people who have lost most of their family and friends are held at the graveside. This is a convenient option but watch out for the weather! Is there an alternative plan in case of rain or blizzard?



Sometimes people ask for a service at a favorite spot, often including the scattering of the ashes at the site. This can make for a lovely tribute, but make sure you know the local ordinances concerning both private gatherings and the scattering of the ashes at the site. Just because someone has dreamed of having his or her ashes spread at a particular spot does not mean that such an action is legal.

Helping a Grieving Person: Listen With Compassion

Almost everyone worries about what to say to a grieving person. But knowing how to listen is much more important. Oftentimes, well-meaning people avoid talking about the death or mentioning the deceased person, but the bereaved need to feel that his or her loss is acknowledged, it's not too terrible to talk about, and the loved one won't be forgotten.

Accept and acknowledge all feelings. Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry in front of you, to get angry, or to break down. Don't try to reason with him or her over how he or she should or shouldn't feel. The bereaved should feel free to express his or her feelings without fear of judgment, argument, or criticism.

Be willing to sit in silence. Don't press if the grieving person doesn't feel like talking. You can offer comfort and support with your silent presence. If you can't think of something to say, just offer eye contact, a squeeze of the hand, or a reassuring hug.

Let the bereaved talk about how his or her loved one died. People who are grieving may need to tell the story over and over again, sometimes in minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death. With each retelling, the pain lessens.

Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss. Tell the bereaved that what he or she is feeling is okay. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience if you think it would help. However, don't give unsolicited advice, claim to "know" what the person is feeling, or compare your grief to his or hers.

helpguide.com

Meeting the Family

Meet with as much of the family as possible as soon as possible. This meeting not only offers the chance for you to be a calm, focusing presence for the family but also gives you the chance to get the emotional temperature of the family and insight into how the family dynamics work. (See "Family Squabbles below").

Ask for the obituary. This can give you very valuable information.



In terms of the "emotional temperature," the biggest determinant is the age of the person. Yes, losing a loved one of whatever age is traumatic. Still, an unexpected death or the death of someone young causes particular stress on family and friends. Also, find out if the parents are living. The death of a child—even a child who is seventy-years old—can be devastating.

The emotional temperature around the death will affect the structure of the memorial and the difficulty of your role in both dealing with loved ones and in conducting the service itself.

For a humanist who has lived a full life, a life of questing, openness, and freedom of thought, the memorial will almost certainly be a celebration of a life well-lived. A life whose ripples continue to move many people. Yes, there is sadness at the loss, but that is tempered by the knowledge that we all have to go sometime.

However, if the deceased is a younger person, the dynamic changes. You as the celebrant will most likely be required to bear much more of the burden during the memorial. Sometimes, the whole family is speechless. In that case, you are the voice.

Checklist for Memorials

- Name of deceased/nickname
- Name of contact person
- Name of next of kin
- Date of Service
- Location of Service
- Do you wish to have family and friends speak at the service? (Names and relationships)
- Do you wish to include music?
- Did the deceased have some favorite songs or music?
- Who will provide the music?
- CD/singers or musicians?

- Burial or Cremation? Location
- Will there be an interment of remains?
- Directions to the cemetery
- Will there be a reception following the service?
- Location & directions?
- Any other announcements you wish to make?
- Should we mention the manner of death?
- Are there any sensitive issues or potential problems of which I should be aware?
- Names of immediate family members
- Information about the deceased to be included in the eulogy or introduction

Gail McCabe, Humanist Officiant Ontario

Meeting with the Family Continued

But before we go into that quandary further, allow me to share the general outline of a memorial service I use. (Samples are included below.) The formal memorial service usually goes something like this:

Opening music.

Opening words.

Perhaps lighting a candle.

A reading.

Words from family.

Words from friends.

The celebrant's summary.

Closing words.

Closing music.



Obviously, this is only a rough outline. A fitting memorial for a musician will be quite different from a fitting memorial for an architect or social worker. Still, the combination of words with music; the combination of music, individual tribute, and poetics or philosophical text, works well, achieving both forward motion and emotional coherence.

At the beginning of the service, name it: someone is dead. Say so. Something such as, "We are here to today to mourn the death and celebrate the life of _____."

A short, pithy quote may be in order. Examples:

"Sorry makes us all children again." Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Sadness flies on the wings of the morning; out of the heart of darkness comes the light." Jean Giraudoux

"Grief wounds more deeply in solitude; tears are less bitter when mingled with the tears of others." Seneca

"Grief should be the instructor of the wise, for sorrow is knowledge." Lord Byron

Usually, I try to limit the number of people speaking at a memorial service to six: three family and three friends. I always suggest that the speakers write their tributes out and limit tributes to roughly 400-500 words, two typed, double-spaced pages. This will make the homages something less than five minutes in length. Therefore, the homages family and friends are making will be roughly thirty minutes.



Figuring in the length of songs and readings, this creates a respectable service of roughly forty-five minutes. Furthermore, it builds in time for the long-winded, so that the service still comes in at roughly an hour or less.

Also, I point out to people that family and friends often become distraught, even if they had not expected to. Watching someone be emotionally overwhelmed is not comfortable for anyone. If tributes are written out beforehand, I can step in and continue the reading.

A variation on this that works very well is to suggest that a “collage of voices” read the tributes rather than family and friends.

In this scenario, I ask disinterested parties to read the words. This both protects the family and friends from embarrassment and prevents long-winded and often plotless extemporaneous trips down memory lane.



Sometimes a family will think it is a good idea to have an open microphone for friends to pay tribute. Again, I dissuade this practice as much as possible. If the family is adamant, I suggest setting the scene by saying something

like, “And now we will hear a few short remarks from friends.” I also suggest that the celebrant stay close to the microphone, thus communicating that you are in charge and watching the clock.

Dear Sweet Reason,

Please explain a humanist funeral so as to appease a large family of “Christians,” most Catholic. How do I explain my funeral to my children, grandchildren, friends and family? Your help is appreciated.

Dear Friend,

You are very wise to be thinking about this question now. Your friends and family will have a better chance of adjusting to your plans if they aren’t taken by surprise, especially a stressful time when surprises are harder to handle. I hope they can appreciate your thoughtfulness, and that your choice of the word “appease” doesn’t mean that there are people who would give you a hard time. I might be taking it too literally, and I’ll begin by assuming that you simply meant you want to help your family understand.

The structure of most humanist funerals is close enough to the structure of religious funerals to be comfortably familiar for people of faith. Both usually include music, a chance for family and friends to reminisce about the person they’ve lost, and often, inspiration readings. There may be people among your family and friends who would be happy to help you choose appropriate music and readings, and even to perform them at your funeral. If so, involving them can help make the gathering comforting and meaningful.

There is more than one purpose to a memorial gathering: it can be a time for the deceased to say farewell to loved ones, perhaps by writing a letter to be read aloud. It’s a time for the living to grieve, and to give each other emotional support. It’s a time for sharing treasured memories. And yes, for some it is a time to pray for the deceased. By planning an event that fulfills the other purposes of a memorial

gathering, you can make it easier for those people to cope with the omission of prayers.

In her article about planning humanist funerals, Margaret Nelson comments, “Your funeral may be about you, but it’s not for you; it’s for those who’ll mourn you.” With that thought in mind, you might want to make arrangements for some people to gather in prayer after the “official” ceremony is over. You know your family best: Don’t suggest such an arrangement if it will only cause hard feelings. But if it will help, maybe you can ask someone close to you to handle the details...”

When you are satisfied with the plans you have made, explain to family members in your own words that you are trying to create a ceremony that expresses who you really are, so that they can carry away a genuine memory of the person they love.

American Humanist Association, HumanistNetworkNews.org

It’s All in the Details

Music

Some questions to ask:

What sort of music does the family want? Who will provide that? Sometimes family members are talented singers and musicians. That’s great. Just get the details worked out. (And refer to “family squabbles” below.)



Funeral homes keep a list of possible (and reliable!) musicians. I am fortunate to have a very talented music director who can play herself or find others who can. But take note: professional musicians need to be paid. Mention this fact to families as early in the process as

possible. Also, for the sake of your own sanity, do not allow yourself to become the “middle man.”

I have a personal bias against canned music. I have experienced its use many times and I can't remember a single time it was successful. Firstly, sound systems in buildings are often not compatible with the equipment the family brings. Nothing is worse than tinny, muddled canned music. Also remind people that they will most likely be nervous during the service itself. Shaky fingers do not work well when trying to find a CD track or the right song on an MP3 Player.

Bottom line: try to avoid situations that are cringe-worthy.

Photos

Loved ones may wish to memorialize the deceased with pictures and perhaps objects the deceased loved. Do the loved ones want pictures or a slide show or both? If a slide show is in the offing, be sure to check on the technical requirements. A slide show with no projector can be a tragedy. Talk through technical expectations. For pictures, find an easel or two.



A few objects that the deceased loved can be very moving. I once did a service for a man who loved to golf. His name was printed on tees. The family left a bowl of these with a sign that read, “Take one of these to remember _____.”

Flowers

Many people opt to donate money that might have been used for flowers toward a cause. This cause (or causes) is usually mentioned in the obituary. Still, guests at the service may want to know details. Be sure to have those available.

On a practical note, florists bring flowers to the memorial venue as early as they can. Sometimes this means 24 hours early, sometimes ten minutes before the service. Sometimes florists will call before they arrive, sometimes not. Get as much information as you can about floral deliveries.



Food

After a memorial service—if there is not an immediate interment planned—many people plan snacks or a meal to offer an opportunity for interaction between family and friends. The best way to encourage conversation is food.

The fare varies from simple snacks to sit-down meals. In congregations, there is often a group of volunteers who provide food and logistical support. Most memorial venues will have a list of caterers.

The type of food offered depends upon the time of day the memorial service takes place. Some families plan for a morning service in order to segue into a lunch. Services that take place in the early afternoon offer the opportunity to stay relatively light on food. Later in the afternoon, supper may be the answer.



The greatest challenge concerning food is logistical: it's hard to know how many people will show up for a memorial. Both too much and too little can create discomfort.

Popular Secular Memorial Music Selections

- All You Need is Love (The Beatles)
- Amazing Grace (Judy Collins)
- Blowin' In The Wind (Bob Dylan)
- Bright Sunshiny Day (I Can See Clearly Now) (Jimmy Cliff)
- Candle in the Wind (Elton John)
- A Day Without Rain (Enya)
- Fire and Rain (James Taylor)
- Good Day Sunshine (The Beatles)
- I'll be seeing you (Frank Sinatra)
- I Will Always Love You (Whitney Houston)
- Many Rivers to Cross (Jimmy Cliff)
- Morning Has Broken (Cat Stevens)
- The Rose (Bette Midler)
- Someone to Watch Over Me (Barbara Streisand)
- Sounds of Silence (Simon & Garfunkel)

- Spring Will Be A Little Late This Year (Ella Fitzgerald)
- They Can't Take That Away from Me (Ella Fitzgerald)
- What a Wonderful World (Louis Armstrong)
- Wind Beneath My Wings (Bette Midler)

Pat McNess: Writer, editor, ghostwriter, personal historian

34 Unique Memorial Service Ideas

Memorial services can vary in style, tone, and content just as widely as the unique personalities of the individuals being memorialized. As more and more families choose to modify or entirely steer clear of “traditional” services, the options for celebrating the life of a loved one multiple to accommodate the preferences of the of the family or decedent.

Since the options for memorial service ideas are nearly limitless, it can actually be somewhat daunting to plan and pull off a memorial. Whether it be a culturally “traditional” service, a “life celebration” party, or something in-between, the abundance of choices and the lessening of a widely accepted standard increases the pressure on choosing the right elements to include. 34 Unique Memorial Service Ideas is an array of memorial service ideas for cremation or burial which will hopefully be assistance in planning the perfect life celebration, funeral, or memorial service. Suggestions include everything from flowers, to scholarship funds, photos, themes, slideshows, poems, scattering and much more.

[Urns Online: Information on cremation urns, final arrangements, and more](#)

Family Squabbles

The death of a loved one can bring out both the best and the worst in everybody involved. If you have not experienced this situation yourself, the fact may seem paradoxical. Perhaps it's best to consider the planning of a memorial service as a very intense Thanksgiving dinner.

Grief can bring out the child in us. It also brings out old sibling rivalries. In your face-to-face meeting with the family, watch the dynamics. Who is caring for whom? Who is deferring to whom? Is anyone practicing a deadly sort of silence? Also ask about who is not in the room. And why....



Family is often separated by miles. Those able to visit with you soon after a death were perhaps the immediate caregivers, but they may not be the strongest personalities in the family. Also, caregivers sometimes resent those far enough away to have avoided some of the responsibility of caregiving in the case of a long illness.

The best policy is this: sit down with the family. First, learn who is in the room. Then ask who is not. Explore the family tree a bit. Use your intuition. Notice not only what is being said and how but also what is not being said. That's a tough proposition, but listening will provide clues.

There are as many scenarios as there are families: The deceased may have both a spouse and an ex-spouse (or two or three) interested in what happens next.

The deceased may have children and stepchildren. Look for signs of bitterness and resentment. As with childhood rivalries, death can bring back troubling memories of divorces. When I sense that tensions may be getting a bit high, I remind the family that memorial services are about the deceased—celebrating a life, not litigating past wrongs.



Counseling

Unless you hold a degree in one of the counseling sciences (and any applicable state certifications), you legally cannot offer counseling services, nor can you use “Humanist Counselor” in your title. If you do hold a degree that allows you to counsel individuals and you are approached as a Celebrant-counselor, then you should take advantage of your shared humanist perspective as well as your secular credentials. Celebrants can and are encouraged to “lend an ear” to anyone who wishes to know what a Humanist perspective would be for any given situation. Referring to such services as “coaching” or “mentoring” can help to ensure people do not confuse your services for licensed counseling, social work, or mental health services.

The above also applies to grief, family and conflict resolution counseling. Unless you are specifically trained to offer such services, it is strongly suggested that you refer to qualified practitioners. When making referrals, advise them to ask for the counselor’s experience, education credentials, and any licenses and certifications.

Humanist Society, A Handbook for Celebrants

To Repeat: It's About Emotional Temperature

As I mentioned earlier, the dynamics of a memorial service for an older person can be mostly joyful in the celebration of a life well-lived. A tragically short life, however, is another matter. Grief may be compounded by shock. It is also more likely that you may run into religious Apologetics.



Keep your eyes open and antennae receptive.

Listen for the mention of a black sheep or two in the family. Do you hear concern that a particular person may show up drunk or stoned? You will want to find out—tactfully—what the likely scenario is.

When it is time for the service itself, listen for concerns about someone who has not shown up. A scheduled service is difficult to cancel. Sometimes traffic or flight delays interfere. An announcement to that effect helps. A little postponement will likely meet with rolled eyes but general good grace. Canceling the service should be a last resort.



Sample Service

A service for a young person

Opening song

Opening words:

We have gathered today to mourn the death and celebrate the life of _____, whose untimely death was so shocking.

Lifting a candle

We light this flame

in a dark time.

We remember _____,

gathering together

in love.



Readings:

Ursula Goodenough in her book *The Sacred Depths of Nature* said,

Biochemistry and biophysics are the notes required for life: they conspire, collectively, to generate the real unit of life, the organism. The intermediate level, the chords and tempos, has to do with how the biochemistry and biophysics are organized, arranged, played out in space and time to produce a creature who grows and divides and is.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said roughly the same, but a bit more poetically:

Success

To laugh often and love much;

To win the respect of intelligent persons

And the affection of children;

To earn the approbation of honest critics

And to endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty;

To find the best in others;

To leave the world a little better,

Whether by a healthy child,

A garden patch

Or a redeemed social condition;

To have played and laughed with enthusiasm

And sung with exultation;

To know that even one life has breathed easier

Because you have lived—

This is to have succeeded.

Music

Words from family

Words from friends

A few words from the celebrant

I've talked with several people about _____ recently, and I heard from several people about his commitment to social justice. I also learned that he loved puns. And so, I will begin with a social justice pun:



Do you know why Karl Marx always drank Lipton tea? Because he believed PROPER TEA is theft. “proper-tea.” Yes, well...

Workers for social justice must have a good sense of humor, or else be driven mad by the enormity of the task.

_____ kept fighting. But he died too young.

The most terrible thing a parent can imagine is the death of a child. It's horrifying because it offends the natural order of things—smart, strong people should not get sick.

Yet, there we have it: reality.

We have choices: we can sink into superstition. We can deny it is true.

Or we can wring the tiny bit of hope out of it—by clinging to family; by relying on friends and those who reach out to us.

It's all we have. But it is enough.

Remember the good. Cling to each other. Reach out. Live well because _____ wanted you to...

Reading:

Martin Luther King, Jr said,

Whatever your life's work is, do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better.

Extinguishing the flame

*We extinguish this flame
but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community,
or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
and in our minds
until we are together again.*

Closing music

A Service for an Elderly Person

Prelude: “One Fine Day”

Welcome

Lighting the Chalice

We are gathered today, family and friends, to celebrate the life of _____. Each of us has memories of her warm smile, her devotion to her family, her love of music and of life. We light the chalice today to honor her memory as we mourn our loss. She has earned this time of peace.

A Poem By Henry Van Dyke

Gone From My Sight

*I am standing upon the
seashore. A ship, at my side,
spreads her white sails to
the moving breeze and
starts*

*for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength.
I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck
of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.*

Then, someone at my side says, “There, she is gone.”

Gone where?

*Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast, hull and spar as when
was when she left my side. And, she is just as able to bear her load of living freight to
her destined port. Her diminished size is in me — not in her.*



And, just at the moment when someone says, “There, she is gone,” there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout, “Here she comes!”

And that is dying....

Musical Selection

Tribute: Celebrant

A Poem by Robert Frost

*Out through the fields and
the woods*

*And over the walls I have
wended;*

I have climbed the hills of view

And looked at the world, and descended;

I have come by the highway home,

And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,

Save those that the oak is keeping

To ravel them one by one

And let them go scraping and creeping

Out over the crusted snow,

When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,



*No longer blown hither and thither;
The last lone aster is gone;
The flowers of the witch hazel wither;
The heart is still aching to seek,
But the feet question 'Whither?'*

*Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or season?*

Remembering _____: Family Members

Music: Deep Peace

Remembering _____: Friends

Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep by Mary Elizabeth Frye

*Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there. I do not sleep.
I am thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.*

*When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die.*

Closing words: Celebrant

Nancy Wood said, “Hold on to what is good, even it is a handful of earth. Hold on to what you believe, even if it is a tree which stands by itself. Hold on to what you must do, even if it is a long way from here. Hold on to life even when it is easier letting go. Hold on to my hand, even when I have gone away from you.”



Extinguishing the Chalice

*We extinguish this flame
but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community
or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
and in our minds
until we are together again.*

Postlude: After the Rain

Sample Readings

For My Daughter

*When I die choose a star
and name it after me
that you may know
I have not abandoned
or forgotten you.
You were such a star to me,
following you through birth
and childhood, my hand
in your hand.*

*When I die
choose a star and name it
after me so that I may shine
down on you, until you join
me in darkness and silence
together.*

David Ignatow



One Art

Elizabeth Bishop

*The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the
intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.*

*Lose something every day. Accept the
fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.*



The art of losing isn't hard to master.

*Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.*

*I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.*

*I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.*

*-Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.*

Note: A popular reading is W.H. Auden's "Stop All The Clocks," Part 1. Due to copyright restrictions, the poem cannot appear on this site.

**Walt Whitman, from Leaves of
Grass:**

*Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world,
serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to
each, Sooner or later delicate
death.*

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,



*For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious, And for love, sweet love-but
praise! praise! praise!*

For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.

*Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet, Have none chanted for thee a chant
of*

fullest welcome?

*Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all, I bring thee a song that when thou
must*

indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach strong Deliveress,

*When it is so, when you have taken them I joyously sing the dead, Lost in the loving
Floating ocean of thee, Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.*

From me to thee glad serenades,

*Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee, And the
sights-of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting, And life and the
fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.*

The night, in silence under many a star,

The ocean shore, and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,

And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil'd Death,

And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the treetops I float thee a song!

Over the rising and sinking waves—over the myriad fields and the prairies wide,

*Over the dense-pack'd cities all, and the teeming wharves and ways, I float this carol
with*

joy, with joy to thee O death!

Other Resources

[Funerals Consumer Alliance](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified, affordable funeral. We do for funeral purchases what Consumer Reports does for products.

[Funeral Helper](#) is a small private organization based in the North East of the UK. They are former funeral directors that specialized in so-called "alternative" funerals, they have also officiated at many funerals with varying degrees of involvement, from full control of proceedings to being an advisory company only.

Funeral Helper is administered from a small home office and is a coalition of past experience and accumulated resources into one easily accessible single informational resource. They are mainly self funded but do have an affiliate with Amazon UK and Google ads which they use to help with hosting costs.

[Judith Pordon](#) is a famous poetry collection

[Pat McNees](#) is a writer, editor, ghostwriter, and personal historian. "I assembled this list for the final session of my life story legacy writing workshop, because the participants wanted to plan their own funerals. Surprised at how hard it was to find a list of recommended musical selections, I decided to prepare one myself, with the help of friends..."

Articles

[Non-Religious Alternatives to Funerals](#): By Beth Morrissey. "When a non-religious person dies it may seem more proper that a non-religious ceremony be held in his or her honour instead of a more traditional, religious funeral service. Indeed it may even be written out in a person's will (s)he does not wish to have a funeral. If the type of ceremony for which the individual wished is described in his or her will them it is important to follow these instructions....."

[Secular Memorials or Funerals Without God](#): Freedom From Religion Foundation. "Freethinkers believe that a memorial service should celebrate life,

not death. Memorials should honor the person who has lived, not be a vehicle to proselytize unsavory dogmas such as sin and salvation, as typical religious funerals often are. It is time to dispense with carbon-copy, fill-in-the-blanks services read by clergy who use the occasion to promote religion....”

[Nonreligious Funeral or Memorial Service Order-of-Service Template](#): By Barbara Kate Repa. “Find out how to put together a nonreligious funeral or memorial service program. In the link below, you’ll find a simple and straightforward template that will help you create a program that integrates all the points covered in most memorial services while making sure you create a program that really honors a person’s life...”

[How to Avoid Arguing With a Sibling at a Funeral](#), By Mara Banar, Demand Media. “Often, a funeral brings out emotions that range from anger to denial. When a family member dies, this can translate into uncharacteristic behaviors exhibited in other members of the family. Previously unexpressed or displaced anger can lead to arguing with a sibling at a funeral. This poses a problem for other attendees, who are trying to process their loss while paying their final respects...”

Books

[Non-Religious Funeral Readings: Philosophy and Poetry for Secular Services](#), By [Hugh Morrison](#)

[How to Plan a Celebration of Life Memorial Instead of a Funeral](#), By [Norma Smith Davis](#)

[Celebrating a Life: Planning Memorial Services and Other Creative Remembrances](#), By [Faith Moore](#)

[Poems and Readings for Funerals and Memorials](#), By [Luisa Moncada](#)

[A Labor of Love: How to Write a Eulogy](#), By [Garry Schaeffer](#)

[Funerals Without God: A Practical Guide to Non-Religious Funerals](#), By [Jane Wynne Wilson](#)

Course Complete

We hope you enjoyed
Humanist Memorial Course

This course is made available largely through donations by individuals like you!



Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world — Nelson Mandela