

Common Funeral, Memorial Service, and End of Life Terms

BEREAVED - (N) The immediate family of the deceased. (V) suffering from grief upon the death of a loved one.

BEQUEST- A bequest is a specific provision in your will or living trust, leaving money or other assets to a person or institution, for example, one's church or a charitable organization.

BURIAL - Placing of a dead body in an underground chamber - earth burial- interment

BURIAL CERTIFICATE OR PERMIT - A legal paper issued by the local government authorizing burial. The permit may authorize earth burial or cremation or removal to a distant point.

CALLING OR VISITING HOURS: Period of time when the family of the deceased is available to be visited, usually in a funeral home, by those who wish to pay their respects—especially those who cannot attend the funeral or memorial service. Hours are usually published in the death notice and/or obituary.

CASKET - A receptacle of wood, metal or plastic into which the dead human body is placed for burial. Sometimes referred to as a "coffin".

CEMETERY - An area of ground set aside for burial or entombment of the deceased.

CERTIFIED DEATH CERTIFICATE - A legalized copy of the original certificate, issued upon request by the local government for the purpose of substantiating various claims by the family of the deceased such as insurance and other death benefits.

CREMAINS – another term for “ashes”.

CREMATION - Reduction of the body to ashes by fire.

CREMATION PERMIT - A certificate issued by local government authorizing cremation of the deceased.

CRYPT - A vault or room used for keeping remains.

DEATH CERTIFICATE - A legal paper signed by the attending physician showing the cause of death and other vital statistical data pertaining to the deceased.

DEATH NOTICE - That paragraph in the classified section of a newspaper, or on the Internet, publicizing the death of a person and giving those details of the funeral service the survivors wish to have published. Sometimes referred to as an obituary.

EMBALM - The process of preserving a dead body by means of circulating a preservative embalming fluid through the veins and arteries.

EULOGY- A brief speech (or speeches) that offers praise and celebrates the life of the person who has died.

FUNERAL- Worship service with the body of the deceased present. By extension, this usually happens within a few days of death. In some traditions, the funeral will follow a prescribed format.

FUNERAL HOME - A building used for the purpose of embalming, arranging and conducting funerals.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (or undertaker or mortician)- A professional skilled in making and executing the plans, services, announcements, and equipment that many choose to make part of their arrangements.

GRAVE - An excavation in the earth for the purpose of burying the deceased.

GRAVE LINER - A receptacle made of concrete, metal or wood into which the casket is placed. Normally this item has four sides and a top but no bottom. The main purpose of this item is to prevent the ground from sinking down around the grave site as the earth settles. By keeping the grass above the grave level with the rest of the cemetery, it's easier to mow. This item is less expensive than a vault.

GRAVE (OR MEMORIAL) MARKER – A headstone. A method of identifying the occupant of a particular grave. Permanent grave markers are usually made of metal or stone and give data such as the name of the individual, date and place of birth, date and place of death.

GRAVESIDE SERVICE- A short service that takes place immediately prior to the burial, or interment, of the body or ashes of the deceased. Often, but not always, by invitation to a smaller group than attends the funeral. Traditionally follows the funeral, but in the case of a memorial service, can and often does precede the service.

HEALTH PROXY- A health care proxy (also known as a durable power of attorney for health care, medical power of attorney or appointment of a healthcare agent) is a document that lets you to appoint another person (a proxy or agent) to express your wishes and make health care decisions for you if you cannot speak for yourself.

HONORARY PALLBEARERS - Friends or members of a religious, social or fraternal organization who act as an escort or honor guard for the deceased. Honorary pallbearers do not carry the casket.

INTER - To bury a dead body in the earth in a grave or tomb.

INURNMENT - The placing of cremains (i.e. “ashes”) into an urn.

LEGAL WILL- A will or testament is a legal declaration by which a person, the testator, names one or more persons to manage his or her estate and provides for the distribution of his or her property at death.

LIVING WILL- a written statement detailing a person's desires regarding their medical treatment in circumstances in which they are no longer able to express informed consent, especially an advance directive.

LIFE SUPPORT- maintenance of the vital functions of a critically ill or comatose person or a person undergoing surgery.

MEMORIAL DONATION - A memorial contribution specified to a particular cause or charity, usually in lieu of flowers.

MEMORIAL SERVICE - A religious service conducted in memory of the deceased without the body being present. This term also applies when the service is conducted while the ashes / cremains are present.

MORGUE - A place in which the bodies of persons found dead are kept until identified and claimed or until arrangements for burial have been made.

MORTUARY - A synonym for funeral home - a building specifically designed and constructed for caring for the dead.

NICHE - A small opening or recess in a wall that is used to display an urn containing cremated remains.

OBITUARY - A notice of the death of a person usually placed in a newspaper, or on the Internet, containing a biographical sketch of the deceased person. Sometimes referred to as a death notice.

PALLBEARERS - Individuals whose duty it is to carry the casket when necessary during funeral service. Pallbearers in some sections of the country are hired and in other sections they are close friends and relatives of the deceased.

PALLIATIVE CARE- is a multidisciplinary approach to specialized medical care for people with terminal illnesses. It focuses on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain, physical stress, and mental stress of a serious illness—whatever the diagnosis.

PLOT - A specific area of ground in a cemetery owned by a family or individual. A plot usually contains two or more graves. This is the space used to bury the casketed body or an urn containing cremains (ashes).

POWER OF ATTORNEY- giving the authority for another to act on your behalf in specified or all legal or financial matters.

PREARRANGED FUNERAL - Funeral arrangements completed by an individual prior to his/her death.

PRIVATE SERVICE - This service is by invitation only and may be held at a place of worship, a funeral home or a family home. This type of service is not open to the public or uninvited friends and family members.

PROCESSION - The vehicular movement of the funeral from the place where the funeral service was conducted to the cemetery. May also apply to a church funeral where the mourners follow the casket as it is brought into and taken out of the church.

REGISTER - A book made available by the funeral director for recording the names of people visiting the funeral home to pay their respects to the deceased. Also has space for entering other data such as name, dates of birth and death of the deceased, name of the officiating clergyman, place of interment, time and date of service, list of floral tributes, etc.

URN - A container into which cremated remains are placed, made of metal, wood or stone.

VISITATION - An opportunity for survivors and friends to view the open casket of the deceased in private, usually in a special room within the funeral home.

WAKE – Formerly described gatherings during the period between a death and funeral, for the purposes of watching over the body. Now tends to loosely describe any social gathering surrounding a death.