Planning a Funeral in Northern Ireland

You have choices.
You do not have to know all of them before somebody dies.

A funeral ceremony and the final committal are separate choices. A religious, Humanist or civil ceremony can be followed by either burial or cremation.

What Kind of Funeral or Ceremony?

Religious Funeral

A religious funeral follows the traditions of the person's faith or denomination. In Northern Ireland this may include Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist, other Christian denominations, or another faith tradition. The exact structure will vary.

For people with an existing connection to a church or faith community, their local priest, minister, clergy member or faith leader may be one of the first people contacted after the death. A funeral director can also help with arrangements and timings.

- ☐ Contact the person's priest, minister, clergy member or faith leader
- ☐ Check where the service will take place
- ☐ Discuss the structure of the service
- ☐ Choose any hymns or music where choices are offered
- ☐ Choose readings or prayers where appropriate
- ☐ Discuss the homily, tribute or words about the person
- ☐ Decide whether family or friends will take part
- ☐ Confirm burial or cremation arrangements

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Humanist Funeral

A Humanist funeral is a non-religious ceremony centred on the life, personality and story of the person who died, without reference to religion or an afterlife. It can accompany either a burial or a cremation.

From my experience: I knew Darren wanted to be cremated and I definitely knew that he didn't want any kind of Christian ceremony. We had never discussed Humanism. A friend recommended it because she'd been at one a few months before and said it was lovely, so that was the avenue we went down.

- ☐ Find a Humanist celebrant. You can ask your funeral director for recommendations.
- ☐ Arrange a meeting or conversation with the celebrant
- ☐ Tell them about the person and their life
- ☐ Talk through important people and relationships
- ☐ Give them funny, ordinary and personal stories
- ☐ Choose music
- ☐ Choose readings or poetry if wanted
- ☐ Decide whether friends or family will speak
- ☐ Discuss photographs or other personal elements
- ☐ Agree the order of the ceremony
- ☐ Read and check the celebrant's draft tribute or script
- ☐ Add the little things that make the person uniquely them
- ☐ Confirm how the ceremony will end or move to the committal

From my experience: What I hadn't realised was how much you actually have to put into it. Richard, our celebrant, came to the house, sat and chatted with us and asked questions about Darren. He then sent a first draft. It was really, really good, but reading it made me realise how much more I wanted to add. You are trying to remember the little things that make that person unique while your head is completely tangled.

Civil or Independent Celebrant-led Funeral

A personalised funeral can also be led by an independent civil or funeral celebrant. The content and degree of religious or non-religious material can be discussed with the celebrant.

- ☐ Choose a celebrant
- ☐ Choose the venue
- ☐ Discuss the person's life and personality
- ☐ Choose music
- ☐ Choose readings
- ☐ Decide who will speak
- ☐ Plan the tribute
- ☐ Include any religious or spiritual elements wanted
- ☐ Plan a time for reflection if wanted
- ☐ Confirm the committal and closing

A Very Simple Funeral or Direct Cremation

Some families may choose a very simple funeral, or a direct cremation without a conventional funeral ceremony, and hold a memorial or celebration of life separately or later.

- ☐ Ask exactly what is and is not included
- ☐ Decide whether anybody will attend
- ☐ Decide whether to hold a separate memorial or celebration later
- ☐ Ask what happens with the ashes
- ☐ Decide who will collect the ashes when ready

My Initial Thoughts

Burial or Cremation?

A ceremony and the final committal are separate choices. For example, a religious, Humanist or civil ceremony can be followed by either burial or cremation.

Burial in Northern Ireland

- ☐ Did the person ever say they wanted to be buried?
- ☐ Is there an existing family grave?
- ☐ If not, is a new grave needed?
- ☐ Which cemetery?
- ☐ Who owns or holds the burial rights?
- ☐ What are the cemetery fees?
- ☐ Is the funeral director arranging the cemetery booking?
- ☐ Choose the coffin
- ☐ Decide whether there will be a graveside element
- ☐ Who will conduct the graveside ceremony?
- ☐ Flowers, if wanted
- ☐ Headstone or memorial - this does not need to be decided immediately

Cemetery rules, availability and charges can differ between councils and cemeteries. Ask the funeral director or the relevant council rather than assuming the process is the same everywhere.

Burial Notes

Cremation in Northern Ireland

Your funeral director can explain the crematorium options available to you and normally help with the necessary forms and booking arrangements.

From my experience: We had to look at what dates were available for cremation at Roselawn because that was the one closest to us. There was also one in Newtownabbey. I remember sitting in a taxi going up to the funeral home reading reviews, and that was basically how I decided on Roselawn.

- ☐ Which crematorium?
- ☐ What dates and times are available?
- ☐ How long is the allocated slot?
- ☐ Will the main ceremony happen at the crematorium?
- ☐ Or will there be a separate service or celebration?
- ☐ Is the funeral director handling the booking and paperwork?
- ☐ Choose the coffin
- ☐ Arrange transport or hearse
- ☐ Choose any music used at the crematorium
- ☐ Decide whether there will be a reading or short tribute
- ☐ Who will attend?
- ☐ What happens immediately afterwards?
- ☐ Who will collect the ashes?
- ☐ What to do with the ashes - this can be decided later

From my experience: Darren died on the Monday. We had his celebration on the Thursday, he came home and stayed in the house with us that night, and his cremation was on the Friday. One of the things I learned was that the celebration and the cremation do not necessarily have to be the same event.

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The Actual Funeral Checklist

People

- ☐ Funeral director
- ☐ Priest, minister, faith leader, Humanist celebrant or independent celebrant
- ☐ Family members contributing
- ☐ Friends contributing
- ☐ Pallbearers if required

The Person

- ☐ Clothes
- ☐ Coffin
- ☐ Viewing or no viewing
- ☐ Funeral home, coming home, or other arrangements
- ☐ Personal items with them if wanted and permitted

The Ceremony

- ☐ Venue
- ☐ Date
- ☐ Time
- ☐ Burial or cremation
- ☐ Order of service
- ☐ Tribute, eulogy or homily
- ☐ Readings
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Speakers
- ☐ Entrance
- ☐ Closing or exit
- ☐ Committal

Telling People

- ☐ Immediate family
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Work colleagues
- ☐ Funeral notice
- ☐ Social media if wanted
- ☐ Date, time and location information
- ☐ Flowers or donations information

Afterwards

- ☐ Wake, get-together or nothing
- ☐ Venue or home
- ☐ Tea and coffee
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Someone else responsible for organising refreshments
- ☐ Transport
- ☐ Flowers
- ☐ Ashes later if cremation
- ☐ Headstone or memorial later if burial

Give These Jobs Away

You do not have to personally organise every cup of tea, photograph, phone call and packet of biscuits.

- ☐ Someone gets food
- ☐ Someone gets milk, tea and coffee
- ☐ Someone contacts people
- ☐ Someone deals with flowers
- ☐ Someone collects photographs
- ☐ Someone asks friends for stories and memories
- ☐ Someone helps with the venue
- ☐ Someone deals with visitors
- ☐ Someone helps with children or pets
- ☐ Someone drives or collects things
- ☐ Someone keeps track of who is doing what

From my experience: Friends and family organised the refreshments after Darren's celebration. They got milk, biscuits, sandwiches and other bits. If it had been left to me, there probably wouldn't have been tea or coffee or anything. I was working at the absolute limit of what I could manage.

Costs and Questions Before Agreeing

- ☐ Ask for a price list or written estimate
- ☐ What is included in the funeral director's fee?
- ☐ What are third-party or disbursement fees?
- ☐ Coffin cost
- ☐ Burial or cremation fee
- ☐ Celebrant, clergy or service fee
- ☐ Transport or additional cars
- ☐ Flowers
- ☐ Funeral notice
- ☐ Venue or refreshments
- ☐ Which extras are optional?
- ☐ Is there a funeral plan or money set aside for the funeral?
- ☐ How and when will the bill need to be paid?

From my experience: I was very aware that I didn't want to spend money unnecessarily. One of our wages had suddenly disappeared. We went for the basic coffin because Darren would never have wanted us wasting money on silly extravagance. It is a strange situation to be making spending decisions like that when you've just lost somebody.

You Don't Have to Create the Perfect Funeral

When I was arranging Darren's celebration, my head didn't stop. I wanted the right words, the right stories and songs that were him, not simply songs that meant something to me. You are trying to organise something incredibly important at exactly the point when your brain is least capable of organising anything.

Do what you can. Ask other people to help. And remember that the person you loved cannot be reduced to one service, one song or one day.

Cost Notes

Further Northern Ireland Information

nidirect: Arranging a funeral
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/arranging-funeral

nidirect: Registering a death with the district registrar
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/registering-death-district-registrar

My Planning Notes

About this resource: This is intended as a helpful guide based partly on my own experience. It isn't legal advice, and funeral, burial and cremation requirements can change or differ depending on circumstances. Please check current arrangements with your funeral director and the relevant official organisations.