

## **Some points reference Quaker funerals:**

### **A Quaker Funeral?**

Do all of those who come to our Meetings know that Quakers 'do' funerals?

Will Quakers be told promptly of a death? Do the bereaved family even know to inform Quakers and if so who and how to make contact? Do the family even know that Quakers 'do' funerals or will they set up a '*sort of non-conformist type free church minister*' funeral?

We need to urge those who come to our Meetings to make their wishes known

a) to their family and

b) to their Meeting

Remember; wishes expressed in a will may not be known about until the will is read, perhaps at the solicitor's, after the funeral has taken place.

Advising and guiding family, funeral director and crematoria staff

### **The funeral**

Family and funeral director may well be unfamiliar with Quakers and welcome information and guidance. You may be quite challenged by the family to explain Quaker beliefs to them. You may find that family members hold very strong beliefs and traditions that do not sit comfortably with Quakers or our ways with them.

Options: cremation followed by ashes left for the crematorium to dispose with no further event or ashes to be scattered or interred at the crematorium later in the presence of mourners or ashes collected and interred or scattered elsewhere (scattering should be by prior agreement with the owners of the location but scatterings do happen at open places, rivers, sea side etc without consent!). If the ashes are to be placed in a Quaker garden or burial ground it must be by arrangement with the A M relevant officers.

or

coffin burial in Quaker burial ground, family plot, local cemetery or green burials site or even land privately owned [I now know of 2 burials on family farms].

Davies Law of Burial, Cremation and Exhumation - guide for burial ground managers Nov 2005 (56 pages available as a pdf on line)

The funeral service/ Meeting for Worship may be in a Meeting House with coffin in or not in: at crematorium: at graveside: to accompany interment / scattering of ashes.

You may find that the bereaved family appreciate assistance in choosing a funeral director if they are not already 'with' a specific local firm.

Memorial Meetings are usually separated from the funeral by anything from a few hours to several weeks and give thanks for the life / celebrate the life of - - - - . I have known it to be held in the Meeting House concurrently with a 'no service' cremation at the crematorium.

Service / Meeting may be entirely Quaker, in which case it is often semi-programmed, or worked jointly with representative(s) of another religion / denomination / humanists.

### **Essential Links**

The family may well welcome someone who knows what MUST be done when someone dies. Registrar's office, Social Services, Funeral Directors etc are able to provide very useful, informative and up-to-date leaflets on those aspects; so they are not part of this. However you may need to build links with local Registrar, relevant Quakers e.g. funerals committee, clerk of A M etc., the local funeral directors, and perhaps family solicitor, family / hospital doctor etc.

Help with knowledge on what fees, donations and collections may be required or requested. There is normally no fee or rent for a funeral of a person associated with Quakers.

Notices in the local press (occasionally obituaries in relevant publications for notable Friends), notice in 'The Friend' for those in membership paid for by family or the Meeting.

### **The Service / Meeting**

Every service / meeting needs to be tailored to what the deceased has requested and what the bereaved family would like to happen. [my mantra is "this is not a rehearsal, we shall do it only once, it must be right"]

It may contain music and pre-planned readings of a secular and/or religious nature: it can be semi-programmed. For a Quaker funeral the usual crematorium slot of 40 or 45 minutes is often felt to be too short because, with many contributions to ministry the meeting can need to continue longer than the normal half hour or so, consequently it can be helpful if the family consider requesting a double slot. This is normally possible provided the funeral director arranges it with the crematorium at the start of the planning process but an additional fee is likely from crematorium.

Discuss with family and arrange in advance in crematoria for the removal, if requested, of cross, crucifix, candle sticks etc.

Detailed and thorough planning, almost to the minute, is very important. No one at a funeral should ever feel insecure or worried about what is happening. In crematoria it is essential courtesy to the next bereaved family waiting outside the doors to make sure your Meeting does not over-run.

It is essential that someone, usually a Friend facilitating and elder for the Meeting, explains briefly but carefully what is going to happen, the sequence of "events", when the opportunity for spontaneous ministry will occur and the

hope that there will be a shortish period of silence after each person has spoken so that what has been said may be appreciated before there is another person speaking. Also they need to explain how everyone - including the funeral director - will know when the Meeting is ended. Most of the people present will be totally unfamiliar with Quaker ways.

At the close, in crematoria, it may be possible to choose whether or not the coffin 'disappears' [curtains, goes down in floor etc] or is left in the chapel for people to walk out and take their leave (then the chapel is closed briefly whilst crematorium staff move the coffin prior to the next service).

It is usually impossible to rearrange crematoria seating to form a circle / rectangle with the coffin at the centre but at St Faiths, where the catafalque is not just at the front, but is in what really resembles a chancel; the crematorium staff and undertaker agreed that the coffin could be on trestles in the aisle and the 'chancel' curtains closed; then after we had all left the undertakers moved the coffin onto the catafalque which, apparently is the only point at which crematorium staff become responsible for the body.

Do the family want or not want an entry in the crematorium book of remembrance, memorial plaque etc?

### **Afterward**

It may be helpful to support the family with ongoing contact, messages to and from the deceased persons Quaker Meeting, a copy of the MM minute recording the death and funeral, guidance on how to proceed with disposal of ashes, memorials (especially in relation to the limitations in Quaker burial grounds), will and probate, legacies and donations etc.

### **Advice to ourselves**

Ensure that your nearest and dearest know to inform your meeting promptly in the event of your death (preferably whom to inform), know what sort of funeral you hope will be held, know where you hope your remains will rest or be scattered. The booklet on Quaker Funerals contains a very suitable pro-forma which could be completed and copied to your local meeting elders / overseers plus MM clerk and MM registering officer.

Les Cockrill

2001 and 2004 (last revisited 2016)