

MCEC Pastoral Conversations: Funerals

March 24, 2020

Rob Wintonyk, Owner and funeral director at Erb and Good Funeral Home in Waterloo, ON, was present to offer guidelines and ideas for how to walk with grieving families during the pandemic. The Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAE) has provided guidelines for funeral homes in Ontario to follow. Funeral practices are provincially mandated, but they are trying to have some consistency across the country.

No large gatherings; don't delay burial/cremation: At this point, funeral homes are being directed by the BAE to limit gatherings of all kinds—graveside and funeral home—to no more than 10 people, and maintain the 6 foot physical distance between people. The advice they are also receiving is not to delay burial and cremation.

Making arrangements: funeral directors are working with families to make all the arrangements either by phone or online; there are secure programs for signing documents (DocuSign). After care is also being done through delivery of the documents to the family's home for them to look over, complete and mail in as needed.

Services: using the language of 'postponed' not 'cancelled'. The burial can and should happen soon, but the actual service can be postponed for a later time.

The funeral home has a private space for the family to say good-bye.

Some families are inviting close friends and extended family to come to visitation at staggered times. To minimize the risk to the family, people still need to maintain the 6-foot distance.

Most funeral homes have livestreaming capabilities, so a small service could be held and shared with others. Erb and Good video and audio records the service, and then uploads it to a private Youtube page that the family can share later—this avoids the streaming issues of a livestream.

Funeral home still printing memorial cards and families can choose to mail these cards to family and friends of the deceased.

A video of a photo slide show can also be shared with others.

Journey of Grief: the journey of grief can't be avoided, even in this time. Still important to find ways to help the family to grieve and say a meaningful good-bye to their loved one. Being separated during this time of pandemic adds a layer of separation to the grieving process. Having a very small graveside service immediately, and a memorial service later, is a way to walk with a family and honour the life of the person who has died.

Ideas: Zoom visitation

Use your phones to take videos and share

FaceTime or Skype to connect with family and friends at a distance

How can our empty church buildings be a resource in this time? Can they be of service to the community? –disinfecting is important after each use.

Funeral homes have the capacity to livestream services, so can also be a resource to congregations who don't have that technology.

Concern about the 'new normal'—without rituals, it is hard to grieve; how can our rituals be adapted in meaningful ways when we are not physically present with each other?

Funeral home websites have online condolence books, so this is a good way to 'visit' the family of the deceased. You can also make memorial donations online. Watch out for scam websites that solicit donations in the name of loved ones.

It is helpful for pastors and congregational leaders to think through a protocol for funerals now, so that families in grief with lots of other decisions don't have to make a decision around a funeral service.

A funeral that will happen this week will be a small gathering of the spouse and some of the children; the service will be recorded for those who can't attend.

Question about 'prepaid' services: if someone has paid for a traditional funeral service, and that isn't able to happen now, what does that mean?

The money a person prepays for their funeral goes into a trust or insurance holding; the funeral home can only access that money by submitting a death certificate and a detailed invoice of the services used. If a traditional service is still desired, even if it is spread out over a period of time, then nothing changes. The family can also downgrade what they want, and in that case, the portion of money not used is refunded, based on today's costs. If the refund is larger than \$50, a T5 is issued and the estate is taxed because an investment was redeemed. Any interest or growth that is used for funeral services is not taxed at that time.

Prayers and a committal service: Carol Penner has written 2 prayers and a committal service. They are available on her website: <https://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/>

Rob Wintonyk is happy to answer any questions you might have: rob@erbgood.com.

Or contact your local funeral director if you have questions.

We can be a resource to each other. Reach out to your fellow pastors to see how they are navigating these situations and decisions. We do not have to figure this out alone!