

Interviews with families¹

The interviews with people who have arranged funerals for their loved ones revealed further how religious content is incorporated into everyday funerals and why. Not all were comfortable with the term ‘celebrant’ and the idea that a funeral is a celebration of life. However, they appreciated the flexibility and choice offered by independent celebrants. Families largely discussed funerals that incorporated a balance of religious, spiritual and non-religious content – very few had experience of arranging funerals that were entirely religious or non-religious. The interviews revealed that the incorporation of religious content persists in everyday funerals, triangulating our content analysis of 1000 funeral services. There was a sense that including religious content was an obligation to make a ‘proper’ funeral. For others, it supported the facilitation of collective emotion or comfort. Reasons for including religious content did not always reflect an initial explicit desire on the part of the lead family member to have a religious funeral. They revealed that they have to balance honouring the wishes of the deceased and of other (particularly older) family members - as well as often seeking guidance from the arranger or celebrant on what to include, revealing further the influence that funeral professionals have.

Uncertainty over the term ‘celebrant’

The families suggested there was some confusion over the term ‘celebrant’ and, in some cases, a dissociation with the meaning of the word. As with the interviews with celebrants, it emerged in interviews with families that they did not necessarily like the term ‘celebrant’ nor did they necessarily see the funeral service as a celebration.

I think people don't know the word 'celebrant' because when people were talking about this celebrant, they were like, 'Oh, you know the guy that did it, what's it called?' So I don't think people always know the word 'celebrant,' and I'm not sure if 'celebrant' is the best word either. When you think about celebrant, you think about celebration, and I think it is a celebration of someone's life, but that's not the first thing you think about with a funeral...I just think people do know that there are other options than having a priest, but I don't know if they'd know to ask, 'I want a celebrant', but they wouldn't know the word. So, I think there's some work to do around language. (Family member 9)

The same family member said ‘The title “celebrant” is something of an anachronism - something that’s out of its time. It’s also a word that seems out of step with what it is. Is it like a misnomer? Like it’s got the wrong word for what it does’ (Family member 9). These reflections suggest that the uncertainty over the term ‘celebrant’ does not always reflect a lack of understanding about the role, as was suggested in the arrangers’ survey and interviews with

¹ While we recognise that not all who arrange funerals are family members preparing services for loved ones, it is rare that they are not, and they were in the case of our interview sample. Celebrants and arrangers preferred to use the term ‘families’ than ‘clients’ so we have adopted the same terminology.

celebrants, but may actually reflect a sense that the term 'celebrant' and 'celebration' are not appropriate representations of the kind of funeral some people want.

There was certainly not consensus on this across family interviews and it was revealed to be a complex issue. For example, the family member quoted above as questioning the use of the term 'celebration', had arranged multiple funerals for loved ones. Despite their reflections above, they said that one of the funerals 'was warm and funny and kind. You know, it's weird saying "funny" when you talk about a funeral, but you do need a little bit of warmth and humour. It should be a celebration of their life' (Family member 9). This suggests that the term 'celebrant' may be appropriate in some cases but not in others – and may not reflect the range of services that independent celebrants lead. A more broadly representative term might be needed for people to feel confident referring to these officiants in a consistent way. These complexities around what people are looking for also emphasise the need for a flexible and adaptable approach from celebrants - where not all are looking for a traditional religious service nor do they fully embrace the idea of a 'celebration of life'. This demonstrates, again, the fusion of traditional and personalised content, and middle-ground between the binarized categories that funerals are often placed into, that most people are looking for.

Choice and flexibility in using religious and personalised content

Families largely reflected on how they had sought a fusion of religious and personalised content for the funerals they planned for their relatives. Most of them had initially opted for a non-religious funeral either knowing, or later deciding, that they wanted to incorporate some religious content. They reflected on how independent celebrants had the flexibility to support and guide them in this.

It was hard to start with as we were all in grief and probably not making any sense when we went into the Funeral Directors. And when she asked us if we wanted a religious or non-religious service, we had very different views on that. We probably weren't very clear at the time. So, they told us that [the celebrant] could do something in between and make a service from what we wanted. So, we went for that. We were also asked if we wanted a man or a woman... they said [the celebrant] would organise it and could do a mixture of religious and non-religious, so that's why we went for [the celebrant] and not a vicar. We didn't want it to be all about God. (Family member 5)

We didn't have a religious service for him, and we have a good friend who is a celebrant, who is non-religious or religious. So, you could have either way, and in that service, it was really good because we had a bit of a mixture. So, the openness of the celebrant in order to say, you know, 'You can have a prayer if you want, or you can have a reading. You can have whatever you want'. The openness of it made it a lot less rigid in organising it. (Family member 9)

These participants reflected on wanting a balance between religious ritual and personalised content in the funerals they planned for their loved ones and the role of the celebrant was seen

as significant in facilitating this balance between ritual and personalisation. These examples suggest that independent celebrants were seen by both funeral arrangers and families as offering more flexibility between religious and non-religious, ritual and personalisation than religious ministers, which also emerged in the interviews with arrangers. The quotations above also suggest that funeral arrangers go some way to presenting the nuance of what a funeral can look like (as also reflected interviews with arrangers) but that they do tend to start from the binarized categories of religious and non-religious. The first quotation refers to the initial questions asked by arrangers of 'religious or non-religious' and 'man or woman' which suggests that there could potentially be more choice presented in terms of what different independent celebrants offer and the opportunity for families to view a range of profiles in choosing their officiant.

While the desire for choice was a clear theme across the family interviews with them often wanting to retain autonomy and control of the funeral arrangement process, it is also clear that this was often combined with a need for guidance from officiants (and other funeral professionals). This was somewhat dependent on how the families were experiencing their grief and level of shock as well as being due to an uncertainty around funeral arrangement processes and what can or cannot be done in relation to the service. This particularly emerged (as seen in the examples above) in relation to not knowing what could be included in terms of religious content in a broadly 'non-religious' service.

Some of the family members had also had experience of funerals led by religious ministers. Others explained why they had opted for an independent celebrant over a religious minister, who tended to be perceived as less flexible. One family member who was also a funeral arranger by profession reflected on their experience of working with church leaders.

Sometimes the church is cooperative, sometimes they're not...I've had priests say to me, 'Well, if the family don't like it, they'll have to go elsewhere,' and that's from the family of one of their parishioners. So, it's very much formal when you have it done religiously, whereas I think a lot of people now like a celebration, they prefer it as a celebration rather than talking more about that religion. (Family member 4)

Another family member explained how they had been guided away from using a religious minister by the funeral arranger: 'we asked about this in the funeral directors, and they said that [an independent celebrant] could do anything, but a vicar might be a bit less personal. So, we were happy to go with their recommendation' (Family member 8).

There were some examples, however, of where church ministers had been flexible in accommodating a balance of religious and personalised content. One family member who was a Buddhist and had led the funeral for his mother, who had been a Christian and church member, reflected on how the church accommodated them. The church leader had allowed for the family member to be the celebrant leading the service, accommodating a fusion of Christian, Buddhist and other content in the service.

My Mum hadn't been to the church in the last few years because of her health, and also chanted [a Buddhist ritual] a lot in her last two or three years. So, she was more than happy for us to do what we thought was right. And when we spoke to the minister, he

was really happy, he said, 'I'll support you'. You know, in a way ours was a, sort of, Buddhist-themed ceremony inside the church. (Family member 2)

Some family members reflected on how their choices for what they wanted in the funerals they were planning were guided by a sense that the funeral should be an emotional event and, particularly, a time for collective emotion or grief to be expressed. For example, when one family member was asked what they had been looking for in the service, they responded 'I would say emotional, we wanted it emotional. Because I am a bit of a firm believer that if you go to a funeral and you haven't got the tears and things like that then that person's life meant nothing...the emotional side, obviously, the respectful side' (Family member 4). For this family member, the focus was on collective mourning rather than 'celebration of life' despite it being a non-religious service led by an independent celebrant. Another family member (who had led the 'Buddhist-themed ceremony inside the church') reflected on how the incorporation of religious elements had supported the expression of collective joy in what was, overall, a 'celebration of life' service.

I mean, in a way, the faith aspect became quite a strong part [of the funeral service] because I related a lot of my Mum's life to her [Christian] faith, because it enabled her to have incredible strength. And then, yes, ending with the story of her chanting so it encapsulated both, and she did love chanting, she'd prepare for Church with chanting and we call it Daimoku...she, with me, helped encourage four of my family members to also practice this Buddhism...and then even her carer...my Mum was very wanting to share, encouraged people to practice this Buddhism...so the actual ceremony really, I think, for everybody was joyful, everybody came out saying how joyful it was and that was our goal, that everybody would be smiling and celebrating my Mum's life and that there wouldn't be a sad face in the room. And I don't think there was. (Family member 2)

These examples reveal the complexities of classifying non-religious or secular services as 'celebrations of life' and religious services as more sombre occasions. While collective emotion was a priority in both examples, whether this was sadness or joy varied between the examples. The examples suggest there is not consensus on whether collective emotion in funerals should focus on celebration or mourning, nor is this clearly divided by whether a service is more or less religious in nature. It is clear from the second example that the incorporation of religious content supported the emotional synchrony and collective joy as part of the 'celebration of life'. This suggests that the expression of collective emotion in funerals is supported by flexibility and personalisation as well as by elements of religious ritual.

In a small number of cases, the range of what can be offered, and the overall control of the service that is held by the officiant, allowed for things to be incorporated into the service that were not wanted. This particularly occurred where families reported that they didn't feel the officiant (whether minister or celebrant) had fully listened to them. One family member explained how the increased use of technology was used in an inappropriate way for her father's funeral by an independent celebrant.

She also said to us 'you could have some kind of cinematic showing of pictures while you have some music'. That wasn't him at all...at another point, I had said how he liked cats...he loved cats if they came near him...when we got to the crematorium and they

were pushing the coffin in, I noticed that on this screen there was a little picture of a kitten with my Dad's name underneath it. She hadn't asked me; she'd just done that which I thought was really odd. (Family member 1)

This has implications for how celebrants are trained to use the range of flexible and personalised options that can be incorporated into services in a way that ensures they balance being guided by the family and actively listening to them, while offering guidance where it is requested.

Influence of the funeral arranger and celebrant

Some of the examples in the previous section indicate that families looked to the funeral arranger or celebrant to guide them in choices around the form of funeral and officiant they should have, as well as the forms of content they could draw on in the service. Some of the families indicated that arrangers and celebrants had a substantial influence on their choices.

There were some cases where families shared that they wanted to be explicitly directed. One family member was asked in interview whether they had wanted a religious service and responded 'Not really, but we didn't really know. We just needed someone to help us figure it out because we'd not done this before and it was such a shock' (Family member 5). Other families also reflected on needing and receiving varying levels of guidance or direction.

I think in my Dad's one, it's interesting when you talk about that one because we did know the minister, but I don't remember having any input into the service, really. Like, he just told me what we were having, and that was alright. It was alright. It didn't feel pressurised, no, and if I'd have said, 'I don't want that', He would have said, 'That's fine', but I think we were all a bit like - it was a really bad time and he kind of took charge which I appreciated at the time... In terms of the recent experiences with the celebrant, I think it was like, 'You can have this or you can have this', or, 'I'm suggesting this'. It was a helpful amount of suggestion and sometimes - especially my [family members] found it really difficult and they couldn't decide anything. So, it was really helpful to have things to choose from rather than just going, 'blank page, what do you want?' It was helpful to have that, without the pressure of it. (Family member 9)

This example highlights that people planning funerals for their loved ones may not always be aware of the range of options that they can draw on in relation to content, as well as that they may feel overwhelmed by too much choice. This suggests that funeral professionals need to support people to understand the range of choice available, beyond the binaries of religious and non-religious, whilst also carefully guiding them through these options with suggestions that respond to their religious or spiritual needs.

There were occasions where families felt that the guidance or direction they received was not necessarily ideal. One family member explained why the funeral arranger had chosen to allocate a particular celebrant who she later felt was potentially not the right person to have been matched with.

They [the funeral arranger] said 'oh, we've got somebody in mind'. And because my Dad was a Shakespeare scholar and stuff, we'd said we'd like somebody who is, I don't know, someone who appreciates Shakespeare and literature and that sort of stuff. So, they said 'Oh we've got just the person who used to be a headteacher', or something. (Family member 1)

This family member did not feel the celebrant had listened well to the family or reflected what her father would have wanted. An opportunity to see celebrant profiles, and understand the range of who is available and what their particular specialisms are, would better support informed choice when it comes to choosing an officiant.

A persistence of religious content in funerals – the 'rite' thing to do?

Overall, as with the other elements of our research, the interviews with families reinforce that there is a persistence of religion in everyday funerals, alongside personalised content. One key reason for the persistence of incorporating religious ritual appeared to be because families viewed it as making a 'proper' funeral. They often spoke about opting for religious content because of a sense of it being the 'right thing to do' as in the examples below.

I don't know the best way to describe it but it was kind of, I don't know, like the right thing to do. (Family member 4)

I had to do what Mum wanted really, and [my sister] was also keen. Mum really liked that hymn, All Things Bright and Beautiful, from Sunday school and she wanted The Lord's Prayer because she said that it wouldn't be right if it wasn't included. (Family member 5)

We chose Psalm 23 because Mum really wanted that, and everyone has The Lord's Prayer, so that seemed right and Mum liked that. She felt it wouldn't be right without it. (Family member 7)

In this sense, the use of religious content was presented as a rite or obligation rather than necessarily a choice, often particularly for the older generations of families.

However, for some, the incorporation of hymns and prayers was also seen as bringing comfort.

What we actually done was we all sat down and had a discussion on what we would like. So, although the family is not religious but it still, I suppose, to some extent, it's a little bit of comfort there having some of the hymns and The Lord's Prayer and things like that, I think you get a little bit of comfort from it. (Family member 4)

This suggests that the use of such resources may bring a sense of emotional synchrony to funerals if 'bringing comfort' is understood as relating to emotion. This may link back to the importance of funerals, for some families, in facilitating collective emotion, as suggested earlier. In this case, the role of religious ritual and the collective act of saying a prayer or singing a hymn may contribute to feeling a sense of collective comfort or emotion.

The sense of comfort, however, might also relate to feeling that the deceased is being committed to God in some way. Some families did suggest that they included religious content for this reason. The same family member as quoted above, although they described themselves as ‘not religious’, also explained that their incorporation of some religious content in an otherwise non-religious funeral related to ‘I suppose, in a way, the hope that she will go on, we're putting her in the hands of God, sort of thing’ (Family member 4). This may link to the idea of people ‘hedging their bets’, as suggested by some celebrants and arrangers in the research. Further to that, it indicates that some otherwise non-religious family members do feel some sense of religious belief (albeit potentially quite agnostic and/or temporary) when they are grieving – particularly, that they do want to believe their loved one is living on in some way. This emphasises, again, the need for funeral professionals to be well equipped to work with people’s spiritual needs regardless of whether they initially request a non-religious funeral.

Defining the everyday funeral as a non-religious service with religious elements?

Families did not necessarily view funerals with some religious content as *religious funerals*. Most described having opted for a non-religious funeral though they incorporated some religious elements in the final service. When asked whether including religious content in a funeral made it a religious service, one family member responded as follows:

No, I think it's a lot deeper than that. I think, really, if you want it religious you need to fully understand it...I mean, you might have hymns and The Lord's Prayer, for example, whereas I think when you go with, into the Church, you do have different readings from the Bible and things like that. So, there's a lot of coming away from [a focus on] the person that's passed away and going over to the religious side. (Family member 4)

This family member did not consider the service they had planned as religious because it was not in a church and the focus was more on their deceased relative than on religion. They described the funeral as ‘I would say non-religious, but then I suppose a little bit of a nod to religion, which suited us perfectly’. Family members may, in some cases, ultimately define services with religious elements as non-religious because they are presented with the binaries of religious and non-religious in the first place, rather than a spectrum.

However, for some, there was potentially the conscious desire to distinguish what they organised as a personalised service with an overall focus on the person who had died from a church-led service focused on God. There was a shared sense among some interviewees that a heavily religious service would distract from the deceased and their life and be more impersonal than a service defined as generally ‘non-religious’. Others reflected similar sentiments to the family member quoted above that there would be less focus on the deceased and more on religion, even where the deceased was perceived as religious. For example, such comments included ‘We didn’t want it to be all about God’ (Family member 5) and ‘Mum believed in God, so it was a little more Godly, but not at the expense of talking about her’ (Family member 6). Again, this appears to reflect a distancing from institutional religion but not necessarily a

complete disconnection from some religious beliefs at times of grieving a loved one. Despite generally being described as non-religious, these everyday funerals appeared to fall into the middle ground of a spectrum and not neatly into the binaries of religious and non-religious.

Honouring the wishes of others

The reasons for including religious content in funerals often reflected the family member arranging the funeral's desire to manage the wishes of others, rather than simply reflecting their own preference as the person (or persons) arranging the funeral. Perceptions of what the deceased would want were obviously a key consideration in this regard. One family member reflected on how this played out differently for their mother's and father's funerals, with their father having passed away a short while before their mother did.

Mum believed in God, so it was a little more Godly, but not at the expense of talking about her. Dad's was a bit less Godly, and some of that was for Mum anyway. But both services were perfect for each of them...both were a good balance of stuff. We got to talk about both Dad and Mum, and I think that the religious stuff was just right for both of them. (Family member 6)

This reflects how the perceptions of what the deceased would want were managed but also touches on how the needs of multiple family members need to be considered. A member of the same family reflected further on their father's funeral, which their mother had been alive for, and how they balanced what their father would have wanted with their mother's desire for some religious content.

We didn't know what we could have, and I thought that if we had a non-religious service then we couldn't have any of it, and that upset Mum a bit. But when [the celebrant] came to see us, [they] reassured us that we could choose what we wanted but the service would still be all about Dad, and not all about God. (Family member 7)

This demonstrates, again, how the initial categories chosen of religious and non-religious do not reflect the complexity of what people want, overall, as well as the flexibility of the celebrant in supporting the family to find the right balance for them.

There were times where attempts to manage the desires of various family members and friends caused some tension, as in the examples below.

We did go into a Catholic church...which was interesting because my Dad wasn't Catholic, but he knew them all there, he was quite a big sort of figure in the local area so they were more than willing to do a Catholic service for him...I mean, to be honest, I'm not 100 percent how he knew the people from the Catholic church but I think he'd helped them outside of the church and they'd become friendly there... And, of course, when he passed away they said, 'Look, if you want a service in the church, we can do that for you!...'we had a mixture, because we had an actual church service and then we went on afterwards to [Crematorium] where it was pretty much a second service...because, I think the thing is, although there was a church service we still had

Irish pipers that he also knew, so they came along and it's like, 'Yes, we'll do that for him.' ...So, there were a lot of people jumping in to say, 'We'll do this, We'll do that,' but then equally there were a number of people that would not go to the Catholic Church. So, of course, then we had to have a secondary service at the Crem... because they didn't believe in religion and things like that. (Family member 4)

[Family member] was quite involved and wanted something quite religious, and [family member] is quite religious. But I'm not - I'm just angry with God, if there is a God, because [deceased] was too young and taken too soon... I had to do what Mum did really, and [family member] was also keen. Mum really liked that hymn, All Things Bright and Beautiful, from Sunday school and she wanted The Lord's Prayer because she said it wouldn't be right if it wasn't included. But for me it's nonsense. (Family member 5)

While these tensions clearly manifested in the final funeral event for these families, there is some indication that the potential for flexibility in people's funeral choices supports the managing of these tensions to some extent. This is particularly in the nuance that a funeral does not need to be either entirely religious or entirely secular. The family member quoted above who had two services at the Catholic church and the crematorium reflected that doing this felt like 'the right thing to do', suggesting that the choice and flexibility to have two services with a range of religious and non-religious content struck the right balance for them.

Spirituality as subjective

As with our content analysis, some family members interviewed recognised that it isn't always easy to determine what constitutes spiritual content beyond the formally religious. One woman, who arranged her father's funeral with no explicitly religious content at all, reflected on how his love of literature and her use of this in his funeral potentially represented something profoundly spiritual.

I suppose my Dad would consider all his literature spiritual, and that's where he lived his emotional, spiritual world really. He was just immersed in literature... But we didn't have any prayers, I think he would've thought that a bit odd if we'd done anything like that... I suppose a lot of Shakespeare's plays were, in a way, about the afterlife and people coming back, birth and death, sort of spirit ghosts, spirits that stay around. He loved Keats, so one of the poems that I read towards the end was a Keats poem that he would often recite to us at Sunday lunch. And I suppose because Keats died when he was twenty-six, having written all his poems and my Dad was obsessed with this idea of this young man writing all these poems and then living on... I suppose in a way, literature was a kind of religion for my Dad, it was something that was sort of enduring and lived beyond the person. (Family member 1)

This suggests that spirituality in funerals is subjective and what might appear to be an entirely non-religious service may have spiritual meaning. It is not clear from the research whether, at present, funeral arrangers and celebrants have explicit conversations about people's spiritual

needs beyond asking if they want formally religious content. As such, this may be an implication for their practice and training.

Negative experiences with officiants and other funeral professionals

Where families reported negative experiences with funeral professionals, these tended to relate to issues of lack of care or adaptability. Lack of attentiveness and active listening caused, in some cases, family members to feel that funeral professionals did not create services that represented how they or their loved one would have wanted them to be. People expected consistent care from the funeral professionals they engaged with, including both arrangers and officiants, and some families recalled times when they did not receive this.

We had a problem with the orders of service... [the arrangers] weren't always very careful with the details, but other than that everyone was good. I remember there seemed to be someone different every time we went to their premises, to make the arrangements... so it wasn't always very consistent, but it all came together in the end.
(Family member 8)

Some of the poor experiences with officiants related specifically to religious ministers who were perceived, overall, to have offered less choice and personalisation than independent celebrants.

My Nan wasn't really religious... If I had organised it myself, it would have been a bit different. It was a religious service, but having had subsequent funerals before that and after, he [the minister] didn't take any time to listen at all...it felt like he was filling in the blanks, and she had a really interesting life... They organised this C of E minister, and so it was different dealing with him. I don't know why Mum didn't want the minister that we knew...I think what we wanted out of it was, we only had it at the crematorium, but a dignified service that was warm....to celebrate her life and have that kind of warmth, I suppose...I would call it, it was like a cover lesson. It was like a plug and play service. It was almost like fill-in-the-blanks, 'So, so-and-so was born at the - went so-and-so, did this'. It just felt like he was just filling in the blanks rather than actually listening...from the moment we met him to the moment he left after the service, everything was in a hurry. It just felt like he was always, 'That's it. Right, good. Five minutes, blah blah blah. I've got to go. I've got another meeting at 7:15'. It felt a bit like we were an inconvenience... It wasn't memorable because it wasn't 'My Nan's' funeral', it was just a funeral. It could have been a funeral for anyone, apart from I did the tribute...that was the worst part, not because what I said was the worst part. Because he was so rude...he just made it feel like it was a real inconvenience and a rush. (Family member 9)

This reflects the view shared earlier that church-led services were often perceived by families as not being focused on the person whose funeral it was – as well as in this case, a sense of a lack of care and attention by the minister.

However, not all independent celebrants were able to manage the nuance of what people wanted as effectively as some of the examples shared in the above sections. One participant reflected on her shock at her father being described as an atheist by the celebrant at the start of the service.

I don't think I had used the word atheist although I might've done, that's quite a strong word, atheist, isn't it? We were just talking about him and how he loved a theological discussion, he used to read in church quite a lot because he was best friends with the vicar, but he always denied any existence of God of any kind...I was explaining this to the celebrant... There were these sorts of mixed messages, of 'I'm really, really here for you', and then this sort of distance where I didn't really feel like she had really listened to us... I asked her to open and close the service... And then [the celebrant] stood up, introduced everybody and said, 'Of course, this is non-religious because [my dad] was an atheist' and I was shocked when she said that. I found it really strange that I was so shocked by that word because there is something so strong about it. Also, I knew that the two wardens that ran his retirement home were deeply religious and they were the loveliest people in the world, and my dad loved them and they loved him and I knew they were sitting at the back. And I had this terrible sense when she said this, I was furious with her because she hadn't run it past me... That's why the word 'atheist' really disturbed me, knowing that these lovely people who were running this home, I knew they were deeply religious and I knew that would be really offensive. And actually afterwards when we stood outside [one of them] sort of came up to me and gave me a hug and she said, 'he was not an atheist'. I said, 'no, no, I don't think he was', you know, but they found that deeply offensive. I was trying to be very, very careful and I thought this was a very sort of unobtrusive blundering in. (Family member 1)

This suggests that some celebrants were more fixed in binarized categories of religious and non-religious and did not fully listen or explore the nuance of what families needed. The example reflects a complexity in managing the spiritual needs of families, even where they have opted for a non-religious service and describe themselves and/or their deceased loved one as non-religious. This example also shows that finding the 'middle ground' between the binaries relates back to some extent to managing the wishes and feelings of others; in this case, the people who ran the retirement home. This suggests that the spiritual needs of a range of people are considered and navigated by people organising funerals for their loved ones, from their own to those of the deceased, and to those of other family members and friends. There is a potential implication here for training for celebrants to ensure it covers working with the full range and complexity of spiritual needs when supporting families and not adopting fixed or binary categories for understanding what people's religious and spiritual needs might be.