

Reflections, implications, and recommendations for churches

The following reflective questions, implications and recommendations for churches and ministers emerge from the 'Faith in funerals' research. These should be considered alongside the research findings presented in the report and toolkit resources.

Five key reflective questions

1. How flexible are religious ministers and churches to support funerals containing a range of 'degrees of religion' alongside personalised elements?
2. How do religious ministers support families to navigate their varied spiritual needs when planning funerals for their loved ones?
3. How might religious ministers respond to the sense that the term 'celebrant' and its connotations of 'celebration' do not reflect what all people want when designing a funeral that is a fusion of religious and non-religious content?
4. How might religious ministers build strong relationships with funeral arrangers and ensure they know what they can offer to families?
5. How far does a religious minister's 'stake' in their local funeral sector reflect their relationships with their community – or not?

Five key implications

1. Don't underestimate the power of sacred spaces to 'hold' 'non-religious' funeral events in authentic and sensitive ways.
2. Pay attention to the grief journeys of those after any funeral event - provide space for community gathering, remembrance and talking.
3. Material symbolism is important for conveying depth and substance in an increasingly digitalised and on-line funeral experience.
4. The move towards personalisation is not automatically 'secular' or a rejection of religious content or practice. It's important to operate a both/and approach to personalisation and 'faith' rather than assuming an either/or situation.
5. The psycho-social-spiritual wellbeing framework devised by Holloway et al. (2013) is still a useful and important yardstick for a good funeral capable of delivering healthy grieving. It plays to the strengths of what faith-based approaches to funerals can still offer, especially with regard to fulfilling the social and spiritual dimensions of this model.

Five key recommendations for religious denominations in England and Wales

1. Provide extra resources for the church and other faith-based celebrants to understand more strategically the pastoral opportunities for engaging in what is perceived to be increasingly a 'no-religion' space, but which nevertheless can have high levels of religious and spiritual content.
2. Develop new liturgical resources that can be used for 'no-religion' funeral events with religious and spiritual content.
3. Establish a joint advisory committee with the National Association of Funeral Directors to develop new professional guidelines around meeting religious, spiritual and belief needs of service users.
4. Pilot a regular practitioner's forum to share best practice and experience with independent celebrants to feed into policy and training frameworks for both cohorts of celebrant (institutional and independent).
5. Develop, in partnership with training providers for independent celebrants, modules and learning opportunities that directly address the religious and spiritual needs of serviced users and provide space for reflection on their own personal positionalities on this issue.

The aim of all recommendations is to create a more confident sector when it comes to addressing issue of 'faith' in the new funeral event landscape. This will help lead to the provision of more effective funeral events that recognise complexity, nuance and diversity around this issue, rather than more crude 'binary' and either/or approaches that our research found to exist in some parts of the funeral industry.