

## Faith in Funerals- training guide (independent celebrants)

### An outline of this training

This training has come out of a research project called 'Faith in Funerals', undertaken over a two-year period by Goldsmiths university. The research looked at people's choices of religious and non-religious resources when arranging a funeral service for their loved one, in services led by independent celebrants. These services were typically classed as 'non-religious' services, but usually had elements of religious content.

The research consisted of a national questionnaire sent to funeral arrangers, in-depth interviews with celebrants, funeral arrangers, families who had organised a funeral, and ordained ministers. There was also a sample of 1000 services considered from a range of independent celebrants in England and Wales.

This training should last 90 minutes.

### The purpose of this training

The purpose of this training is support celebrants to reflect on how to deal with people's spiritual and religious needs when arranging a funeral service, and to understand better the choices they make, and the celebrant's own influence in how they guide the family in making these choices.

### Learning outcomes

By the end of the session, Celebrants will be better able to

- Understand better the spiritual and religious needs of people arranging funerals for their loved ones.
- Reflect on how to cater for a range of spiritual needs and viewpoints.
- Explain to people the nuanced ranges of options in relation to spiritual and religious content in funeral ceremonies.
- Guide people to make choices that meet their spiritual needs.
- Understand the influence they have when people are making these decisions.

### How this session is delivered

This session can be delivered in person or online (eg Zoom or Teams), as long as there is room (in person or virtual) for people to break off into small groups. A suggested maximum number is 12 people per session to help the discussion within the session.

### Overview of the session

This session is delivered alongside a PowerPoint presentation, and this document has some helpful notes to guide you in facilitating the session. This document will also provide an overview of some of the research findings.

This will be a session with some interaction, including real-life scenarios that have been experienced by celebrants when visiting families.

Overview of the session and timings- total suggested time: 90 mins

#### *Introductions and ice breaker – Slides 1-4 (12 mins)*

The presentation opens with the main aim and learning outcomes for the session. The ice breaker is designed to get people talking and involved. This should be done fairly quickly.

#### *Research activities / key findings - Slides 5-13 (13 mins)*

This segment will outline the main research findings from the Faith in Funerals project about the use of religious content in funerals. This includes quantitative and qualitative data, and begins to highlight the nuance that exists around religious content in funerals.

#### *Activity - Slide 14 (6 mins)*

This is designed to encourage Celebrants to consider a real-life example of how a names and roles around officiants can be confusing.

#### *What constitutes a religious service? - Slides 15-17 (7 mins)*

This segment is designed to get Celebrants to consider what they feel constitutes a religious service and that they should understand their own religious perspective to guide families.

#### *Activity - Real-life scenarios (One per group, then brief plenary discussion) - Slides 18-21 (20 mins)*

These are real-life scenarios and the activity is designed to get Celebrants to consider how they would act in these situations, considering the difference that families may have regarding religious content and beliefs. Celebrants are also encouraged to consider their own viewpoint and how they are influential in helping people make their choices. (Slide 21 supports a brief overview of reflections from the activity).

#### *Family interviews - Slides 22-25 (8 mins)*

These are examples given to us through the family interviews, including a quote from Maya Angelou that a family member shared.

#### *The impact of Covid and increased technology - Slides 26-28 (4 mins)*

These slides outline findings on the impact of Covid-19 and the implications of technological advances in funerals.

#### *Some final thoughts and questions - Slide 29-30 (20 mins)*

A few questions to tend the presentation and allow the Celebrants any final thoughts / reflections.

## Guide for the facilitator

#### *Slide 1: Opening page (1 min)*

The Faith in Funerals research project was undertaken over a period of two years, and was funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust, as well as supported by the National Association of Funeral Directors alongside a range of industry stakeholders.

#### *Slide 2: Aim of the session (1 min)*

The purpose of the session is to introduce some of the research findings and relate them to how a celebrant can better support families in arranging funeral services for their loved ones.

#### *Slide 3: Learning Outcomes. (2 mins)*

**See slide**

*Slide 4: Icebreaker (8 mins)*

This is a short exercise to encourage people to start thinking about their own spiritual and religious beliefs and a suggested fun exercise about the choice of music in funerals services (data supplied by Obitus, 2023)

***(The data for this is at the bottom of these session notes)***

Presentation of Research Findings, including scenarios

*Slide 5: Project background (2 mins)*

The area of civil funerals has received little attention recently, despite the growing trend of people to have fewer services in church, led by religious ministers, and the growing use of crematoria, alongside the steep rise in civil celebrants over the past few years. The research focussed on the fusion of religious content in civil ceremonies, and the reasons behind that.

*Slide 6: Main Research aims (2 mins)*

Additional aims:

- To explore how families use the services of funeral celebrants to find and create meaning using religious and non-religious resources.
- To understand how people using funeral celebrants understand and navigate their spiritual needs and strengths.
- To generate further understanding of the large section of the population who opt for neither entirely religious nor entirely secular funerals for their loved ones.

*Slide 7: Research activities (2 mins)*

These are the main activities that were undertaken as part of the research project.

*Slide 8: Breakdown by age (1 min)*

The age breakdown for the deceased in the 1000 services we used as part of the research was as follows. Over 55% of the services were for people aged 70-90 and just 5.4% were for under 50s.

*Slide 9: Religious Content (1 min)*

These were taken from the 1000 services. 0.4% had readings from non-Christian religions - Buddhist and Islam. 0.3% had prayers from other traditions - one each of Jewish, Hindi and Apache.

People from faiths beyond Christianity often have ceremonies organised outside of the mainstream funeral industry, rather than using the services of independent celebrants.

*Slide 10: Popular songs. (1 min)*

There are complexities over categorisation of non-hymns and non-explicit religious poems that have spiritual connotations. Many of the poems and songs chosen make reference to the afterlife and the comfort that gives people.

This slide shows just a few of the popular songs and pieces of music that have some connection to the spiritual / religious or afterlife.

*Slide 11: Popular poems (1 min)*

The same as for the music. There are many poems which are not strictly religious and are often chosen in the absence of any more explicit religious content.

*Slide 12: Quotes from interviews with Celebrants. (1 min)*

We interviewed 14 celebrants and one of the things a number of them mentioned was the vast increase in the numbers of celebrants being trained.

Whilst services led by celebrants are on the rise, there are an increasing number of celebrants on the market, to the point where there is concern amongst some of the celebrants in our research that the market is being saturated.

*Slide 13: What's in a name? (2 mins)*

Names are important to some people, but less so to others. Celebrants have been called many things by people, including those on the slide!

*Slide 14: Activity. (6 mins)*

The aim of this activity is to put the celebrant into a situation where they have been mislabelled / misnamed / potentially misunderstood. This is a real-life situation that happened to a celebrant in our research. The celebrants are encouraged to consider how they would act at that moment in someone's home.

**Scenario 1:** You're in a meeting with a next of kin, whose husband has passed, and the telephone rings. She answers and says 'Sorry, I can't talk right now, the vicar's here'.

**Question 1: Do you respond? If so, how? If not, why not?**

**Continued:** You've chosen to gently explain that you're not a vicar / not ordained / don't wear a dog collar. The telephone then rings again, and once again she says 'Sorry, I can't talk, the vicar's here'.

**Question 2: Do you respond? If so, how? If not, why not?**

*Slide 15: A religious funeral is...what? (3 mins)*

The Celebrants and Arrangers interviewed were asked what they considered as a religious funeral. There were a range of comments. This illustrates that there is no clear idea as to what constitutes a religious service.

*Slide 16: Guiding people around religious content. (2 mins)*

People have many different reasons for including religious content into a largely non-religious funeral. This slide shows three of these reasons, according to the celebrants in our research.

*Slide 18: Understanding your own spiritual journey (2 mins)*

Going back to the icebreaker question. Understanding our own spiritual and religious beliefs is important as it gives us a framework with which to help other people, and know how we might guide them, without influencing or leading them based on our own positions.

*Slides 18-21: Activity - (10 mins small groups) (10 mins plenary) (20 mins)*

The aim of these activities is to help celebrants understand real life situations. Each is designed to help the celebrant consider how they might guide the family in each situation.

**Suggestion - in small break-out groups, each question is considered by one group. All groups have all the questions but are asked to consider one of the questions.**

**Scenario 1:** You're meeting a family and they tell you that they're not sure if they should have the Lord's Prayer or a hymn. Their 93 yr old Mum was described as 'Church of England' and went to

*Sunday school, but not a church goer. She liked Songs of Praise though. The two grown up children organising the service have no interest in religion.*

**Questions:**

***How do you guide them through the options and help them decide?***

***What factors are important here?***

***How does your own belief affect your guidance and influence on the family?***

**Scenario 2:** *You're meeting the Father (in his late 70s) who is arranging a service for his 48 yr old son. The Father's wife died three years ago, and his son leaves two teenage children, and has no partner. The children aren't coping very well so the Father is dealing with the arrangements.*

*He says that he has no faith, but his wife was a church-goer, and so her service had prayers, a bible reading and a couple of hymns. His son had no religious leanings at all, and nor to his children. He then says that if his wife were here, she would be adamant that there should be some religious content. He doesn't like God at the moment but is very much torn because he also wants to respect his late-wife's wishes.*

**Questions:**

***How do you guide him through the options and help him decide?***

***What factors are important here?***

***How does your own belief affect your guidance and influence on the family?***

**Scenario 3:** *You meet with a large family of a 60 yr old man. He loved football and rugby and would belt out 'Abide with me' on cup final day, and Jerusalem at England rugby matches. But, at the same time, he would have described himself as an atheist. He has two sports-mad children in their 30s.*

*His wife is very passive and just wants everyone to be happy. His uncle, however is a retired vicar, and although he doesn't want to lead the service, he is very much pushing for much more of a religious service. He's becoming quite animated. There appears to be some conflict in the room about this aspect of the service.*

**Questions:**

***How do you guide them through the options and help them decide?***

***What factors are important here?***

***How does your own belief affect your guidance and influence on the family?***

**Feedback to the group**

**Question**

*After hearing people's feedback, would anyone do anything differently?*

*Slide 22: Religious / spiritual beliefs are personal for each of us (2 mins)*

This slide shows how one family in our research worked their way through their own personal situation when considered their Mum and Dad's services. It highlights that these situations are nuanced.

*Slide 23: Family interview slides & scenarios (1 person, 5 funerals) (3 mins)*

This was the experience of one person we interviewed who had organised five funerals in four years. She had strong feelings about each one of them, and four of the five were led by different officiants, some two ordained ministers, two civil celebrants.

The first was for her Father - a family friend, also a religious minister. She said the service was personal, because the Minister knew her Father, but the minister chose the bible readings that would be included.

The second was for her Nan, and was an unknown religious Minister. She described this as one of the worst experiences of her life. It was impersonal, all at God and hardly about her Nan.

The third was for a close friend, and was a Celebrant. She said that the service was personal, but far too scripted, and that the celebrant hardly looked up from her notes.

The last two were for her Father and Mother in law. This time the Celebrant was personal, warm and perfect. Didn't read every word, engaged with the congregation and made it all about her Nan. She also had total input into what would be included in the service.

This person's experience includes an interesting range of experiences and emotions, which she says will stay with her forever.

*Slide 24: Family interviews (2 mins)*

These are just a few of the quotes given to us by some of the families we interviewed

*Slide 25: Maya Angelou quote (1 min)*

One of the family members offered this quote, which we feel was very personal. It perhaps speaks for itself. People organising funerals for their loved ones want to feel like they have been listened to and that they feel like they have done the right thing.

*Slides 26 / 27: Has Covid had an impact? (3 mins)*

These were some of the comments given to us through the interviews with celebrants and arrangers, and also data from the analysis of the 1000 services.

*Slide 28: Be careful with technology! (1 mins)*

This was from one family interview and a situation where a celebrant went to see a family. The family member had an uncomfortable feeling that the celebrant wasn't *really* listening to her. At many crematoria, the technology allows a picture to be put up in memory of a person on the big screens at the front of the chapel. The family member was horrified that this picture was chosen, without agreement, as she said it definitely didn't sum up her Father!

Consider this family's feelings with the Maya Angelou quote in mind.

*Slide 29 - Some final thoughts (5 mins)*

These are just some thoughts / questions that have come out of the research for further consideration, not for consideration now.

*Slide 30 - Final suggested plenary questions (15 mins)*

**Suggestion - in pairs (or small groups online), each question is considered by one group. All the groups have all the questions but are asked to consider one of the questions.**

*How do you see your role in identifying the spiritual and religious needs of people when they're arranging a funeral of a loved one?*

*How do your own spiritual and religious beliefs influence how you guide others?*

*What can we, as Celebrants, do better to allow people's spiritual and religious needs to be fully reflected in their loved-one's service?*

*What tools / resources might be useful to help Celebrants deal with people's spiritual and religious needs?*

*Slide 31 - Final Slide*

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## Appendix 1

Top 40 songs used for funeral services

*Data from Wesley Media, 1/1/23 - 31/7/23 (Obitus, 2023)*

1. MY WAY - Frank Sinatra
2. TIME TO SAY GOODBYE - Sarah Brightman & Andrea Bocelli
3. SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW – Eva Cassidy
4. WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD – Louis Armstrong
5. WIND BENEATH MY WINGS – Bette Midler
6. YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE – Gerry & the Pacemakers
7. UNFORGETTABLE – Nat King Cole
8. WE'LL MEET AGAIN – Vera Lynn
9. SMILE – Nat King Cole
10. SUPERMARKET FLOWERS – Ed Sheeran
11. SIMPLY THE BEST – Tina Turner
12. MORNING HAS BROKEN – Cat Stevens
13. BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER – Simon & Garfunkel
14. DANCING IN THE SKY – Dani & Lizzy
15. FIELDS OF GOLD – Eva Cassidy
16. JEALOUS OF THE ANGELS – Donna Taggart
17. ANGEL – Sarah McLachlan
18. SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW - Israel Kamakawiwo'ole
19. BRING ME SUNSHINE – Morecambe & Wise
20. MOONLIGHT SERENADE – Glenn Miller
21. YOU RAISE ME UP – Westlife
22. SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW – Judy Garland
23. STRANGER ON THE SHORE – Acker Bilk
24. I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN – Westlife
25. SAILING – Rod Stewart
26. I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU – Whitney Houston
27. DANCING QUEEN – ABBA
28. DANCE WITH MY FATHER – Luther Vandross
29. ANGELS – Robbie Williams
30. SOFTLY AS I LEAVE YOU – Matt Monro
31. THE WONDER OF YOU – Elvis Presley with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
32. IN MY LIFE – The Beatles
33. THESE ARE THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES – Queen
34. ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE OF LIFE (MONTY PYTHON) (Clean) – Eric Idle
35. HE AIN'T HEAVY HE'S MY BROTHER – The Hollies
36. SONGBIRD – Eva Cassidy
37. TEARS IN HEAVEN – Eric Clapton
38. TIME TO SAY GOODBYE (CON TE PARTIRO) – Andrea Bocelli
39. BECAUSE YOU LOVED ME – Celine Dion

40. FLY ME TO THE MOON – Frank Sinatra