

# **Partners in Caring**



**Information for Funeral Directors from the Uniting Church in  
Australia**

The Uniting Church recognises and affirms the importance of the partnership between the church (usually represented by one of its ministers) and those working within the funeral industry, in caring for and supporting the bereaved, not least in the first hours and days following the death of a loved one.

The information in this brochure is offered respectfully, with the hope that it will assist those from outside the Uniting Church to better understand the principles and values that guide its practice as it responds to, and cares for, those who are grieving. A second information brochure, prepared specifically for the bereaved, is also available and may be of interest to you.

When a Uniting Church minister is requested to conduct a funeral they will seek an opportunity to meet with the bereaved family as soon as possible in order to establish a pastoral relationship and begin planning for the service. Your assistance, where necessary, in facilitating this connection will be very much appreciated.

The nature and purpose of the Uniting Church funeral service is best understood through the words with which the service begins:

***We are here today to give thanks to God for the life of NNN and to affirm the Christian conviction that while death is the end of mortal life, it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God. We are also here to share the sorrow of those who mourn, and to offer them our love and support.***

A funeral service conducted within the ethos of the Uniting Church will consist of at least the following elements:

prayer  
scripture readings  
an address by the minister  
the commendation of the person to God  
the committal of mortal remains to the elements  
an affirmation of the faith and hope we have in God; and  
a blessing

In addition, it is usual for time to be given to remember and offer thanks for the life of the person who has died, though always with honesty and integrity.

It is also common for music to be included in the service, and this may involve the singing of Christian hymns or songs.

The Uniting Church believes it is very important that the reality and finality of death be acknowledged and expressed, in both the pastoral support of the bereaved, and the conduct of the funeral service itself.

In this regard, it is important to remember that there will almost always be others, in addition to the immediate family, who will be grieving and need the opportunity to express their grief and say “goodbye” to the person who has died.

For all these reasons we have a preference for the following practices:  
when a funeral service is conducted in a church building it should be followed by, either the lowering of the coffin and scattering of earth at the graveside, or the act of fully removing the coffin from view at the crematorium, along with the committal  
the presence of the coffin at public memorial services  
the use of real earth (or earth mixed with dust/ashes) rather than flowers or flower petals at the graveside

Within the faith and polity of the church, and with due regard to the pastoral sensibilities involved at certain points, it is also our preference that the coffin be unadorned and placed at right angles to the Holy Table.

It is important that Christian symbols be prominent in the sanctuary and we suggest that any items of personal memorabilia be placed on another table near to, but separate from, the coffin.

In addition, and where applicable, it is our preference that the national flag be placed on the coffin only when it leaves the church building and that additional ceremonies involving other organisations do not take place in the church but at the graveside or crematorium.

Your support in encouraging the bereaved family in regard to these practices will help us as we seek to offer the best quality of care we can in difficult circumstances.

Ministers of the Uniting Church will welcome opportunities at any time to engage in face-to-face conversation regarding the principles and practices outlined in this leaflet.

It is our desire to be effective “partners in caring”.

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