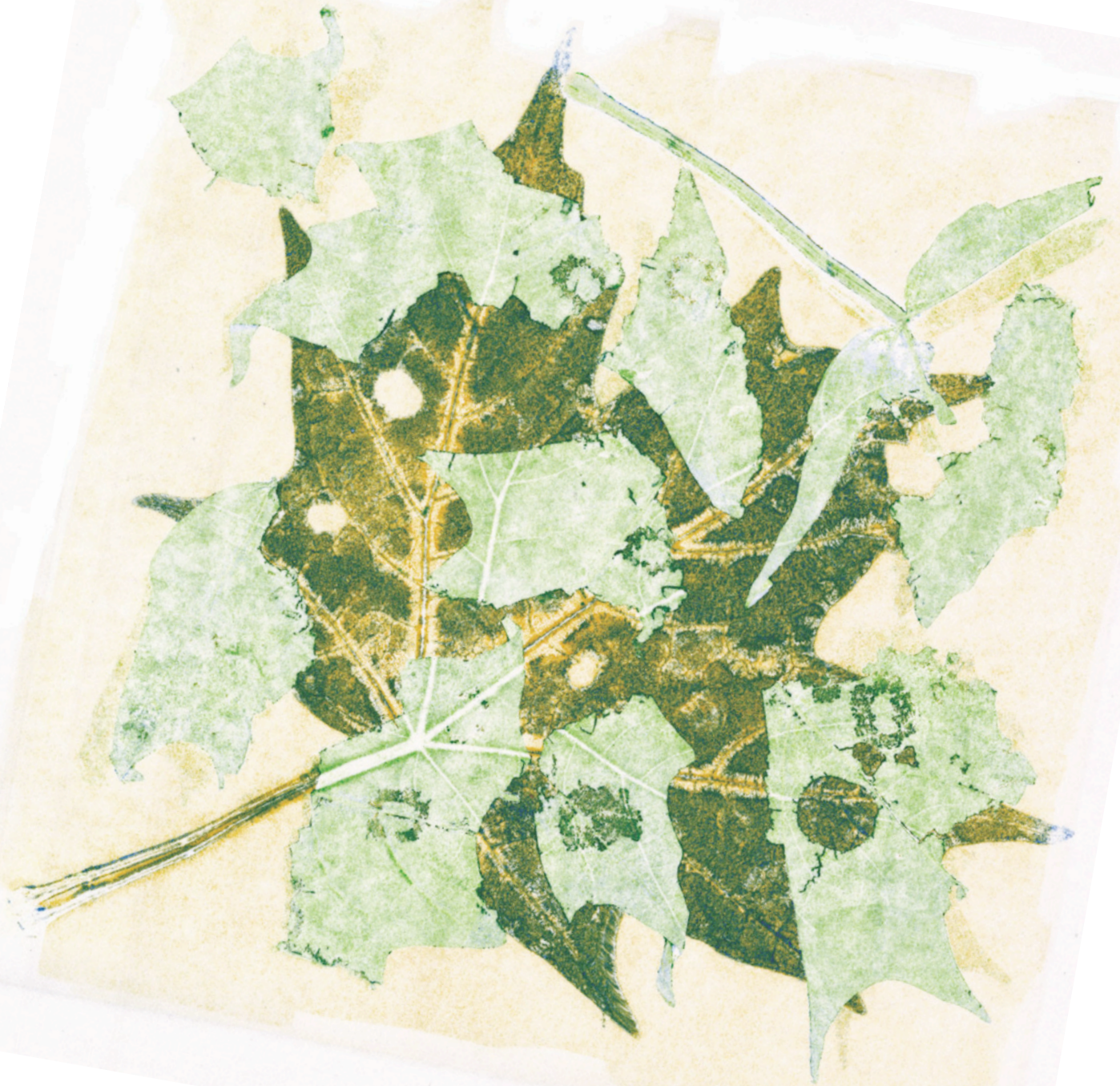


Undertaken WITH Love



A Home Funeral Guide
for Congregations and Communities

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All of Ann Manning's artwork in this manual is © 2007 Jack Manning & Friends and is used gratefully with permission. For more information on this remarkable artist and the home funeral her family provided her, see www.nogreysuits.org.

The creators of this manual assume no legal or financial responsibility for death-care arrangements by readers or for any unauthorized alterations of the original text. Readers are encouraged to supplement the manual with further research, education and training specific to their circumstances.

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Many thanks to Holly Stevens who originated the idea for this manual and saw it to publication.

Introduction

By Holly Stevens

When Nellie Hickerson, of Randleman, N.C., died in early 2008, she went to the grave in the same manner that she had lived her final years—lovingly tended by her children C.L. Hickerson and Suzanne Poorman on the family's 80-acre rural homestead.

For three days, Nellie's body lay in her bedroom, cooled by dry ice and the ice bottles that grandson Matthew Poorman had stashed ahead of time in the freezer. Captured earlier on a CD, Nellie's voice sang out now and then in a hauntingly ethereal Southern twang: "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

A third sibling drove down from Wilton, N.H., for the Friday burial in the homestead graveyard where C.L. had previously reinterred his father's remains. An unlined cedar casket made by a neighbor waited nearby. Meanwhile, friends and church members prepared meals, took pictures and brought shovels. Someone even thought to stash tampers and a rake for finishing the site afterward.

In the end, Nellie was laid to rest beside her husband on the only tract of land she'd ever known intimately, her grave adorned with the wildflowers and herbs she'd admired all her life.

If this story sounds fanciful, despite the fact that it really happened, it is only because we've grown so accustomed in the past century to handing over the care of our own dead to institutional caregivers. There is nothing wrong with hiring professional funeral providers, of course. But in recent years, more families like the Hickersons have opted to care for their own loved ones all the way to final disposition.

In all but a handful of states, a family may serve as its own funeral director in caring for its dead until burial or cremation. It does require attention to a few regulations and a willingness to be something of a pioneer in communicating your intentions to those who will be involved. But many who have chosen this route will tell you that they found it to be enormously healing and satisfying.

While a motivated family can independently acquire the legal knowledge and practical skills to arrange a home funeral, the process is eased considerably when a group assists. Often, that support might come in the form of a faith-community committee that embraces home funerals as a natural extension of its work in bereavement care. In other cases, an entirely secular group might evolve from a circle of close friends or neighbors or a hospice support group.

We've created this manual to help such groups, whether faith-based or secular, create committees to support families opting to care for their own loved ones from the moment of death until burial or cremation. The manual's aims are to:

- provide step-by-step instructions for how to start a home funeral committee;
- suggest a continuum of options in funerals from entirely institutional models to entirely home-centered models;
- teach the skills involved in handling, preparing, cooling, laying out and transporting the dead to the cemetery or crematory;
- convey the necessity of researching and grasping local and state laws that relate to home funerals and how to acquire the necessary knowledge; and
- offer ideas for sustaining the home funeral committee.

One challenge we faced in writing the manual was reaching agreement on what to call this work. Some prefer the moniker "family-directed funeral" to differentiate it from a funeral directed by licensed funeral directors. Others use "home death care," "natural funeral," family-centered death care" or

other combinations. After much give and take, we settled on *home funeral* as our primary term for the work and *home funeral committee* to denote the group that assists the family. They are not perfect descriptors. The word "funeral" carries multiple meanings—from the ceremony, to the procession to the grave, to the actual committal, to the entire process. Also, not all home funerals will occur in the home; some faith communities shelter the body, for instance. But the term "home funeral" seems to be gaining favor in most of the literature, perhaps because it falls more gently on the ear than its "death care" counterparts, and it is simple. For clarity, we devised this working definition:

A home funeral is a noncommercial, family-centered response to death that involves the family and its social community in the care and preparation of the body for burial or cremation and/or in planning and carrying out related rituals or ceremonies and/or in the burial or cremation itself. A home funeral may occur entirely within the family home or not. It is differentiated from the institutional funeral by its emphasis on minimal, noninvasive care and preparation of the body, on its reliance on the family's own social networks for assistance and support, and on the relative or total absence of commercial funeral providers in its proceedings.

The actual tasks carried out by the home funeral committee will vary according to its aims. One home funeral committee might be motivated most of all by the desire to embrace equality at life's end by purchasing inexpensive caskets in bulk and negotiating reduced rates for an immediate burial or cremation through a local funeral provider. Another

home funeral committee might be drawn especially to natural practices focusing on gentle, nonchemical care of the body in a home setting followed by burial in a biodegradable casket in a natural, or green, cemetery, which eschews vaults that would inhibit the process of “returning to the earth.”

Certainly a faith-based funeral-care committee would want to infuse its practices with its religious rituals, language and values, while a secular funeral-care committee might strive to avoid religious overtones that could be a hindrance to some members’ participation. In writing this manual, we tried to be inclusive of this diversity. Our study guides reflect this concern. They offer suggested exercises that might work in some settings but not others, and we’ve taken care not to be prescriptive or to assume a particular orientation. We encourage you to discard any suggestions that don’t fit easily with your group’s culture or practices and to incorporate your own customs at every opportunity.

Before training begins, the home funeral committee organizers will want to decide whether to use the manual as a group study guide or as a reference text. Used as a reference text, committee members might read the entire guide as one assignment in a training process. Other assignments might focus on other resources listed in the manual’s online resources or of the group’s own choosing. However, we anticipate that most groups will choose to use the manual as a study guide for a series of six weekly or monthly training gatherings. Used this way, the members would arrive at each gathering having read the text of the current chapter and having completed the homework assignments recommended in the previous chapter (or the leader’s declared alternative).

One decision that should be made ahead of

time is when and how to research and compile relevant laws at the local and state level that relate to home funerals and the disposition of dead human bodies. The third chapter, *Finding the Law*, offers guidance on how to locate the laws in your particular state and county that your home funeral committee must follow. If your group is blessed with the participation of someone who already has thoroughly researched such laws, that person might compile a list of them to be added to the space provided on page 20 before the group begins its training. Otherwise, the group will research and compile such laws as it reaches Chapter 3.

As groups begin to use the manual, we hope to hear from you about your experiences with it and with actual home funerals. Your feedback will greatly assist any future revisions. Please e-mail us at <http://tinyurl.com/undertakenwithlove>, or send a letter to Home Funeral Manual, c/o Holly Stevens, 5918 Pepper Road., Oak Ridge, NC 27310-9631. Be sure to let us know how we can get in touch with you.

Home funerals are not for everyone. Certainly, they are departures from the institutional manner in which Americans have arranged for death care since the early 20th century. Undoubtedly, home funerals require more involvement from the family, though the support of a group can greatly ease the load. Occasionally, circumstances will make a home funeral impractical. But most who have experienced home funerals share that the process was enormously healing, enabling them to participate creatively in honoring the one who died in ways that commercial funeral homes and crematories cannot replicate.

We are delighted that you are embarking on this road of discovery.

At Life's End

By Donna Belk



In many instances, the home funeral committee is a natural extension of a care group that formed not only to assist families at the time of a death and beyond but also to affirm and support them as death nears.

Families often hunger for guidance on how to help their loved one die less burdened and without unnecessary discomfort. Your committee might want to consider creating a pamphlet with practical suggestions that family members and friends can use at life's end. Here are some tips you might want to include:

Share memories and stories. Buy a book with blank pages, and write down family stories, recollections and thoughts. Add photos, mementos, etc., that portray the life that is passing.

Look at family photos. Select favorites, or write stories about the photos. Add captions because once your loved one dies, no one else may be able to identify the people in the photograph.

Put together a collection. This can be of recipes, poetry, stories or anything significant to the person who is dying. Add notes and record memories about the collection.

Read. Share poetry, or read a book or magazine aloud. Discuss what stands out.

Write. Compose and mail a letter, or ask them to write or dictate a letter to be read to their family members in five or 10 years.

Sing. Sing favorite family songs or lullabies, or buy an album of children's lullabies, and listen

to them together. If a Threshold Choir is available in your area, consider inviting them to sing at the bedside.

Practice visualization. Learn a simple visualization technique that you can use to help relax your loved one. This can also be used as a distraction while you wait for pain medication to bring relief.

Practice breathing techniques. Breathing exercises may help with relaxation, which can ease pain. They can also be useful later in the dying process when breathing can become difficult. Gently encourage them to let go of their breath and breathe deeply. Sometimes, it helps to say that you will breathe for them. Tell them how much they are loved, how much they have been loved and how safe they are.

Bring a pet to visit. If there are no pets in the house, a visit with a well-behaved animal may be enjoyable.

Leave the house. It can be very therapeutic to go out for a meal or short trip. This will, of course, be dependent upon the health and strength of the dying person, but anything that can be done to take the focus off the illness and put it onto something enjoyable is beneficial.

Hold a living memorial. Invite friends and family to come over and express their love now while it can be appreciated.

Even if loved ones are unresponsive, you can still show you care. In addition to singing and reading as described above, you can:

Provide comforting touch. Massage their hands, feet or lower legs. Rest your hand on the bed, and put their hand on top of yours.

Whisper gentle assurances or soothing words.

Repeat a comforting phrase as a sing-song while stroking their head, hand or arm. An example is, "All is well, and all is well, and all is doing very well."

Breathe. Match your breath to the rhythm of their breath.

Keep vigil. Sit silently by their bedside. This can be one of the most devotional acts of loving care you can offer.

Bless or pray for them.

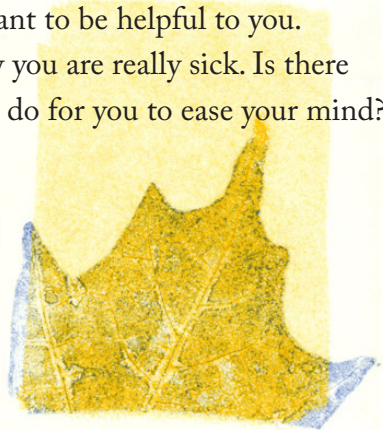
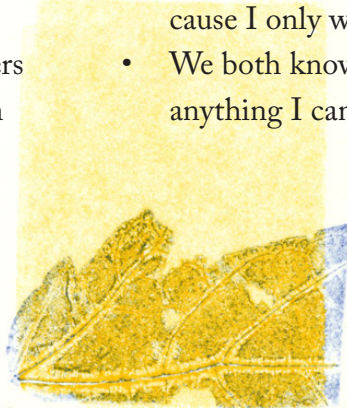
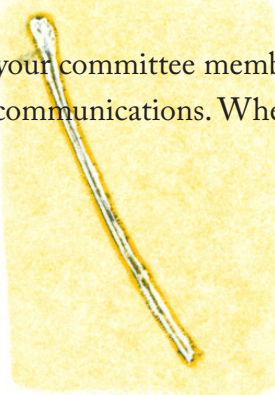
Purposeful Dialogue

People nearing death can feel out of control, which creates more anxiety. To help them retain a sense of control, your pamphlet might also recommend ways that families can ask questions or phrase statements that encourage the involvement of the one who is dying.

In visiting the family, your committee members can model these types of communications. When

genuinely asked, questions allow the one who is dying to feel appreciated and respected and are a reminder that others know they are much more than just their illness. Here are some examples:

- If you want to tell me what kind of day you are having today, I would like to know.
- How can I help?
- I am here to support you.
- Is there something I can get for you?
- Are you feeling uncomfortable? What can we do to make you more comfortable?
- Is there anything worrying or bothering you?
- I am sorry this is happening.
- Whatever you want to do or talk about is exactly what I want to do or talk about.
- I sometimes feel I don't know what to say, so please tell me if I say the wrong thing because I only want to be helpful to you.
- We both know you are really sick. Is there anything I can do for you to ease your mind?



Healing 3

By Ann Manning



STUDY GUIDE

For the opening of this gathering, read the following or begin in a way that is appropriate for your group. It may be helpful to get comfortable and sit quietly for a few minutes in order to gather your thoughts and become open to sharing with others.

...

Psalms 139: 7-10

A psalm of David

*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.*

Exercise

Total time: 35 minutes

Instructions: Pair off in groups of three. Take 5 minutes to read the instructions below. In 10-minute sessions, two members of the group will ask questions of the third member. The questions can be in any order. When the 10 minutes are up, switch roles until each member of the group has been interviewed.

Life Review

The purpose of a life review is to be able to paint a picture or tell the story of the person being interviewed. You are not trying to gather a collection of facts so much as the person's story. Avoid letting the interview become a question-and-answer session.

Instead, strive for a flowing conversation.

Begin by saying: "I'd like to find out about your life history. Could you tell me about it? Tell me as if you were telling me the story your life." Where they start their story and how they tell it will reveal what immediately strikes them as important.

Most people will skip over many details. If the details seem important, use open-ended questions to encourage more sharing of information. For example:

And then what happened?
What did you do after that?
How did you feel about that?

Another technique to encourage a person to go into more detail is to mirror back something important about what they've just said. You can repeat the exact words, or you can paraphrase. You can even add a thought you had or a feeling you sensed in something they said. For example:

Interviewee: My mother taught me to sew.
It was one of the times I felt closest to her.
Interviewer: It seems like you enjoyed being close to your mother.

Other examples of mirroring are:

I guess you really enjoyed that time of your life.
It sounds like it upset you when she said that.
It seems like that was an important event.

Try to talk in whatever way seems to be the preference of the person being interviewed. Pay careful attention to how the person is responding



Twilight 1 By Ann Manning

to your questions, and always be respectful of his or her privacy. If the person is uncomfortable discussing some aspect of his or her life, don't press for an answer. Simply move on.

When used in real end-of-life scenarios, avoid feeling the need to be constantly upbeat when the situation may be quite the opposite. And remember that sometimes words are not needed; just sitting together in silence can be sacred. Take your cues from the person who is near death. Avoid telling your own story. Place his or her needs at the heart of the matter.

An extensive list of potential life review questions may be found at the end of this chapter.

Assignment

1. Read the next chapter, *Then and Now*.
2. Interview elderly friends or relatives who have memories of funerals that took place in the home when they were young. Record their story to share at the next meeting. Alternatively, find written accounts of home funerals.

...

For the closing of this gathering, recite the following responsive reading or end in a way that is appropriate for your group.

Form a circle. Then, going in a clockwise direction, let each member take turns reading one "says one" line, while the group responds with the refrain.

Blessed Are These Hands

a responsive reading by Holly Stevens

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have held an infant.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have closed a casket.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have carved and painted.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have worn thin with use.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have brushed away tears.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have turned pages of ancient texts.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have scripted a letter to a lonesome friend.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have been held back in anger.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have prepared a nourishing meal.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have trembled in fear.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands that have been raised in praise.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Says one: Blessed are these hands we now join in love.

Refrain: Blessed are our lives, and blessed our hands with which we serve.

Life Review Questions

Parents and/or Grandparents:

- What can you tell me about their lives?
- When and where were they born?
- Where did they live?
- How did they make a living?
- What were important events in their life?
- Do you recall anything important they said to you or did for you?
- What are your clearest memories of them?
- Did they have any special traditions?
- What role did each play in raising you?

Early Childhood:

- What do you know about yourself as a baby?
- Were there any family stories or jokes about what you were like as a child?
- What are your earliest childhood memories?
- Do you remember any songs or lullabies?

School Years:

- Do you remember the very first day?
- How did you do at school work?
- What were your relationships like with your teachers and schoolmates?
- Did you ever get into trouble? Why?
- What did you want to be when you grew up?
- Were you ever given any important advice?

Adolescence:

- What can you tell me about your adolescence?
- When did you start to date?
- What were those relationships like?
- What things did you do with your friends?
- Who helped you the most in your family or outside of your family?

- What kind of jobs did you have?
- Were any very difficult or unusual?

Family Information:

- Tell me about your siblings.
- Were there any conflicts in your family?
- Did your family ever move?
- What was your religious upbringing?

Adult Life:

- When did you first leave home? Why?
- What's been important about your adult life?
- Tell me about your adult relationships.
- What types of jobs have you had?
- What jobs did you especially enjoy?
- What are your hobbies or other interests?
- How did you meet your spouse?
- How did you fall in love?
- When did you decide to marry?
- Was there a wedding? If so, what was it like?
- Did you have children?
- Describe your relationships with them.
- Do any family members have your traits?

Miscellaneous:

- Is there anything you are very proud of?
- If you could be any age again, what age would you be? Why?
- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would it be? Why?
- What do you feel like you need to complete?
- What important messages do you want to deliver and to whom?
- Have you told everyone who needs to know how much you love them?

Then and Now

By Donna Belk, Margalo Eden, Wendy Lyons
and Holly Stevens



If you visit a funeral home today, you're apt to find a general price list that includes embalming and a sealed metal casket in its description of a "traditional" arrangement. But for most of America's history, the traditional funeral was a far more simple and affordable affair.

Many of our grandparents knew exactly what to do when a death occurred, and friends, neighbors and faith communities rallied to help. Often, at least one woman in the community possessed specialized knowledge in the laying out of the dead. Just as a midwife was called upon to assist with a birth, this "shrouding woman" could be called upon to assist following a death and organize the women in the cleaning and dressing of the body. Historically in America, after-death care was considered the exclusive duty of women. Meanwhile, the men built the casket, dug the grave and transported the body.

The Civil War marked the beginning of a historic transition in the way Americans would care for their dead for generations to come. When soldiers died in combat, they were typically buried in the battlefield. But families that could afford the expense often had the government transport their dead home for burial. As the number of dead increased—along with the challenges of locating and transporting decomposing corpses from battlefields, hospitals, etc.—a lucrative market for new "embalming surgeons" emerged. Contracted by the government or working independently, they performed

arterial embalming to slow decomposition and better enable transportation over long distances. These embalmers were the forerunners of the modern-day funeral director.

And little by little, caring for our dead went from being an act of love freely carried out by families and communities to a trade that allows for little—if any—hands-on family involvement. And it's been that way for decades.

Reclaiming Our Past

After-death care in America is once again in a transition of historic proportions. Lisa Carlson's trailblazing book "Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love," which was first published in 1987, inspired many families to rethink how to approach burial and cremation. Today, Funeral Consumers Alliance and many FCA affiliates throughout America educate consumers about their right to care for their own dead. Modern-day pioneers in family-led home funerals, including Nancy Jewel Poer, Jerrigrace Lyons and Beth Knox, have contributed to our understanding of the practical skills involved in caring for our dead.

Likewise, those who have participated in home funerals confirm their healing benefits. Many have graciously invited the public to bear witness through photos, videos and newspaper stories so that others are inspired to follow in their footsteps. With each passing year, more people choose to reconnect with this sacred tradition and welcome the funeral back into the intimacy of the home.

Although family-directed home funerals take more effort to arrange and carry out, many families

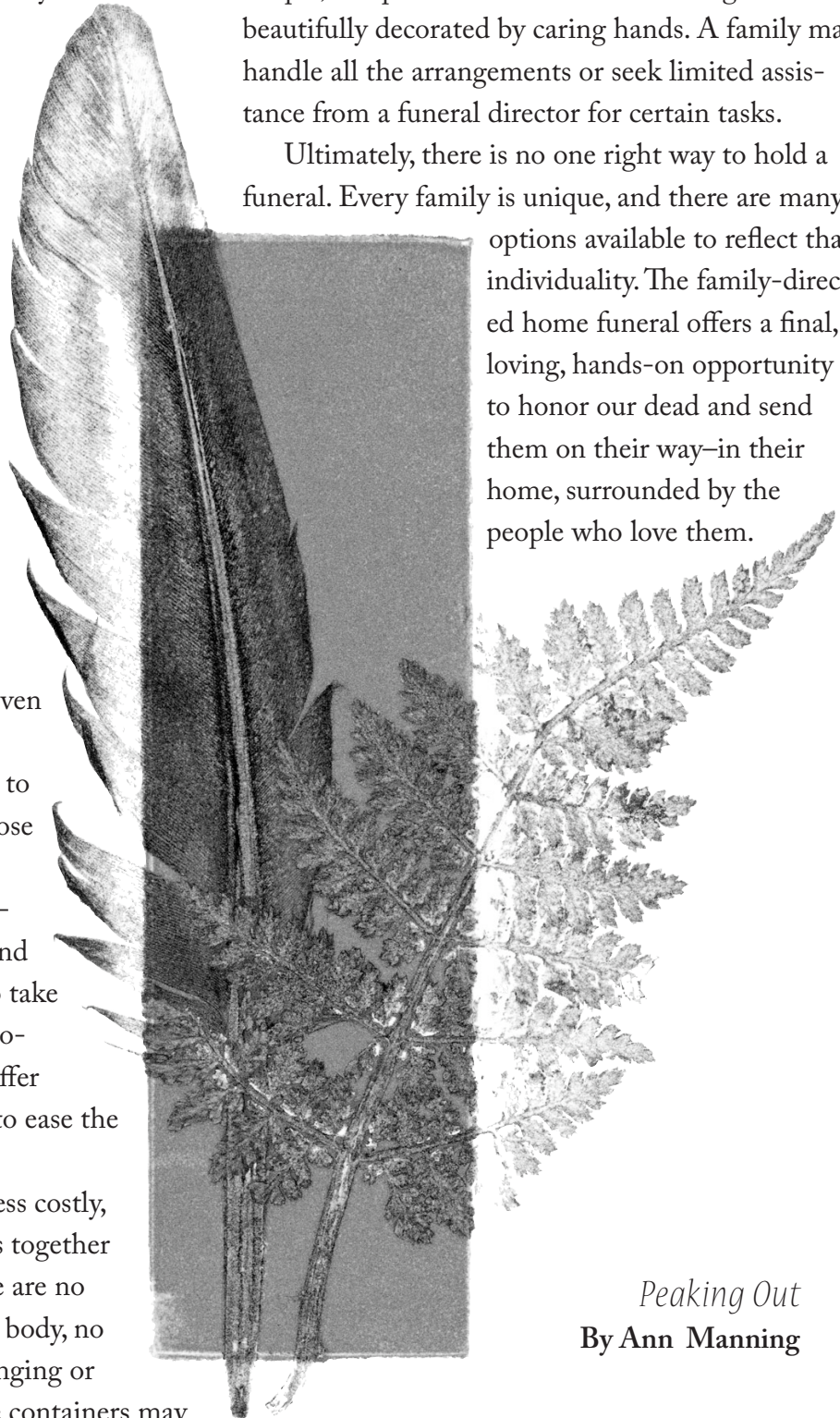
feel they are more meaningful and healing than those arranged for them by a funeral director. A home funeral can help people gently integrate the death into their lives. When the body remains at home for a few days, family and friends lovingly attend to it and remain connected to the process, their deceased loved one and each other. A home funeral offers mourners a sense of control and helps them feel useful. It also enables families to create the ambience, to decide how the body is to be treated, to choose—without pressure—how to facilitate the most meaningful gathering for their loved one's farewell.

A home funeral does require organization and determination. Even mundane tasks, such as filing state and local forms, while not difficult to perform, may seem daunting to those deep in grief. For this reason, it is important to plan ahead when possible and gather family members and friends who are willing and able to take on various responsibilities. An ongoing home funeral committee can offer acquired wisdom and consistency to ease the process.

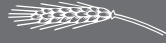
A home funeral can be much less costly, as well. When a community comes together to provide this loving service, there are no facility fees, no fees for storing the body, no fees for transportation, flower arranging or cosmetology. Coffins or alternative containers may

be crafted and decorated instead of purchased. An urn for cremated remains can be fashioned, or a simple, inexpensive container can be bought and beautifully decorated by caring hands. A family may handle all the arrangements or seek limited assistance from a funeral director for certain tasks.

Ultimately, there is no one right way to hold a funeral. Every family is unique, and there are many options available to reflect that individuality. The family-directed home funeral offers a final, loving, hands-on opportunity to honor our dead and send them on their way—in their home, surrounded by the people who love them.



Peaking Out
By Ann Manning



STUDY GUIDE

For the opening of this gathering, read the following or begin in a way that is appropriate for your group. It may be helpful to get comfortable and sit quietly for a few minutes in order to gather your thoughts and become open to sharing with others.

...

A Blessing for Children

By Mark Frydenberg

*May your eyes see the best in all people,
May your mouth speak wisely,
May your hands reach out to others,
May your feet run to do good deeds.*

*May you have the patience to learn,
and the spirit to be playful.
May you have the will to imagine,
and the freedom to dream.*

*May your life be long and happy,
May your good name shine,
May Tradition show you The Way,
May you find your place in the world.*

*May there be love in your heart,
and a smile on your face.
May your days be filled with promise and wonder.
May God grant you peace.*

Mark Frydenberg's "A Blessing for Children" appears in Siddur Chaveirim Kol Yisrael, Ktav Publishing House, New Jersey, 2000, page 48 (www.chav.net/siddur) and is used with permission of the author.

Exercise

Instructions: Allow 15-20 minutes to read and ponder the following questions. Please feel free to address only the questions you feel comfortable

answering. As you complete these questions, you might find there are things that come up that you want to further process with a friend or counselor at a later time.

Afterward, discuss one or two of the questions to help the group get to know each other and to bring awareness to some of these issues. Leave time for anyone to bring up a question of particular impact for discussion.

Death Questionnaire

Think of when you had a significant experience with death.

- How well did you know the person that died?
- What was your experience in being with someone when they were dying?
- When you were first told of the death, how did you feel?
- What was it that most helped you deal with the death?
- What was it that most hindered you in dealing with the death?
- What was of most support to you in dealing with the death?
- What was the most confusing part of dealing with this death?
- What was the hardest part of dealing with this death?
- What do you remember most vividly about how this death affected you and those around you?
- Dealing with death can be difficult, but is there anything that happened for which you are grateful?

- If you have experience in being with someone when they were dying, what advice could you offer to others in that same situation?
- What one thing impressed you as an important part of the whole death process?
- Looking back, what do you think about the way the medical community handled the situation?
- If hospice was involved, what did you feel about your contact with them during this experience?
- Looking back on what you went through with the funeral and the people in attendance, what stands out most about the funeral?
- If you were to be able to have one last conversation with your deceased loved one, what might you say to him or her? What might he or she say to you?

As a group, view the 1-hour documentary *A Family Undertaking*, which is available for rent from www.netflix.com. This film shows multiple families going through the home funeral process. Afterward, discuss what was the most striking aspect of the film. Discuss anything that seemed of particular service to the families of the deceased.

Assignment

1. Read Chapter 8 and the chapter for your state in Lisa Carlson's *Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love*.
2. Read the next chapter in this manual, *Finding the Law*.

For the closing of this meeting, read the following poem or end in a way that is appropriate for your group.

...

Gone from my sight

I am standing on the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength, and I stand and watch her until at length, she is a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.

Then someone at my side says, "There! She's gone!" Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and she is just as able to bear her load of living weight to her destined harbor.

Her diminished size is in me, not in her. And just at the moment when someone at my side says, "There! She's gone!" There are other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "There she comes!" And that is dying.

While the original source of this poem is unknown, it is usually credited to Henry Van Dyke (1852-1933) or Bishop Charles Henry Brent (1862-1926).



Nested 2
By Ann Manning

Finding the Law

By Gere B. Fulton and Joyce Mitchell



Although it is legal in most states for a family to care for its own dead without the involvement of a licensed funeral provider, certain laws must be respected in the process. It is imperative that your home funeral committee explores all legal requirements before it begins assisting families. This is not only to ensure that you are acting within the law at all times but also to withstand any challenges concerning the legality of your activities.

Laws regulating the disposition of the dead are made at the state level, and they vary from state to state. Some states require a licensed funeral director to supervise all aspects of disposition. In other states, only a licensed funeral director may sign and file the death certificate and obtain the burial transit permit, and then you can do everything else. Some states even provide guidelines to assist families in meeting requirements.

Where to Start

As you begin your search, be aware that the term *law* is sometimes used interchangeably or collectively to refer to statutes and regulations. Laws are passed by the legislature and typically signed by the governor. Regulations are promulgated by the state agency to which responsibility for implementation of the law has been assigned. There are several ways to research the law and procedures for caring for your own dead.

Search online. Type the name of your state followed by the word *laws*, *regulations*, *statutes*, *code* or *rules* into your browser. For example: *South Carolina*

regulations. This should take you to the official code of laws or regulations for your state. There will probably be a search engine on the Web site, which will allow you to search by topic. Enter the words *funeral*, *burial*, *dead bodies* or *death certificate*. You should also perform this search on the Web site of the state agency that grants professional licenses.

Contact a local FCA affiliate. To contact a Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA) affiliate in your area, go to the Web site of the national organization, and click on the link “Find a Local FCA” at the top of the page. If there is an affiliate serving your area, they may already have compiled this information and will be happy to share it.

Visit government offices. Go to your county health department, and ask for a copy of the procedures to be followed when a family wishes to act as its own funeral director. If you have been successful in finding the law online, bring a copy of the exact statute that grants you the right to file a death certificate. You may need to leave that copy for the worker to analyze. While this may be time consuming and may result in some interesting reactions

Since 1984, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has regulated funeral industry practices with what has been termed the Funeral Rule, 16 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) Part 453. Federal law does not govern funerals carried out by individuals. It only applies to how professional funeral directors conduct business with consumers. Your committee should know these important FTC regulations.

from ill-informed or uninformed employees, it will give you some idea of procedural problems that might confront a grieving family member. It will also give you the opportunity to begin the educational process that is often needed.

If your local health department is unwilling or unable to provide this information, seek an answer from your state health department. Ask the clerk at the local department for the name, address and telephone number of the head of the appropriate division at the state department. Make a telephone call, or set up an appointment. If not terribly inconvenient, the latter is preferable. The person at the state level should be able to provide you with copies of the relevant statutes and regulations and tell you the procedures to be followed.

Another place to turn to is your county coroner or medical examiner. Since unexplained or questionable deaths by law become “coroner’s cases,” she or he will be the one from whom the family seeks custody of the body. Coroner’s cases may include death from violence, death when unattended by a physician, and death when in apparent good health.

Visit care facilities. Visit your local hospitals to inquire about their own policies and procedures for the release of a dead body to someone other than a licensed funeral director. Begin with the decedent affairs, patient services or patient representative offices. Again, the purpose is not only to gather information but to gauge how a family wishing to care for its own dead might be treated.

Legal Documentation

At least two documents are typically required for the disposition the dead.

The first is a death certificate, which must be filed with the state within a prescribed time fol-

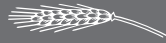
lowing the death. The person or persons assuming custody of the body will be required to complete the biographical information, and it must be signed by the physician who pronounced the death or the coroner. States require the signature of a “funeral director” to show who controlled the final disposition. Depending on state law, that definition may include you. In other states, only a licensed funeral director may sign. In some states, the completed and signed death certificate is necessary in order to obtain other required documents.

The second document is a permit for removal and transportation, which is sometimes referred to as a burial, removal and transit (BRT) permit. States have their own peculiarities in terminology, but the permit is usually needed to transport the body only to the final place of disposition—the cemetery or crematory. Some states also require a medical examiner’s authorization to cremate, which may be part of the burial transit permit.

Final Considerations

Because family-directed funerals are still unusual in many places, it is important to preplan. If the death is expected, it would be wise early on to let the physician caring for the patient and the administrator of the hospital, nursing home or hospice of your intention to act as your own funeral director since it’s impossible to know what barriers might be encountered.

If you live in a very restrictive state, you may still carry out a home funeral if you find a cooperative funeral director to assist. It may be helpful to introduce the concept to a funeral director who is unfamiliar with the concept as an “extended” form of a direct/immediate cremation or direct/immediate burial.



STUDY GUIDE

For the opening of this gathering, read the following or begin in a way that is appropriate for your group. It may be helpful to get comfortable and sit quietly for a few minutes in order to gather your thoughts and become open to sharing with others.

...

The Book of the Dead

Egyptian prayer c. 4500 B.C.

*As each day ends, may I have lived
That I may truly say:
I did no harm to human kind,
From truth I did not stray;
I did no wrong with knowing mind,
From evil I did keep;
I turned no hungry person away,
I caused no one to weep.*

Exercise

Share and discuss: Fran Miner, an Episcopalian in Billings, Mont., handled everything herself when her mother died in 1995. It was not an easy process. All along the way, people questioned whether she was “allowed” to do it. The nursing home said she couldn’t move the body. “The funeral people said I couldn’t do it.” Even the coroner’s office, at first, said “Forget it.” The County Records Office refused her a death certificate.

“I called back the coroner’s office, and a different man said ‘Sure you can do it,’” and helped her. He then said the same to the nursing home and the county offices who gave her the blank death certificate to have filled out. Finally, Miner and her sons were able to transport her mother to the crematory

in a cardboard box that Miner lined and decorated herself with pink satin.

“I beat the system, and I took care of my mother ... I stood up to everybody ... I was so determined to do this,” said Miner, who had spent the last days holding and singing to her mother and wanted to finish her task. (Nan Cobbey, *Episcopal Life*, March 1, 2000)

Role-play: Take turns role-playing as a person making the above requests to a government or care-facility worker. The person playing the worker will draw out of a hat one of three scenarios: The worker will refuse to give the information; the worker will give the information willingly; or the worker will only give it unwillingly. Afterward, brainstorm for methods you can employ to invite a worker to want to help you succeed.

Assignment

1. Read the next chapter, *With Our Own Hands*.
2. Using the methods described in this chapter, search for your state’s laws and hospital policies.

For the closing of this meeting, read the following expression or end in a way that is appropriate for your group.

...

*When you were born, you cried
and the world rejoiced.
Then live your life in such a way
that when you die, nothing is remiss
and the world will cry whilst you feel bliss.*

– **American Indian expression**

Use this space to document funeral law in your state.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

With Our Own Hands

By Donna Belk



In assisting the family with the practical care of the body after death, the home funeral committee helps to meet emotional and spiritual needs, as well. In all that they say and do, your committee members can model an awareness of these dimensions by going about their work in a quiet, slow-paced and mindful manner. Take your time. Remember, there is no hurry. Pause from time to time to reflect on the emotional and spiritual dimensions. Be so centered that you can even observe your own breathing.

If you are initially uncomfortable about touching the dead, this is not unusual. Because we have so little contact with our dead in today's society, it is normal to be afraid at first. Just remember that this has been considered a sacred act for thousands of years and, even though dead, he or she is still beloved.

It is also safe to handle a dead body except in rare instances. Unlike a living person, the dead do not cough, spit, breathe or sweat. In the case of transmittable disease, simply take the same precautions that were used in life such as the use of medical gloves. You do not have to worry about hurting your loved one. Ask a friend with nursing experience to help if that makes you more comfortable.

Washing and dressing of the body can be done by two people, but, if possible, arrange to have up to six people on hand to help carry the body or place it into a coffin. It is usually easier to care for the body soon after death before rigor mortis has set in.

Times vary widely, but the body usually begins to stiffen within an hour or two.

If you are going to have a home vigil or viewing, plan in advance where you want the body located and whether it will be laid out in a casket or on a table or bed. If practical, prepare the body in that location.

Preparing the Work Space

If you decide to wash the body, have all the supplies on hand so you can work without interruption.

Create enough space to comfortably move around the body. Remove medical items, supplies and as much clutter as you can to make the space feel serene.

If you have a hospital bed or a portable massage table, you will find that the height and width are more convenient and easier on your back than a regular bed. A sturdy folding table or rectangular table can also be used.

Moving the Body

It usually takes a minimum of two people to turn the body. It is easier if you have three or four people. To turn a body onto its right side, stand on the left side of the bed (as viewed from the footboard), bend the left leg at the knee, and bring it toward the chest. Then set the left arm on top of the body. Hold the back of the bent knee and the back of the upper arm and pull toward you. Allow the body to rest against your body. Reverse the procedure to turn the body onto its left side.

Transporting the body of an adult usually requires six people. With three people standing on

each side, roll the sheet, which is underneath the body, as close to the body as possible. This creates a handle for lifting. Count to three, and have everyone lift at the same time. A sideways shuffling step is required to clear the bed, and it helps to count and step in unison. You may also want someone at the head of the body to keep the head slightly elevated. Alternately, a body board can be used.

If the body will be placed in a coffin, make sure to plan in advance how you will get it in and out of the house and how best to maneuver it through doors and up or down stairs. Go through a trial run with the empty coffin.

Washing the Body

Feel the sacredness of what you are doing. You can start with a ceremony, poem or prayer that feels right to you, even just a few words to set the tone.

In some traditions, it is customary to wash the body as a form of ritual. You may want to create your own ritual. If so, there is no right or wrong way to do it. Let your personal preference guide you.

To begin, remove the clothing and any medical devices. If the body is going to be cremated and there is a pacemaker, additional steps will need to be taken. Please see the note at the end of this chapter. Clothing can be cut off if necessary. As you work, consider using a sheet to preserve modesty as you would if the person were alive. This may also help people feel more comfortable with the process.

Before bathing, place a folded towel or disposable plastic pad under the hips and bottom, and slowly apply firm pressure just above the pubic bone to remove any urine from the bladder or bowel contents. Then remove the soiled towel or pad. (See instructions on page 21 for safely turning the body.)

Gathering Supplies

For washing the body: shower curtain or plastic sheet to protect the mattress if you're working on a bed, bath towels, washrags, soap, wet or dry shampoo, cotton swabs or balls, large bowl(s), rubber or latex gloves, and essential oils.

For cooling the body: 20 to 30 pounds of dry ice, preferably cut into 1-inch slices; thick cloth/leather gloves or a washrag; Styrofoam ice chest; paper bags or pillowcases. If dry ice is not available, use frozen gel packs.

For dressing the body: final outfit or shroud/wrapping.

For the vigil: clean bed sheets, special coverings or quilts, scarves or silk, flowers, candles, religious items, family photos, decorative elements; reading lamp, chair, inspirational literature, and paper or a blank memory book.

For final disposition: Purchase or make the burial or cremation container, and decorate if desired. You can purchase caskets and urns online, from Costco, from funeral homes and from local craftspeople, or you can make your own. Arrange to rent or borrow a van, pickup truck, hearse or SUV that will accommodate the casket.

Use a gentle soap with warm water. If desired, sprinkle a few drops of essential oil and flower petals in the water. The following is a suggested order for washing the body:

Wash the face and neck. To dry, pat the body instead of rubbing since the skin may be delicate.

Cleanse the mouth and teeth with cotton swabs, a small rag or moisturizing sponges for the mouth. Mouthwash can be used as an antiseptic rinse to reduce odor.

Wash the hair if desired. Dry shampoo works surprisingly well. Or move the body so that the head is off the end of the bed and supported and use regular shampoo and water.

Wash the arms and hands, and gently pat dry. If needed, manicure the nails as you normally would.

Turn the body on its side. Wash the upper body front and back, and gently pat dry. Turn the body to the other side, and repeat.

While the body is on its side, lift the upper leg a few inches so you can wash the genital area. If you are not comfortable doing this, an alternative method is to draw a washrag or towel back and forth between the legs a few times. If the deceased received a thorough bath shortly before he or she died, you may omit this step.

Lay the body back down. Wash the legs and feet, and gently pat dry.

Before dressing, you may anoint the body with oil or moisturizing lotion to keep the skin hydrated. You can also apply powder or cornstarch to the body to ensure dryness.

If there are open or unsightly sores or wounds, cover them with gauze pads and seal in place with waterproof medical tape.

Although bodily discharge is not usually a problem, you may wish to place a disposable adult diaper

on the body after bathing and before dressing as a preventative measure. If you are seriously concerned, you may place cotton in the rectum to make sure any leakage is contained.

When finished, place a clean sheet or blanket under the body. The simplest way to do this is to roll the body to one side, roll up and push the soiled sheet against the side of the body. Then roll the body to the other side, and remove the soiled sheet. Follow the same procedure to put clean linen under the body. This sheet becomes the means by which you lift and carry the body later on, so it is important that it be sturdy and dry.

Preparing the Facial Features

If you prefer the eyes be closed, it is easier to accomplish before rigor mortis occurs. Simply close the eyelids with your fingers, and place an eye pillow or a bag of beans, rice or coins on top of the eyelids. Once rigor mortis sets in, you can remove the weights, and the eyes will usually remain closed. A dab of petroleum jelly or a small swab of cotton placed under the eyelids will also help the eyes stay closed.

To close the mouth, loop a scarf under the chin and tie it at the top of the head, or prop the jaw with a rolled-up hand towel fitted snugly under the chin, and place a pillow under the head. If the muscles are too stiff, massage the lower part of the jaw until it loosens enough to close. Once rigor mortis sets in, the tie or towel can be removed, and the mouth will usually remain closed.

At this point, you may wish to take a moment of silence and say a prayer, or offer a blessing for the one who has died.

Dressing and Laying Out the Body

If the body is going to be placed in a casket, dress the body first. If the body is going to be laid out on a bed or table, move the body to that location and then dress. (See instructions on page 21 on how to safely transport the body.)

Rigor mortis can make dressing difficult, but limbs can be worked or massaged to remove much of the stiffness. You can be quite vigorous with the bending of the limbs; you will not harm the body.

Dress the body in whatever you deem most appropriate. A garment can be cut up the back to make it easier to put on. Undergarments, shoes and socks are not necessary, but use them if you feel it is important. If you want to shroud rather than dress the body, encircle the body in several layers of cloth, a quilt or sheets.

Since the torso of the body will be elevated slightly by the dry ice, you may need to place folded towels under the arms and legs to allow the body to lay flat. If the feet fall away from one another in an unattractive way, tie a scarf around the ankles or cover the lower half of the body with a favorite quilt or scarf.

Apply makeup and nail polish as desired. A sheer scarf can be placed over the face or any part of the body to cover anything unsightly. A scarf covering the face is a time-honored technique that conveys the message that the person is truly gone.

Finally, place a pillow beneath the head for a more natural look, which will also help restrict fluid that may be in the stomach or lungs. You may wish to arrange the hands crossed over the heart or resting on the belly.

Cooling the Body

To slow the breakdown of the body, you should keep the body cool. In some states, this may be a legal requirement. You can easily cool the body with dry ice, which can be purchased at many grocery stores or specialty vendors for about \$1 per pound. If possible, use a specialty vendor, such as an ice cream supplier, who can slice the dry ice in convenient 1-inch sheets. If that is not possible, then you can drop the dry ice on a very hard surface or use a hammer to break it into small chunks.

Since dry ice evaporates, purchase it daily rather than buying and storing a large quantity. Start with about 30 pounds. Thereafter, you will usually need 10-20 pounds per day. Immediately place dry ice in a cooler. A Styrofoam container is preferred because dry ice can crack plastic. Do not set the cooler on wood or tile floors, which can be damaged from the extreme cold.

As dry ice evaporates, it emits carbon dioxide, so leave the cooler slightly open to allow the gas to escape, and make sure a door or window to the room is left open for ventilation. This is also the reason we recommend wrapping the dry ice in cloth or paper, not plastic bags, when you place it under the body. You can also use a moisture barrier, such as bubble wrap or a shower curtain, between the dry ice and casket to help reduce condensation.

To handle dry ice, use leather or cotton gloves or a washrag to protect your hands. Place a slice of dry ice into a paper bag, pillowcase, newspaper or towel. Tuck a bundle under each shoulder blade, the lower back and the upper thighs of the body. You can also use dry ice under the head and on top of the lower abdomen. An alternate method is to place three sheets of 1-inch thick slices of dry ice side by side under the torso starting at the shoulders and

extending to the lower back with one slice on top of the lower abdomen. The goal is to cool off the torso and internal organs, not freeze the entire body. The skin should have a little give to it when pressed. For small bodies, such as a child, frozen gel packs may be a better option so the body does not freeze completely.

Check the dry ice once or twice a day. As it evaporates, add more. Be prepared to have someone help roll the body to the side when you check or replace the dry ice. Keep the head slightly elevated as you do this. Have a washcloth nearby, and protect the clothing and bedding with a towel just in case the movement causes a bit of fluid from the stomach or the lungs to exit the mouth or nose.

Vigil and Visitation

If you want to hold a vigil, it can take place with the body resting on a bed, a massage table, a table or in a coffin. This is purely a matter of personal preference and convenience.

Arrange and adorn the body in a way that feels appropriate or sacred to you. If using a coffin, you can decorate it in any way you choose. If desired, put personal belongings or notes in it.

When the body is readied, prepare the room for visitors. This may include placing flowers, greenery (rosemary, for example, is the herb of remembrance), essential oil in a diffuser, candles or incense around the room. If the body is clean, there is usually no problem with odor. However, a subtle fragrance is generally a pleasant and welcoming addition to the room.

You might want to have extra chairs, a reading lamp, paper or a blank memory book with pen or pencil, music, sacred reading material and decorative items like flags on hand. It is also nice to assemble

photos of the deceased and mementos of her or his life.

The manner of the viewing may be religious or secular. The vigil or visitation can occur at hours or days convenient for the family. It may be simple or elaborate to fit the personality of the deceased or the needs of the family. During a vigil, people can sit together, share silence or talk, read inspirational texts, sing, chant, invoke blessings, gently touch the body, pray, etc.

Final Transport

A vehicle to transport the body to the cemetery or crematory should be arranged for well in advance. You can rent or borrow a van, pickup truck or sport utility vehicle, or a funeral home can be called on to assist for a fee. (See *Finding the Law* for required permits.)

Other Considerations

It is important for members of your committee to know when it is appropriate to guide families away from conducting a home funeral. Issues to consider include massive trauma or burns, autopsied bodies, and severe obesity, which makes turning or moving the body dangerous for caregivers. However, after a frank discussion of what to expect in these situations, it should ultimately be the family's decision.

While rare, there are also certain infections that make a home funeral inappropriate, including septicemia, which is a virulent blood infection that produces odor and accelerates decomposition. In addition, if the deceased shows evidence of tissue gas, the body must be buried or cremated without delay. Commonly known as gangrene, the symptoms of tissue gas include strong odor and the blackening and distention of the skin. Notably, the skin

“crackles” when touched. This infection spreads very quickly, and unpleasant effects can become obvious in as little as two hours. Once started, there is no way to prevent the spread of the bacteria other than the use of embalming chemicals. If it is important for the family to continue with their home funeral plans, then a funeral director should be called upon immediately to embalm. Afterward, the body may

be returned home.

Note: Due to the danger of explosion, pace-makers and other internal battery-powered devices must be removed before the body is cremated. If not removed, you may be held liable for damages to the cremation chamber. Ask medical personnel to remove these devices or consult a licensed funeral director.

Home Funeral Supply Kit

- Ace bandages
- Adult diapers
- Assortment of waterproof bandages
- Black garbage bags for waste
- Brown paper grocery bags for dry ice
- Brush and comb
- Camera
- Chux waterproof underpads
- Cotton balls
- Crazy glue
- Disposable rubber or latex gloves
- Dry shampoo
- Duoderm Dressing
- Essential Oils and diffuser
- Eye pillow
- Fabric strip or belt to close the jaw
- Face mask/medical masks
- Fragrant soaps
- Gauze
- Gloves for handling dry ice
- Hydrogen peroxide (to remove blood)
- Large bowls
- Make-up
- Manicure kit
- Medical tape
- Moisturizing lotion
- Mouthwash
- Music
- Plastic sheeting
- Q-tips
- Rubbing alcohol
- Sanitary pads
- Scissors
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Shaving kit
- Suturing kit
- Tampons
- Tissue
- Vaseline
- Washcloth or gloves for handling dry ice
- Wet wipes
- Wire cutters
- X-Acto knife
- Yards of fabric for decoration



STUDY GUIDE

For the opening of this gathering, read the following or begin in a way that is appropriate for your group. It may be helpful to get comfortable and sit quietly for a few minutes in order to gather your thoughts and become open to sharing with others.

...

Deep Peace

-excerpts from an old Gaelic blessing

*Deep peace I breathe into you ...
 Deep peace, a soft white dove to you;
 Deep peace, a quiet rain to you;
 Deep peace, an ebbing wave to you!
 Deep peace, red wind of the east from you;
 Deep peace, grey wind of the west to you;
 Deep peace, dark wind of the north from you;
 Deep peace, blue wind of the south to you!
 Deep peace, pure red of the flame to you;
 Deep peace, pure white of the moon to you;
 Deep peace, pure green of the grass to you;
 Deep peace, pure brown of the earth to you;
 Deep peace, pure grey of the dew to you,
 Deep peace, pure blue of the sky to you!
 Deep peace of the running wave to you,
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
 Deep peace of the quiet earth to you ...
 Peace, Deep Peace!*

Exercise

As a group, view the 1-hour video "Passing Through Our Hands," which is available at www.passingthroughourhands.com for \$15. This is an instruction video that shows how to provide after-death care.

After the video, discuss the most striking aspect of the tutorial. Perform a mock body preparation

as a group, even if only a part of it, such as arranging the body or moving the body from the bed to a table.

Assignment

1. Read the text of the next chapter, *Setting Out Together*.
2. As an individual, write down what you might consider to be the basic aim of your committee. Which tasks would you associate with this aim? Which tasks would you consider to fall outside the scope of your aim?
3. Come to the next gathering with the dual intention of offering your perspectives on aim and scope as well as holding back from doggedly imposing your preferences on the whole committee if no easy consensus can be reached.

For the closing of this meeting, read the following blessing or end in a way that is appropriate for your group.

...

Cherokee Prayer Blessing

*May the warm winds of heaven
 blow softly upon your house.
 May the Great Spirit
 bless all who enter there.
 May your moccasins
 make happy tracks
 in many snows,
 and may the rainbow
 always touch your shoulder.*



WITH OUR OWN HANDS NOTES

Use this space to add notes about after-death care.

[illegible]

Setting Out Together

By Holly Stevens



By now, your home funeral committee is acquiring the basic knowledge and skills involved in home-centered care of the dead. It is crucial at this point to clarify and place in writing your committee's basic aims and tasks so that your group can clearly articulate both its purposes and its limitations.

Pared to its essence, how would you describe what your home funeral committee is aiming to achieve? Just as important, what falls outside its scope? How you answer these two questions will affect which specific services and tasks you choose to undertake as a group.

Accounts of other home funeral committees illustrate the diversity to be found among such groups, whether they recognize themselves as such:

In Dillingham, a rural community in southwestern Alaska, there is no funeral home to serve as backup. Funeral preparation involves a team of men working mostly with shovels and buckets to clear a spot amid the roots of ancient trees or on a steep slope leading to the beach. The work is backbreaking, so the diggers take turns, drinking coffee and discussing commercial fishing on their breaks. Wintertime is the most grueling; the ground yields only chips to the shovel blade, and the Alaskan winds claw at exposed skin. A "home funeral committee" here is, by necessity, the domain of weathered men, and the ceremony to honor the dead is wresting from the earth a hole big enough to accommodate the coffin.

Leaders of the Adath Jeshurun Synagogue in Minneapolis, Minn., found themselves alarmed at the increasing cost of funerals and the tendency of member families to depart from conservative Jewish funeral traditions. After researching Jewish laws of burial and the role of the chevra kadisha (burial society) in traditional Jewish practice, they formed their own chevra and began offering their members a plain pine box, which is provided without charge by the congregation to promote equality in final arrangements. They also negotiated arrangements with a local funeral provider that honored the requirements of their faith tradition at a reasonable cost.

In North Carolina, the Islamic Association of Raleigh recognizes Islamic burial as *fard kifaya* (a community affair), which exemplifies the Muslim belief that Allah is pleased with a community that organizes itself to bury its dead according to the teachings of the Quran. Under its leadership, the association has trained hundreds of American Muslims to wash, shroud and bury their dead, maintain Muslim cemeteries, and create funeral kits that contain appropriate shrouds for each sex as well as wooden materials for the grave. Since only men wash men and only women wash women in Islam, both the training and the response committees are organized accordingly with member duties rotating monthly through the year.

Crossings Care committees are forming in local communities across America, embodying the perspective of Beth Knox, founder of Crossings: Caring For Our Own at Death, who learned at the tragic death of her 7-year-old daughter, Alison, that she

had the right to care for her child's body up until the moment of burial or cremation. These committees promote alternatives to conventional funeral and after-death care, forming groups of individuals who sometimes pledge to help each other care for their loved ones' remains.

The Final Affairs Committee of the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting in Michigan has hosted member forums on hospice, living wills and simple burial. This Quaker group also created a checklist to get members planning for their passing to ensure that their desires are known and to ease the logistical effort on the survivors. The checklist gathers contacts for next of kin, attorneys, insurance/financial agents, etc., as well as burial or cremation choices and requests for ceremonial songs, burial clothes and epitaphs. Some members file a copy of their checklist along with copies of their advance directives at the congregation's office.

Assessing Goals and Limitations

What are *your* home funeral committee's aims? Here are a few guiding queries that you might consider both individually and as a group.

If your home funeral committee functions as part of a faith community. How does home-funeral work relate to your faith community's religious beliefs, customs, values and language? To what degree is it infused with religious or spiritual motivations? The answers to these questions might lead to a compelling statement about your committee's basic aims.

To what extent does your faith community set the pattern for acceptable funeral practices or, conversely, allow for individual choice in funeral practices? You may find clues here that define the scope of your committee's activities. In many Catholic

parishes, for instance, funeral liturgical ceremonies must be held at the church. A Catholic home funeral committee might, therefore, focus primarily on the vigil, which can be held in the home.

Given your home funeral committee's emphases, where does it fit most comfortably in the organizational structure of your congregation and/or its parent bodies? This, too, might influence its aims. If your home funeral committee is an extension of a long-standing bereavement-care committee, then the primary aims likely would include offering funeral options as a healing resource for families that are hurting.

How large is your faith community? How close-knit are its members? How similar or diverse are its members' customs and perspectives when it comes to funeral options? These characteristics can help guide your committee in establishing aims that reflect the culture of your particular community.

How committed to home funerals are the leaders of your faith community? If your faith community's guidance comes from one or two religious leaders, their perspective on home funerals may greatly influence your committee's aims.

For any home funeral committee, faith-based or secular. To what extent is making funerals more affordable a guiding motivation? More family centered? More environmentally responsible? More emotionally healing? More creatively expressive?

Is your home funeral committee part of a larger organization? If so, how does your committee relate to the parent organization's work and aims? A hospice-based home funeral committee, for instance, might focus on expanding the role of their hospice to include the care of the dead through final disposition.

If your home funeral committee is independent, who would benefit from its services? If it is forming as a cooperative agreement among a circle of friends who intend to support each other's families in caring for their dead, then the aims can be achieved through consensus building among its members or another agreed upon process. However, if the committee is seeing its work primarily as influencing funeral practices in the local community, then its aims should be a response to prevailing local customs.

Once you have defined your aims as a committee, consider the more specific activities and tasks that home funeral committees can assume. In the process, you will be defining the scope of your work, which will help to protect the committee from becoming extended beyond its means. Though not a complete list of possibilities, here are some common home funeral committee tasks to consider.

Before and during home funerals:

- Review home funeral tasks and arrange for assistance.
- Assign a committee liaison to coordinate assistance.
- Assist family with practical care of the body.
- Help arrange a home vigil.
- Offer prayer meetings or other rituals of support for the dying as befits your community.
- Maintain a home funeral supply kit.
- Make or purchase a casket, shroud or cremation urn as desired.
- Find a local supplier of dry ice, or stash gel packs in a convenient freezer.
- Assist with purchases of dry ice or other essentials as needed.
- Assist family with coordinating any visitations.

- Provide a journal or register for any visitations or ceremonies.
- Arrange for printed bulletins, flowers or other items for any planned ceremonies.
- Recruit any pastoral ministers, musicians, pallbearers or others needed for any ceremony.
- Coordinate with any licensed funeral provider that might be involved.
- Arrange or provide funeral transport in keeping with state laws.
- Develop a list of people to be notified immediately upon death and another for those who won't be notified until after final disposition.
- Assist family in notifying friends and relatives of their loved one's death.
- Maintain a list of individuals to be thanked afterward.
- Gather information for the death certificate and/or obituary.
- Assist family with processing death certificate and/or placing obituary.
- Arrange for volunteers to answer the family's phone as needed.
- Assist with caring for any children or pets in the family home.
- Provide meals and/or light housekeeping for the family.
- Arrange for a house sitter during publicized events to thwart would-be burglars.
- Arrange for lodging and transportation of any out-of-town guests.
- Follow up with the family afterward to attend to any continuing need of support.

Other possible roles:

- Educate families about home funerals and other funeral options.

UNDERTAKEN WITH LOVE

- Provide statutory forms for advance directives, such as healthcare power of attorney, that relate to final arrangements.
- Identify and proactively seek the cooperation of parties involved in arranging death certificates, obituaries and other necessary home-funeral tasks.
- Maintain a registry of members' final arrangement preferences.
- Develop a presentation for other community groups that might want to consider starting their own home funeral committees.
- Record accounts of home funerals in the home funeral committee binder.

Considering the aims you have established for your home funeral committee, what other tasks and responsibilities might you identify?



Adrift By Ann Manning



STUDY GUIDE

For the opening of this gathering, read the following or begin in a way that is appropriate for your group. It may be helpful to get comfortable and sit quietly for a few minutes in order to gather your thoughts and become open to sharing with others.

...

We Give Thee but Thine Own
By William Walham How, 1864

*We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.
May we Thy bounties thus
As stewards true receive,
And gladly, as Thou blessest us,
To Thee our first fruits give.
To comfort and to bless,
To find a balm for woe,
To tend the lone and fatherless
Is angels' work below.*

Exercise

Using the main text for this chapter, consider the aims that each member identified in preparation for the gathering. Assign one member to record the aims suggested. Where are the commonalities? Where are the convergences? In a similar process, consider the limitations that the group intends to place on its scope.

Finally, use the checklist in the text to identify tasks that relate to the agreed upon aims. Brainstorm additional tasks that might not be listed but would be central to the committee's aims. Have you been careful to consider your limitations, as well?

Assignment

1. Read the next chapter, *Down This Path*.
2. If the committee has reached consensus on its aims and limitations, assign one member to write an announcement of the committee's formation and purpose that can be considered at the next gathering.
3. Ask another member to purchase for the next gathering (and perhaps design an inviting cover for) a 3-ring binder to serve as the committee's receptacle for stories, information, plans and other resources.
4. Invite all members to brainstorm ways that the home funeral committee can make its presence known and publicize its services. Come prepared to develop a publicity plan at the next gathering.

For the closing of this gathering, create the following group poem or end in a way that is appropriate for your group.

...

Have each member silently identify one or two loved ones who have passed and some small specific memory that brings them joy to recall—something that can be shared in one sentence. As an example:

Miriam, I remember you holding apples in both hands.

Daddy, I remember you recording Central Park sounds on reel-to-reel tapes.

Light a candle as members reflect. Then invite members to share their poem fragments one at a time in clockwise order, forming a group poem, to honor the ones who have crossed.

Home Funeral Committee Binder

A three-ring binder is an excellent tool for collecting a home funeral committee's stories, plans and resources for the committee's own use and for the families it serves. Its content will reflect your committee's specific aims, goals and tasks, but possible items include:

- Our stories – accounts by funeral committee members and the families assisted by the committee
- Our aims – a statement reflecting the consensus of the funeral committee members
- Our short-term goals – concrete, measurable objectives for the coming year or other time period
- Our tasks and services – the responsibilities the home funeral committee is equipped to assume as well as a statement of its scope and limitations
- Members and assigned roles – this section might include a written statement from each member about his or her experience with home funerals and motivations for being involved with the committee
- Minutes and other records of committee actions and decisions
- CDs containing ready-to-print PDF materials that the committee uses repeatedly
- Forms used by the home funeral committee, such as advance directives, data to be gathered in advance for the death certificate or obituary, family funeral plans, etc.
- A registry section for the funeral plans of families to be assisted by the committee
- Legal requirements – a place to gather statutes, letters, articles and other written material about laws affecting home funerals in your area
- Advocacy – a place to keep plans, correspondence, notes and other materials related to your committee's work in advocating for families serving as their own funeral directors
- Publicity – a place to keep past news releases, fliers and other publicity samples as well as to maintain records of media contacts and other distribution lists
- Recommended funeral providers willing to work with family-directed funerals, including funeral homes, crematories, cemeteries, funeral transport services and gravediggers
- Liturgies, poems, meditations, music and other elements for funeral ceremonies
- Correspondence
- Checklists for funeral committee members assisting in home funerals
- Checklists for families serving as their own funeral directors
- Literature on death, dying and after-death care and disposition rights and options
- Other media on death, dying and after-death care and disposition rights and options

Down This Path

By Holly Stevens



The effort your home funeral committee is making to define its purpose and scope no doubt will help yours be a fully functioning group. But to remain vital, your committee will require regular tending. This chapter addresses key elements that enable home funeral committees to remain healthy and sustainable over time.

Identify Motivations

Anyone who serves on a committee operates from a set of motivations and assumptions that might not be fully understood—even by themselves. For some, the task element, which is what your home funeral committee formally establishes as its aims and scope, is primary; they may heartily endorse the return to less-institutional forms of death care and be eager to invest their energy in making this happen in their local communities. For others, the work has a social purpose; they yearn to interact with others who share similar values and passions. For committees that function in a faith community, the members may see themselves as engaged in ministry or seeking spiritual growth; these groups might build into their gatherings opportunities for reflection on how the tasks at hand relate to the members' religious journeys. Others are looking to develop new skills; the home funeral committee may be a great opportunity to involve teens and young adults in a field that, so far, seems to be dominated by those on the far side of 40.

As new members join the committee, it is

wise to invite them to share something about what draws them to this work and to share with them some of the motivations of the other members. By tapping into these motivations, the committee will identify ways to incorporate processes and experiences that mesh. For instance, a group comprised of individuals who enjoy the social aspect of their work might gather for a meal in a member's home after completing a funeral to process their shared experience.

Establish Timely Goals

Another key to sustaining a vibrant home funeral committee is to establish specific goals for each year or other selected time period. In the first year, your goals might center on training and publicity. In the second year, the focus might shift toward home-funeral advocacy in the local community. Setting annual goals will help the home funeral committee pace itself and recognize that not every aim has to be fully met in the first year.

Set Times to Come Together

The home funeral committee also should determine the frequency and length of committee meetings and responsibilities between meetings. If the committee is part of a larger organization such as a congregation, it will also need to consider how it will report to and work with other committees (e.g., a nominating committee that might regularly appoint new volunteers to the home funeral committee). What will be the impact on the committee if it suddenly faces several home funerals in a short period of time? How will the members build in an

opportunity to reflect together on how those funerals went and to celebrate what went well? Conversely, how will the committee remain engaged if no home funerals occur in some years?

Determine a Leadership Model

Each home funeral committee must determine the form of leadership that best serves that particular group. Some committees find it helpful to designate one person as the coordinator for a year or more, while others may rotate the leadership or assign leaders on an ad hoc basis. For most committees, it is wise to build in a process for rotating the leadership at set intervals (weekly, every two years, etc.) to avoid too much dependency on one person. If your committee is drawn to consensus-building models, it might select a moderator whose role is to focus on group processes, look for areas of clear agreement and ensure that all members are heard while working toward a common vision. (See Online Resources for a recommended Web site on consensus-building models of governance.) Another member might be appointed to record ideas and decisions, while yet another member might oversee logistics (speaker invitations, DVD rentals, refreshments).

Incorporate Check-In Moments

What will be the format of your continued gatherings? This manual's study guides suggest a transitional opening and closing plus experiential exercises and assignments, but ultimately your home funeral committee must decide what works best for your group. As you move beyond basic training, you might want to build into each gathering a time to go around in a circle to see what each person's focus has been in light of his or her responsibilities since the last meeting. These check-in moments can help

other members identify new resources or even ward off burnout when a member expresses emerging difficulties in coping.

Reach Those You Serve

How will you publicize the committee's services? This involves being clear about who your public is and whether it is confined only to the members of your congregation or open to any family in your town or city. Once you identify those who need to know about your committee, brainstorm for creative ways to reach them.

Even if your funds for publicity are few, many options exist. If your home funeral committee operates within a faith community, what means does your community use to communicate (newsletters, bulletin boards, bulletins, announcements at religious gatherings, religious education classes, related committees, Web sites and member blogs)? Secular and faith-based committees might consider distributing news releases; writing an op-ed column for the local newsletter; asking related organizations, such as senior services entities, to publicize the committee; sending announcements to local calendars and blogs; and hosting home-funeral-related events. You might even start your own Web site. In working with the news media, keep in mind that your "newness" and "uniqueness" are newsworthy. Make the most of it!

Get Organized

How will you keep records of your decisions and experiences for the benefit of others down the path? At the previous gathering, we suggested the purchase of a three-ring binder for the organizing of stories, plans, information and other resources. A description of what this binder might include

is found on page 34. Such a notebook would help not only in passing along the committee's corporate wisdom to new members and leaders but also serve as a resource for families beginning to consider their options for less-institutional final arrangements.

Recruit New Members

How will you continually add new members to the committee and equip them with the requisite knowledge and skills for home funeral work? Recruiting should be recognized as everyone's role and will require alertness to signs of interest in home funeral work. Often, new members will come from the families served. Some committees host public events to educate the community about home funerals; those who attend often become new members. Be aware, also, that some people are willing to help with specific tasks from time to time but are reluctant to participate in ongoing committee gatherings. What opportunities will you provide for their involvement? In a congregational setting, some churches host regular "committee fairs" where members can sign up to serve on specific committees or task forces. If your faith community doesn't yet offer this opportunity for identifying new members, you might suggest it.

Ongoing Training

Once new members join, the best way to educate and train them is to involve them in actual home funerals. But if these events are few and far between, especially at first, consider establishing an orientation process that will equip them with basic skills and knowledge. This might include providing them with a copy of this manual to read, occasionally inviting new members to come early to a gathering to watch a DVD on home funerals and hosting one

or two simulated body-care sessions each year, as outlined in Chapter 4, for new and potential members or families.

Forge Alliances

In addition to recruiting and training new members, stay alert to opportunities to forge new alliances with like-minded organizations and individuals. Depending on your home funeral committee's aims and emphases, alliances might be sought with hospice professionals, a local chapter of Funeral Consumers Alliance (see Online Resources), a local religious leaders group, cancer support groups, funeral transport services or other freelance providers that could assist with home funerals, a sympathetic state legislator, or a motivated hospital chaplain who wants to improve protocols for releasing a body to a family serving as its own funeral director. The possibilities are endless.

Care for One Another

Finally, recognize that home funeral work, while deeply satisfying, can be fatiguing. Though members focus primarily on helping a family care for its dead, they should also care for one another. We've already suggested incorporating opportunities to reflect upon and celebrate shared funeral experiences. Other forms of group nurture could include sending thank you notes as a member takes on or completes a significant helpful task; encouraging members to express their needs for assistance as they check in at the beginning of committee gatherings; and occasionally breaking out of the rut to experiment with a new gathering format, time or place. Working to prevent burnout may be the greatest gift home funeral committee members can give to one another.



STUDY GUIDE

For the opening of this gathering, read the following or begin in a way that is appropriate for your group. It may be helpful to get comfortable and sit quietly for a few minutes in order to gather your thoughts and become open to sharing with others.

...

There is a Spirit

by James Naylor

17th century Quaker martyr

*Can I, imprisoned, body-bounded, touch
the starry robe of God, and from my soul
my tiny Part, reach forth to this great Whole
and spread my Little to the infinite Much,
When Truth forever slips from out my clutch,
and what I take indeed, I do but dole
in cupfuls from a rimless ocean-bowl
that holds a million million million such?
And yet, some Thing that moves among the stars,
and holds the cosmos in a web of law,
moves too in me: a hunger, a quick thaw
of soul that liquefies the ancient bars,
as I, a member of creation, sing
the burning oneness binding everything.*

Exercise

- Have members participate in a check-in time to share what they've done since the last gathering.
- If needed, continue working on aims and scope.
- Begin defining short-term goals.
- Decide frequency and content of upcoming meetings.
- Decide who will lead the meetings.
- Assess the meeting format you're using.
Does it need to change?

- Brainstorm contents for the home funeral binder. Assign parts.
- Brainstorm how to publicize the home funeral committee.
- Assign roles.

Assignment

The aims and goals your home funeral committee establishes, as well as your schedule for future gatherings of the committee, will determine any assignments to be made.

For the closing of this gathering, read the following psalm or end in a way that is appropriate for your group.

...

Psalm 23

A psalm of David

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he
leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of
righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of
mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my
cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the
days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the
Lord for ever.*

Online Resources

The Centre for Natural Burial, <http://naturalburial.coop>.
A resource center for green burial information and products, including a green cemetery locator.

The Consensus Building Institute, <http://cbuilding.org>.
A not-for-profit institute founded by Lawrence Susskind, the author of *Breaking Robert's Rules of Order*, to promote effective negotiation and conflict resolution.

Crossings, www.crossings.net.
Beth Knox provides educational seminars that prepare individuals to carry out family-directed home funerals.

Federal Trade Commission,
www.ftc.gov/bcp/rulemaking/funeral/index.shtm.
A resource for Funeral Rule information, consumer literature, industry compliance guidelines and the registration of complaints.

Final Passages, www.finalpassages.org.
Jerrigrace Lyons provides educational seminars preparing individuals to carry out family-directed home funerals.

Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA), www.funerals.org.
A nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the rights of funeral consumers. FCA has approximately 100 state chapters. Online forums and a discussion group are available.

Funeral Ethics Organization, www.funeralethics.org.
Founded by Lisa Carlson to promote ethical dealings in all death-related transactions.

Green Burial Council, www.greenburialcouncil.org.
Founded by Joe Sehee, the council establishes standards and provides certification for green cemeteries.

Home Funeral Committee Manual Publishing Group,
www.homefuneralmanual.org.
This manual's official Web site where additional resources and author biographies may be found.

Home Funeral.Info, <http://homefuneral.info>.
Donna Belk's site includes a wealth of useful information on home funerals, including a state-by-state directory of home funeral providers and consultants.

Islamic Center of Raleigh, www.islam1.org.
A resource for preparing the dead for Islamic burial. Click on Imam's Corner, then Various Topics, then select The Basic Rules of Islamic Funerals.

Jewish Funerals, Burials, and Mourning,
www.jewish-funerals.org.
Organization providing information and assistance with traditional Jewish death practices.

Natural Burial Co., www.naturalburialcompany.com.
A supplier of environmentally friendly burial products and services.

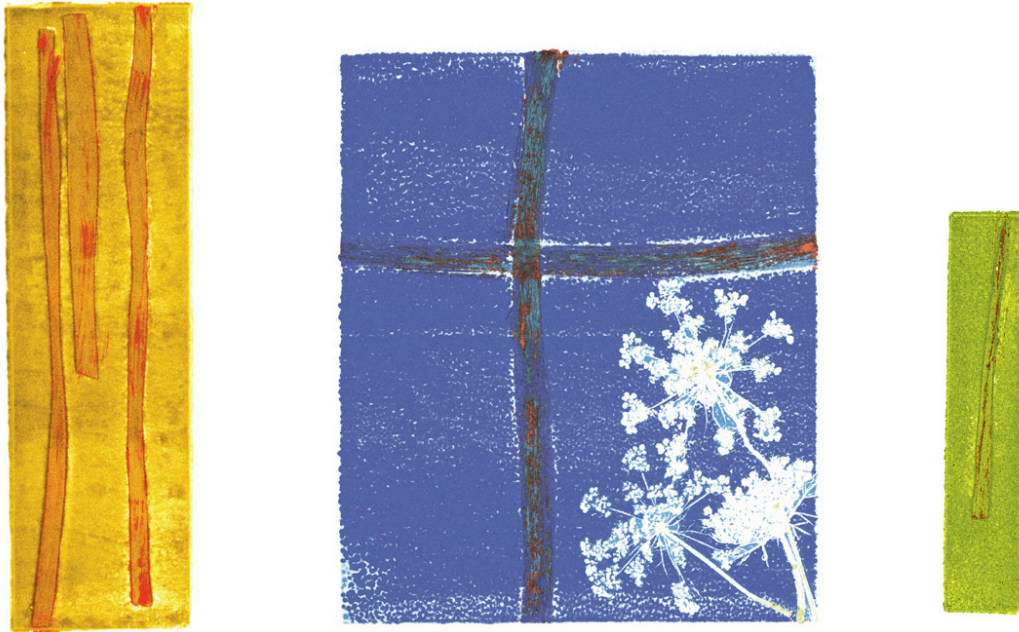
Natural Death Center, www.naturaldeath.org.uk.
A U.K.-based organization providing advice on and support of family-organized funerals and natural burial grounds.

P.O.V.'s *A Family Undertaking* Web site,
www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/afamilyundertaking.
Film information, updates and interviews, a gallery of Victorian-era funeral photography, purchasing information and much more.

Threshold Choir, www.thresholdchoir.org.
Founded by Kate Munger, these nationwide all-women choirs sing at the bedsides of the dying as a free community service.

Undertaken With Love at Lulu,
<http://stores.lulu.com/homefunerals>.
An on-demand publishing site supplying pre-bound versions of this manual.

UNDERTAKEN WITH LOVE



Looking Out By Ann Manning

In most of the U.S., a family may care for its own dead until burial or cremation without involving licensed funeral professionals. It does require a willingness to be something of a pioneer in today's hands-off society, but those who have chosen to reclaim this historical tradition confirm that the process is enormously healing and meaningful.

While a motivated family can independently acquire the legal knowledge and practical skills to arrange a home funeral, the process is eased considerably when a group assists. That's why we've created *Undertaken With Love*: to help faith-based and secular groups support families that want to continue caring for their loved ones all the way to the grave or crematory.

Presented in a study guide format for six weekly or monthly self-training sessions, this manual will teach you:

- how to start a home funeral committee;
- how to research state laws and identify your legal rights and responsibilities;
- how to handle, bathe and transport the body; and
- how to sustain an effective home funeral committee.

Whether used in a congregational or a secular setting, *Undertaken With Love* will provide the basic knowledge and skills to launch a home funeral support committee in your community.