



# *your guide to* **FUNERAL CUSTOMS**

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# your guide to FUNERAL CUSTOMS

		RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS					
		Christian					
		Assemblies of God	Baptist	Roman Catholic	Christian Scientist	Episcopal	Greek Orthodox
	<b>Length of Service</b>	30 – 60 minutes	30 – 60 minutes	30 – 60 minutes	Depends	Depends	30 – 60 minutes
	<b>Flowers</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	<b>Food</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Inquire	No
	<b>Dress Code</b>	Dark	Dark	Dark and Somber Men: Jacket and tie	Darker preferred	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie
	<b>Recording Devices</b>	Possibly	No	With permission	No	No	No
	<b>Open Casket</b>	Usually	Usually	Depends	Rarely	Rarely	Usually
	<b>Time Taken from Work</b>	7 – 14 days	7 days	7 days	Depends	7 days	7 days
	<b>Mourning Time</b>	Varies	60 days	7 days	Depends	Depends	Depends
	<b>Reading Sources</b>	<i>The Bible</i>	<i>The Bible</i>	<i>New American Bible</i>	Readings from <i>Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures</i> , the <i>King James Bible</i> and others.	<i>The Book of Common Prayer</i>	<i>Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom</i>
	<b>Other Aspects</b>	Doctrine asserts that the Bible is divinely inspired and infallible.  May also be known as Pentacostals.	The two largest denominations are the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention.  Practices vary by region.  Take cues from the group or ask a pastor before the service begins.  Non-Baptists are not expected to receive communion.	Unlike other Christian religions, they recognize the pope and Vatican as the religious authority and have a special appreciation for Mary, Christ's mother.	Services may be held at private home.  Followers believe that disease and death are a distortion of the mind than therefore they rely on spiritual healing, not medical services.	Guests may sit where they choose and are not expected to view the body.  Non-members may sit, kneel and pray with the congregation as long as this doesn't compromise their own beliefs.	Guests may greet the family with the phrase, "Memory Eternal" and offer condolences.  Viewing the body is optional.  Believers may kiss an icon or a cross that lies on the breast of the deceased, but non-believers are not required to do so.  At graveside, each guest places a flower on the casket.

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		RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS					
		Christian (continued)					
		Jehovah's Witnesses	Lutheran	Methodist	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)	Presbyterian	United Church of Christ
	<b>Length of Service</b>	15 – 30 minutes	30 minutes	Depends	60 – 90 minutes	30 – 60 minutes	15 – 30 minutes
	<b>Flowers</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	<b>Food</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Women's group usually supplies	Yes	Yes
	<b>Dress Code</b>	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie	Dark; Men: Jacket and tie
	<b>Recording Devices</b>	Audio recording only	With pastor's permission	No	If discreet	No	No
	<b>Open Casket</b>	Depends	Possibly	Depends	Depends	Rarely	Rarely
	<b>Time Taken from Work</b>	Depends	A Few Days	Depends	Depends	7 days	Depends
	<b>Mourning Time</b>	Depends	A Few Weeks	Depends	Depends	Depends	Depends
	<b>Reading Sources</b>	<i>The Bible</i>	<i>Lutheran Book of Worship and The Lutheran Hymnal of Lutheran Worship</i>	A variety of sources.	Scriptures and hymnals	<i>The Bible and Presbyterian Hymnal</i>	<i>The Bible</i>
	<b>Other Aspects</b>	Services take place in a funeral home or Kingdom Hall.  Cameras or video equipment, however, are not welcome.	Christians are expected to fully participate, but non-Christians need not kneel, sing or pray with them.	Guests who are non-members are not expected to participate or discouraged from doing so.	Use of a cross or crucifix is not permitted.  Guests who are not Mormons can fully participate in the funeral service.	Guests are free to sit where they please and not expected to view a body.  Programs are often distributed and non-members are invited to participate to the extent that they feel comfortable.	Guests may sit wherever they choose and join in any part of the service.  If not participating, they should remain seated.

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		RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS					
		Non-Christian					
		Baha'i	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Jewish	
	Length of Service	Depends	45 – 75 minutes	Depends	Depends	Depends	
	Flowers	Yes	Yes	Yes	After services	No	
	Food	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	
	Dress Code	None	Dark and casual	White and casual	Men: No head cover Women: Arms and legs covered	Dark; Men: Jacket, tie and yarmulke	
	Recording Devices	Possibly	No	No	No	Yes	
	Open Casket	Rarely	Always	Always	Rarely	Never	
	Time Taken from Work	Depends	Depends	10 – 30 days	3 days	7 days	
	Mourning Time	Depends	90 days	10 – 30 days	40 days	30 – 365 days	
	Reading Sources	Baha'i Prayers	Sutras (Prayers)	Mantra	Koran (or Qur'an)	Torah	
	Other Aspects	<p>Baha'i practices do not permit embalming unless required by law.</p> <p>The body is buried within one hour's travel time from the place of death to discourage becoming attached to any particular geographic site.</p>	<p>To ensure the deceased a safe journey to the next life, friends and family may wear a white cloth as a headband or arm band, burn incense and walk with sticks to symbolize the need for support.</p> <p>Although guests do not bring food to eat, flowers and fruit are made as offerings.</p>	<p>The body remains at home until cremation, which usually occurs within 24 hours after death.</p> <p>Guests are expected to view the body, but not touch the deceased.</p> <p>Guests of other faiths are welcome to participate, but not expected to do so.</p>	<p>Guests of the same sex greet each other with a handshake and hug.</p> <p>Within two days following death, the body is carried to the graveyard.</p> <p>Crying and wailing is encouraged because Muslims believe that by releasing sorrow one's body is relieved.</p>	<p>The rabbi begins by cutting a black ribbon, a symbol of breaking away.</p> <p>At least ten Jewish adults, traditionally males, recite prayers.</p> <p>At the cemetery, family members place dirt on the coffin before burial.</p> <p>Jewish funerals are often held entirely at graveside.</p> <p>Yarmulke (skullcap) is provided by the funeral home or synagogue.</p>	

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## ETHNIC GROUPS

Religious diversity is present within ethnic groups, and cultural heritage introduces unique traditions. This section provides additional rituals that you may encounter when attending the funeral or memorial service for someone of a particular ethnic background.

### African American

Attendance is very important and can even cause the service to be postponed.

Other aspects, particularly among southern families, are:

- Keening, the dramatic expression of sorrow. In fact, “nurses” are sometimes present to aid a mourner who becomes overwhelmed with emotion
- Flower girls, the female counterpart of a pallbearer, comfort grieving family members
- Musical performances are presented by a choir and/or loved ones
- A large assortment of flowers decorates the coffin.

### Humanist

The humanist funeral service can be held before interment or cremation, or as a memorial service after the body has been laid to rest.

The service includes musical selections, a short introduction, readings and interment announcements.

### Mexican American

Primarily Catholic, Mexican Americans hold funerals that are lead by Catholic priests and are heavily attended.

In urban settings, a viewing is held in a mortuary, but in rural communities, a wake is usually held at the home.

The coffin is placed on a table or stand under burning candles and herbs.

The wake is followed by a church ceremony.

Attendees can expect:

- Strong emotional responses to be encouraged
- Children of all ages to attend
- Family members to throw a handful of dirt on the coffin before the grave is filled.

### Native American

Although Native American nations do not share a single faith, common practice can be derived from worldviews based on prevalent spiritual values.

Native Americans regard all creation as sacred and diverse beliefs can exist harmoniously.

Because they do not proselytize, outsiders who express curiosity about traditions may be regarded with suspicion.

## OTHER FUNERAL CUSTOMS

### New Orleans Jazz Funerals

Carrying vestiges of African funeral rituals and originally intended to celebrate the new-found freedom of a departed slave, jazz funerals evolved as a way to exalt the life of a loved one.

The music, dancing and parade help the deceased find their way to heaven and celebrate the final release.

The funeral begins with a slow march from the home of the deceased to the church or funeral home.

The coffin may be carried by a horse-drawn hearse and accompanied by a brass band.

Observers are welcome to join in.

Musicians, police officers and African-Americans, in particular, are remembered.

### Irish Wakes and Customs of Old

A cultural blend of paganism and Christianity, the Irish wake, had everything from profound grieving to rollicking fun.

The wake was held at home and the body was covered in white linen adorned with black or white ribbons—and never left alone until burial.

Candles were placed around the body.

Clocks were stopped at the time of death.

Mirrors were turned around or covered.

Once the body was properly prepared, the keening began.

Wakes lasted through two or three nights with plenty of food and tobacco.

Today, these rituals are dramatically moderated.

### Modern Wakes

A wake is sometimes synonymous with a visitation or viewing—and is returning as a practice in some circles.

Friends and family gather together in a private home or funeral home to swap stories about the person who has died.

The mood and stories may be serious or humorous.

However, visitations and viewings tend to be subdued gatherings and are often held at a funeral home the day before the funeral or immediately before the funeral.

A modern wake is a celebration of the deceased.



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