

Glossary of Funeral Terms

A

Aftercare – one of many terms used to describe services available to family members after the death of a loved one. Aftercare is a free resource when you have questions or need assistance with anything from where to find a grief support group to applying for government related benefits.

Alternative Container – is a container designed to protect human remains prior to cremation. Typically made from wood or a heavy cardboard without decoration or inner lining, “Alternative Containers” are rigid and resistant to leakage.

Ashes – see “Cremated Remains”

Autopsy – thorough inspection of a body after death by a medical doctor in order to determine the cause of death.

B

Basic Services – describes the basic services of coordinating funeral details, assisting with administrative tasks such as completing a death certificate, applying for benefits, and a proportionate share of everyday overhead.

Body Donation – donation of the entire body for purposes of medical science and education.

Burial – placing remains in a space in the ground.

C

Casket – a rigid container designed for human remains. Constructed of wood or metal, it is ornamented and lined with fabric. There are a variety of caskets at various price, style and quality to choose from; Bronze, Copper, Stainless Steel, 18 Gauge, 20 Gauge, Solid Wood, Veneers and cloth covered fiberboard.

Cemetery – land reserved for graves for burial.

Chapel Ceremony – a funeral or memorial ceremony held at a Funeral Home.

Closed Casket – describes a visitation or ceremony in which the body is in a closed casket, not available for viewing.

Columbarium – a structure that is used to house cremated remains. A columbarium can be freestanding, or located within a chapel or mausoleum.

Committal – the portion of a funeral ceremony at the gravesite where last words are said before interment.

Conglomerate – a large group of companies under the same ownership. Many independent funeral homes have been sold to these larger regional or national companies.

Coping With Loss – describes the difficult period following the death of a loved one. See also “Aftercare” and “Grieving”.

Cremated Remains – remains of a body following cremation.

Cremation – is a heating process which incinerates human remains into ashes.

Cremation Casket – a casket designed specifically for the cremation process. This casket can be used for viewing the body prior to cremation.

Crematorium/Crematory – facility where the cremation of the deceased occurs.

D

Death Benefits – when a loved one dies, survivors may be eligible for benefits from Social Security or the Veteran’s Administration. The funeral director can help determine what, if any, benefits are available to survivors, as well as help apply for them.

Death Certificate – a legal document signed by a physician that shows the cause of death as well as other information about a person who has died. Certified copies of the Death Certificate are required to file various claims – such as insurance or death benefits claims.

Death Notice – a type of notice placed in a local newspaper or on the Internet to announce the death of a person. This is not a complete obituary. See “Obituary”.

E

Embalming – a procedure in which human remains are chemically treated by injection and/or topical application for temporary preservation, including, but not limited to, the act of disinfecting, preserving, and restoring the human remains to natural life-like appearance. This preservation is intended to allow for adequate time to plan a funeral ceremony and for friends and family to travel from out-of-town, rather than for any long-term preservation.

Eulogy – words spoken at a ceremony to celebrate the life of a person who has died.

F

Family-Owned and Operated – Family owned and operated verses being owned by a national conglomerate. Family owned and operated firms take pride in offering personal service and care to the clients in their community.

FTC Funeral Rule – The Federal Trade Commission Funeral Rule outlines specific requirements for funeral homes regarding funeral goods and services. The Funeral Rule demonstrates one of many ways the industry is regulated to protect consumers and ensure a high level of professionalism within the business.

Funeral Director – A funeral professional who works with a family to arrange burial, cremation or other funeral services. The director, who must be licensed to practice in the state may also help prepare remains.

Funeral Escort – Individuals who escort a funeral procession, such as law enforcement officers.

Funeral Procession – two or more vehicles accompanying the remains of a deceased person, usually transporting remains to a final resting place.

Funeral Service – The ceremony or group of ceremonies that marks a person’s death, held before he or she is buried or cremated. Funeral Services also include the arranging, supervising or conducting the funeral ceremony.

G

General Price List – a list of prices detailing services rendered by a funeral home. The Federal Trade Commission requires this list to be made available to anyone who is seeking price information, plans a service or requests it.

Grave – a space in the earth for the purpose of burying remains.

Grave Liner – see “Outer Burial Container.”

Graveside Ceremony/Service – a funeral ceremony held at graveside

Green Funeral – describes funeral, cremation and burial options that are eco-friendly. For example, a casket of biodegradable material may be chosen for burial, or a tree may be planted over a grave as a way of “giving back” to the environment. Cremated remains can be planted with a tree for an environmentally friendly disposition.

Grieving – part of the natural process that includes experiencing deep sadness.

H

Hearse – vehicle designed and used for transporting remains.

I

Immediate Burial – the burial of human remains without a formal viewing, visitation or ceremony.

L

Lead Car – a vehicle used to transport clergy or personnel for funeral/memorial ceremonies and the lead car for the funeral procession, when needed.

Limousine – a vehicle used to transport up to nine passengers, usually family members, from the residence to the funeral home, church, cemetery or any other facility for a funeral /memorial ceremony.

M

Mausoleum – a building designed to house a body above the ground, rather than in-ground burial.

Medical Examiner – a medical doctor who examines a body after death to determine the cause of death.

Memorial Service – a ceremony held to honor the deceased without the body present.

Memorial Folder – a printed card available during a visitation, memorial or church ceremony. The name, birth and death dates of the deceased are often included. A prayer or meaningful quote may also be used.

Memorial Donation – a contribution made to a particular charity or organization in honor of the person who has died.

Mortuary Science – the area of study in which a funeral director is certified and trained.

This intensive educational program leads to the awarding of an accredited degree, and includes a wide range of topics – from helping grieving individuals and preparing a body for burial or cremation, to planning a funeral service.

N

Next Of Kin – a person’s nearest living blood relative.

Niche – the space in a mausoleum or wall to hold an urn.

O

Obituary – a notice placed in the newspaper about a person’s death. An obituary can include biographical information about the person who died, as well as details about a planned service. The funeral director will help families write and place obituaries.

Open Casket – describes a visitation or ceremony in which the embalmed body is in an open casket.

Outer Burial Container – a concrete container used to support a casket in the ground. This container helps prevent the grave from collapsing.

P

Pall – a special cloth that is placed over a casket or urn at the funeral ceremony in some churches.

Pall Bearer – a person who helps carry or escort a casket at a funeral or burial ceremony.

Pre-Need/Pre-Payment/Pre-Planning – see “Advanced Planning”.

Private Service – a service in which the family prefers to include only the family members and closest friends of the person who has died.

R

Refrigeration facility – a special refrigerated unit at the funeral home designed to hold un-embalmed human remains prior to preparation for cremation or burial.

Register Book – a book that a family will have at a ceremony, for visitors to sign as a way to pay their respects to the person who has died. This list of visitors can be of comfort to the family in the days following a ceremony.

Removal – The event of removing human remains from the place of death.

S

Scattering – the act of distributing ashes in a special location.

Service – see “Funeral Service”.

T

Traditional Full-Service Funeral – usually includes a viewing and visitation, formal ceremony, a graveside service, and burial or entombment.

Transferring – remains may need to be transported from one location to another location. There may be necessary permits or documentation to fulfilling specific requirements. Funeral directors will ensure safe passage to almost any destination in the world.

U

Undertaker – see “Funeral Director”.

Urn – the container used to hold cremated remains after cremation.

Urn Vault – a small reinforced container used for housing an urn in the ground. The urn vault acts the same as a burial vault does for a casket to help protect the surrounding ground from collapse. Required by many cemeteries.

V

Vault – a reinforced concrete outer burial container used to house the casket, and to protect the surrounding ground from collapsing. Required by almost every cemetery.

Veterans Cemetery – a cemetery owned and operated by the Federal or State Veterans Department for burial of Veterans and spouses. There is usually no charge for this space or service.

Viewing/Visitation – a period of time set aside for friends and family to view the person who has died, usually in a special room within a funeral home or place of worship.

W

Wake – a period of time set aside for family members and friends to privately visit and view the person who has died, usually in a room within the funeral home. The body is generally viewed in the casket during this time. Also called “Viewing or Visitation.”

Water Scattering – a method of scattering cremated remains in which they are scattered on or across a body of water.