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By The Reverend Fr. Michael Brown – Honorary Chaplain
The Regulating Branch Association

PREPARING FOR THE LAST DAY - THE DAY WE CROSS THE BAR

I write this article in an attempt to help, I hope, those who want to prepare for the last day, morbid though the subject might be to some. Many of us will say to ourselves, that we will do this one day, but we never get around to doing it. Then, the sad fact is, your family is left behind to try and pick up the pieces and carry out your wishes, working from memory and passed conversations, when you've moved on. In short, they can't remember everything, they and we can never know what you're really thinking. So what you do at this time will be a great help, if you have a particular idea of what you want. Your plans can be either long, short, comprehensive, or simply notes. But what you do, will always be a help to those who are left behind.

What Can Be Placed On Your Coffin?

Ex Service

Every ex service person is entitled to have the Union Flag placed on their coffin. The practise of placing a White Ensign on the coffin is presently unlawful, but some relaxation on this is being sought. That said, in some areas there is already a local custom of using a White Ensign on the coffin. Medals, sword, cap, beret, football boots, bible, etc., whatever expresses who you are? These items can be placed on your coffin. Any items so placed will be retrieved by your funeral director and returned to your family. Presently Serving Personal

Sadly you will all be denied the choice of a White Ensign on your coffin; you will only be allowed the Union Flag. That said you will be entitled to a full military funeral service with pal bearers. That said everything else mentioned above for Ex Service personal, will still apply in regard to what can go on your coffin.

2

A Funeral Service At The Crematorium

At the Crematorium the first thing that you should be aware of, is that essentially most services are similar, regardless of denomination. But as a general rule you need to be aware that at the Crematorium services will only last 20 to 25 minutes in total, in and out. This allows for two short hymns, a eulogy and some prayers. You will need music to enter by and music for people to leave by; this can be a CD or organ music. The choice of hymns and music can be essentially yours, but the priest or minister, will probably want to have the last word. They, like me, would want to avoid the following being sung at the Crematorium, "Burn baby burn" or "light up the fire ..." or "smoke gets in your eyes..." I think your getting my drift. We priests and ministers, like to keep a check on good taste for the benefit of the bereaved, and we 'do' have the last word. My local funeral director once told me that he was surprised at the Yeovil crematorium, when one family stood as the curtains closed, and they all sang "Wish me luck as you wave me good bye..." they were all waving at the time. For them on that occasion there was no minister present, it wasn't a Christian funeral service. So I suppose you could say no holds bar. But again I'm sure you're getting my drift.

A Funeral Service In Church

I think the first thing I should say here, is that the Church of England is the Established Church of England. Which means that every resident, in every parish throughout England, regardless of denomination, faith or belief. Has the right to have their funeral service held in their parish church. But the funeral service you will get there, 'will be' a Church of England Funeral Service, and nothing else by law.

You should also know that a funeral service in church does not have the same time restriction that the crematorium imposes on you, so you can be more flexible, with more hymns, readings etc. So a Church service would always be the better choice. But again in all cases, the priest or minister taking the service will have the last word, in regard to taste.

3

Memorial Services

Memorial Services – These can be held after the Crematorium or a private funeral service in church. Most denominations make allowance for this thanksgiving service. This service would mean that the funeral service itself can be a very private occasion and the memorial service would become a public one and could be held at any time. There are no rules as to when a memorial service should take place, and some have been known to occur a year after the funeral service has taken place.

Disposal of Remains

Clearly this again can and often is a touchy subject with the family.

Hard and fast instructions left for guidance can and often are a great help for your next of kin, though good reason and practise will always be a guide.

Asking for your remains to be part of a new motorway or breakwater wall, might prove difficult to arrange. Believe it or not, there are hard and fast rules on the burial of bodies and cremated remains, it can't just be done anywhere.

What are the options?

Burial or cremation is the two forms of disposal, but there is more that can be done with the disposal of cremated remains, than there is that can be done with the whole body. You will probably all be aware of the gardens of remembrance at your local crematoria, and even of the areas set aside in your own churchyards for cremated remains, especially when the churchyard as a whole is closed for internments. But what you may not be aware of is that, cremated remains can be disposed of at sea, or even at the Defence College of Police & Guarding Southwick Park, with the permission of the Commandant.

4

Disposal at Sea – Serving and Ex Service

If you choose a disposal of cremated remains at sea there are three main points that will do this for you on behalf of your family. They are the Chaplaincy departments of the Portsmouth, Devonport and Faslane Naval Bases. Details of how to use this service are available through the Chaplaincies concerned. Families can be present on these occasions or the remains may be despatched without the family present. That said, full and due decorum will be paid by the Chaplaincy service and those detailed to assist, to the deceased person. I have witnessed a few of these occasions and I have taken part in them. They are very good.

Disposal of Cremated Remains at the Defence College of Police & Guarding – Serving and Ex Service

A precedent has been established in 2007 where cremated remains of one of our Association, was directly scattered into the ground, outside the main door of the Memorial Chapel at Southwick Park. An area has been set aside specifically for this purpose. These interments are carried out with the permission of the establishment Commanding Officer.

Questions

Should you have any questions at all in this area, please do not hesitate to contact me, I will only be to glad to help where I can.

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