

# Planning a funeral in the Benefice of Berrow and Brean



A guidebook including  
information about  
churchyards and memorials

## **Introduction**

A funeral marks the end of a life here on earth. Sometimes this comes naturally, and on other occasions it can come quite unexpectedly. Whatever your circumstances, we would like to start by offering you our sincerest sympathy at this time. It is also hard that it is now that you have to begin thinking and planning for the funeral service, and so the purpose of this leaflet is to give you some helpful guidance as you meet the minister who will be taking the service for you, and to help you to think through the memorial that you would like to leave for your loved one.

## **Funerals in the Benefice of Berrow and Brean**

We are a benefice of 2 churches served by a small ministry team, and so the funeral service may be taken by a clergy person or one of our Readers. All are experienced in taking thoughtful and carefully prepared services.

In the days following your bereavement, the minister who will be taking your service will be in touch to arrange a visit. There are a number of things that they will want to talk through with you. Firstly, if they did not know the deceased person very well they will need to find out a bit more about them, especially if you would like them to deliver a tribute on your behalf. They will also want to talk through details for the service itself, including possible hymns and readings that you would like to include. They may have some helpful suggestions if you would like them. If the death is especially sensitive, sudden or unexpected, the minister taking the service will be able to help you to accommodate this appropriately and sensitively.

## **What happens in a funeral service?**

There are some different options for funeral services. Some people will choose to do everything at one of the local crematoriums. Others would like a church funeral followed by a short service either at the crematorium, or of burial. Others will choose to have a service at the crematorium followed by a service of thanksgiving in a church. The funeral director and minister preparing the service will be able to give you guidance about what will best suit your circumstances.

The funeral service itself takes us on a journey that helps us to begin facing our grief and sadness. It recognises that we are there together mourning the loss of someone that we care for and love. It helps us to remember the person who has died. And finally, it gives us the chance to place our loved one into God's care.

The service will begin often with the minister leading the coffin, using some short sentences from the Bible. After a welcome, some words may be spoken about the deceased either by a friend or family member, or by the minister if you would prefer. There can be some hymns, and there will be at least one reading from the Bible, and maybe another reading of your choice, followed by a short sermon to help speak about Christian hope of life beyond death. There will be some prayers both for those who are grieving, and the one who has died.

The service ends with the prayers of commendation and committal, where we commend the person into God's loving care, and then we say goodbye to their physical body, allowing our personal memories of them to live on.

### **After the funeral**

It is often after the funeral, once the busyness of all the arrangements and planning have passed, that the full impact of what has happened hits us. Questions about why it has happened are quite natural. Questions about life and death come up, and you may wish to discuss this with someone. There are a number of things that we offer in order to help you in the time following a bereavement.

Firstly, we have a pastoral visiting team, and a member of that team would be very willing to come and visit you and talk through any of your questions, or just have a cup of tea and sit with you.

If you feel that you might want to talk to someone who is trained in bereavement counselling, we can also help you to find someone suitable to speak to.

Secondly, each year we hold a special memorial service to remember those who have died. You should receive an invitation to this service which is usually around the beginning of November, but if you would like to find out more please do ask.

Most importantly, we would want you to know that although the busyness has gone, you are not left alone. We will continue to hold you in prayer, and will offer you as much support as we can as you journey through your grief.

## **Some Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Can a person be buried anywhere they choose?**

Everyone is entitled to be buried or have their ashes buried in their local parish churchyard (as long as there is still space), regardless of whether or not they have attended church. If there is a close connection to a parish, for example a person lived there for the whole of their life but recently moved elsewhere, the parish priest may also give permission for a burial to take place there.

### **What if there is no space in our local churchyard?**

The Local Authority will have made alternative provision for burial, and the church minister can take a service there instead.

### **Should children come to a funeral service?**

That is a decision that you really need to make yourselves. These days it is common for children to attend a funeral, and it is important that they are given the same opportunity to say goodbye to someone that they love. It is worth spending time talking to them about what is going to happen so they are prepared. We can also advise you on resources to help a child to come to terms with and understand death.

### **What happens following a cremation?**

The funeral director will give you information about receiving the ashes back following a cremation. We are not able to offer scattering of ashes in a churchyard, but there are plenty of places that are available should you wish to do this. We can inter them in a plot in a churchyard either loose, or in a biodegradable casket. Again your funeral director can give you further information about this. A minister will be present to do a short service of interment if you choose this option.

### **What happens about collections at church services?**

No collection is taken during a funeral service, but there is often a retiring collection as people leave the service. This can be for a charity or organisation of your choice, but provision will also be made for people to make a donation to the upkeep of the church alongside this, as we rely on such donations to keep these small churches open and available for occasions such as this.

### **Is there guidance about memorials in churchyards?**

If you would like to place a memorial in a churchyard, there are some guidelines that will help you to know what is allowed, in just the same way as a crematorium or cemetery. The summary of information below is designed to help you to choose something appropriate and fitting.

## **1. Introduction**

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Brean is responsible for the care and maintenance of their churchyard. Berrow churchyard is closed, and the cemetery next to the churchyard is maintained by Berrow Parish Council.

Any works (including the introduction, renewal or alteration of any item in the churchyard) may only be carried out subject to seeking permission from the PCC or parish priest. All applications should be posted to Rev Jonathan Philpott, The Rectory, 1 Manor Way, Berrow, Somerset. TA8 2RG.

## **2. Permission for Memorials on Graves**

Placing a memorial in a churchyard is not a right, but is a privilege granted by the Church of England. Ultimately, the Chancellor of the Diocese has the authority to approve or reject an application, although limited authority is given to the parish priest, limited by size, design and material.

Where the design is different, the application must be referred to the Diocesan Chancellor who may grant permission although this involves applying for a faculty. The process can be explained in full if this situation arises, and there is a fee applicable for this. The parish priest can approve applications which meet the requirements set out below:

- a) Materials. The memorial must be either natural wood or natural stone. It must not be polished or reflective, black or pearl granite, marble of any colour, synthetic stone or plastic.
- b) Form. The memorial must consist of:
  - A headstone (including plinth) not more than 120cm (4') high, 90cm (3' ) wide and 18cm (7") thick, and no less than 75cm (2'6") high, 50cm (1'8") wide and 7.5cm (3") thick, or
  - A cross not more than 120cm (4') high, or
  - A horizontal slab sunk into the ground so the surface is flush with the surrounding earth, with dimensions not exceeding 18"x16"x2"
  - Vases must be separate, and no more than 30cm x 20cm x 20cm.
- c) There should be no identification of the maker or supplier, except for the craftsman

or designer in letters no more than 13mm high.

- d) Any base for the headstone (or other memorial) must be sunk into the ground so that a mower can pass over it. There should also be enough room between headstones for a mower to pass through.
- e) Memorials should not include photographs, metal or plastic inserts, railings, chippings, statues, bird baths, trees or other items

### **3. Existing Memorials**

It is not uncommon for churchyards to contain memorials introduced in the past which do not conform to the guidelines set out in this booklet. This does not mean they are to be viewed as a precedent as they are sometimes introduced without permission. If in doubt, just ask and we will do our best to advise you.

### **4. Applying for a Memorial**

You will need to speak to a stonemason, who will send an application on your behalf to the parish priest. Assuming it meets the criteria in this booklet it will be approved quickly, and returned ready for the memorial to be prepared. Where it does not meet the criteria, it will be returned with the advice that a faculty needs to be applied for, and a suggestion on how to change it to meet the criteria as an alternative.

We really hope that this leaflet has been helpful in what is a difficult time, but if there is anything that you would like to know that isn't covered here, please do let us know. Please contact Rev Jonathan Philpott on 01278 751806 or email [rev.jonathanphilpott@gmail.com](mailto:rev.jonathanphilpott@gmail.com)