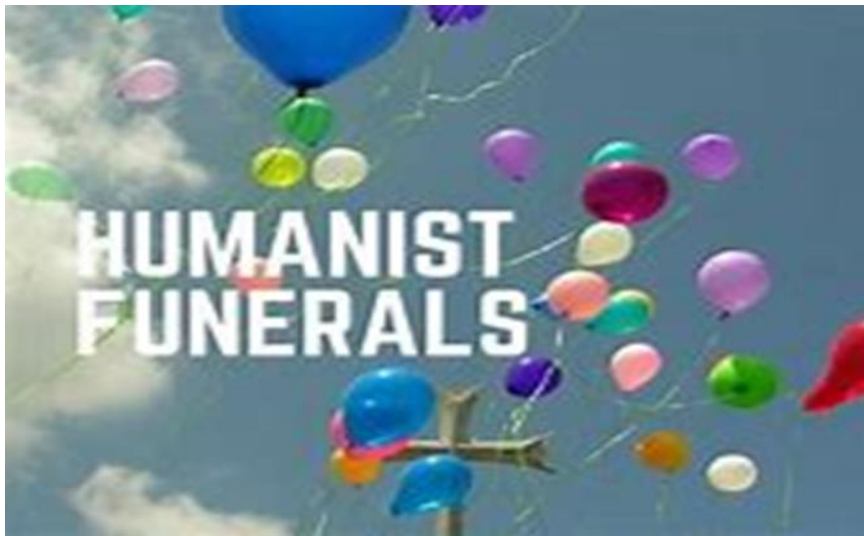


What is a humanist funeral?

A humanist funeral is an extremely intimate and individual service. It is non-religious however humanists follow a belief system ourselves as human beings to do the right thing, thus, humanists class this as their religion and therefore should be taken seriously. It is a ceremony that can integrate the mourning associated with long-standing funeral services and the more recent notions such as celebrating the deceased's life. The focus is very much of the departed being remembered, and as each service is unique to that individual what they liked, their passions, goals and dreams, the celebrant who will conduct the ceremony can work with the family to create a personal and memorable service.



Conducted by a trained celebrant, humanist funeral rarely contain any religious worship or elements. If there was a particular hymn, poem or reading that contained religious references that were of certain significance to the deceased then they may be used for meaningful content rather than religious content.

At the centre of a humanist funeral ceremony is the tributes to the deceased, which will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes and is written by the celebrant in which will include tributes, accolades and eulogies by family, friends and important people in the departed person's life. It can also include music or text chosen by loved ones or that have been specified previously in the wishes of the deceased. A humanist ceremony can also observe a moment of silence that gives people a small amount of time to contemplate the person's life and a chance to say goodbye. If attendees have a particular faith they can at that time say their own personal quiet prayer, this time is often commenced with the release of balloons and so forth.



What are the advantages of having a humanist funeral?



There are many advantages to having a humanist funeral. As stated above the humanist funerals allow a relative to be remembered without being crammed with deeply religious content. This, therefore, is the funeral that in essence could cater to everyone allowing them to have the words and the songs that they loved in life, without having to adhere to strict and rigid rules.

Having a humanist funeral makes the planning part much easier. This is a great benefit for people who want to plan their funeral in advance and want to be able to have what they require when they wish.

Funerals of any kind are extremely distressing for friends and family of the deceased, which could be made worse by the feeling that the service has not been an adequate reflection of their loved one's character or the way in which they chose to live their life. The personal way in which the funerals are planned and conducted is an uplifting help, which can make people feel cushioned and supported at one of the darkest times in their lives. The celebrants are empathic to bereavement and what it means to people and will be there the whole way by guiding the loved ones through the service, and burial and cremation procedures. They will take time to listen while people reminisce about moments they want to be shared and so forth, all the time lending a supporting hand to the bereaved.



The non-religious nature of a humanist funeral helps the family avoid the likelihood of meant well but unhelpful at the time sentiments such as 'they're in a better place now', or 'at least they are out of pain'. These are sentiments that may make the family uncomfortable if they are of no religion themselves but can also make them feel anger or despair at the unfairness as to them their loved one is not in a better place and should be with them.

Do you need to be a humanist to have a humanist funeral?

There are no restrictions on humanist funerals and they are not only for people of no set religion or who identify themselves as a humanist in life. In fact, a lot of humanist funerals are held for people who wouldn't fit into those categories.

A humanist is defined as someone who:

- Lives their life as an atheist or agnostic, who believes in scientific methods when understanding how the universe works and they don't believe in the supernatural.
- Makes any ethical decisions based on reason, rationality, empathy and a concern for human beings and other animals.
- Has the belief that, in the absence of an afterlife and any comprehensible purpose to the universe, human beings can bring their own meaning into their lives by seeking happiness and helping others to do the same.

Thus, even the deceased didn't use or know the term humanist but were not religious it is likely they would fall under one of those definitions and therefore would be very fitted to a humanist ceremony.

Likewise, if a family member or friend belongs to a religion they will be welcomed at a humanist funeral.

How to organise a humanist funeral

The first step would be to contract an accredited humanist celebrant, this can be done via the funeral directors or via the internet, however, there are lots of unaccredited celebrants offering their services. They will be able to help make all necessary arrangements and talk and support loved ones through their hard bereavement process. They can also make suggestions about the service.

If you require some religious content to be incorporated due to some significance that it has such as a hymn or poem, the celebrant will be able to tell you whether this is possible.

A humanist funeral often encompasses green or eco-burial elements such as the deceased not being embalmed and biodegradable coffins and so forth.



In cases with such specifications, the service should be organised promptly- usually within 48 hours of death if there is to be an open casket or within 10 days if the body is in cold storage.



Where can you hold a humanist funeral

Humanist funerals can be held almost anywhere, apart from places of worship. Popular venues include crematoria, woodland areas, meadows, beaches and so forth.



There is also the option to have the service in a completely different space such as a special place to the deceased, a public building or the family home of them or a family member and then later transport the deceased to the place of burial or cremation afterwards.



What is a humanist funeral order of service?

Humanist funerals are highly individual and personal, allowing the family and friends to design a ceremony that they see fit as a reflection of the deceased.

There are many sites on the internet that show you an example structure of a humanist funeral. As a guideline for anyone considering this type of service, this example structure is from www.humanist.org:

1. Introduction music
2. Words of welcome
3. Thoughts on life and death from a non-religious perspective
4. The tribute – an outline of the life and personality of the person who has died
5. Readings of poetry and prose
6. Reflection – a few moments for private thoughts about the person who has died, either in silence or accompanied by music
7. The committal – when the coffin is lowered or the curtains are closed
8. Closing words- including thanks on the family's behalf
9. Final music



What to wear to a humanist funeral

As this is not a religious funeral, there are no strict rules and regulations about the wearing of mourning clothes, unless specifically requested by the family. It is normal for people to attend wearing semi-formal/casual clothing.

For many humanist funerals, attendees are often requested to wear bright and colourful clothing that will reflect on the deceased's personality and love of life. It is a common request for people to not wear black as this is seen as more of a celebration than a mourning.

If the funeral is to take place in an outdoor location such as a beach or a woodland burial site, then weather conditions must be taken into account and appropriate attire should be worn, with the avoidance of unsuitable footwear and so forth.

