

Janet Shell Ceremonies

independent funeral celebrant



**Some guidance on creating a beautiful
ceremony to honour your loved one**

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Losing somebody turns your world upside down. Your emotions hijack your life and seem out of control. Sometimes the loss is accompanied by the relief that the deceased is no longer suffering, but the loss is still felt very keenly.

Right at the time your world has stopped. you are required to make important choices concerning the funeral.

For those who are not part of a religious community, this can be overwhelming and you want to honour the person but may not know where to begin.

This is where I step up and help guide you through what can be an overwhelming process to bring you to the moment you say your final farewell, with dignity, and help make the service one to remember for all the right reasons.

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I start with some information you may not know and which I believe you should. I apologise for the starkness of it, but it does go some way to explaining why your celebrant is an important person in the process

The ceremony is generally timed to last 30 minutes, unless a double slot is booked, then it can be up to 50 minutes. You may well have been told 45 minutes, but that includes arrival, entrance and exit and then preparing the chapel. It is my job to make sure we have as much love and celebration within the service as we can fit in whilst adhering to the crematorium timings. I believe you should know that the crematorium can fine families anything up to £600 if they run over the time, and different places have different leniency around this. There have been some news items around this over the years. Whatever you think, it is a reality and it adds further distress to be kept waiting around while the previous service ends. I think you should know this piece of information! Please help me to help you!

Things I am going to discussing with you.

Name of Funeral Director and approximate number of mourners.

You will need entrance and exit music.

There is a comprehensive list on the two systems that the crematorium parlours use. They will either be using Wesley Media or Obitus. Most tracks of choice can be found there. You cannot personally order from these professional services. that is done via the Funeral Director.

Should you want a different piece of music, not on the system, the company will buy it in for you.

Wesley
Media



Obitus

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Some chapels have an organ and professional player if you want to have a favourite hymn. There are hymns with a background choir singing on the music media systems and some families choose to sing along to those. My background as a professional singer means I am able uniquely to lead the singing as appropriate.

If you have a relative or friend singing a song or playing an instrument that has been recorded previously or even for the occasion, send it to me and I can edit it and make sure it is put into the system. I have had grandchildren create a poem, recorded reading it, and then played that on the day for example.



The visual tribute is a lovely thing which allows you to select 25 photos of your loved one and then decide a piece of music to have accompany the showing of the photos, so, a slide show video. You can select more, but be warned this will then cost you more. Prices are set by each individual crematorium and your funeral director will be able to tell you the present costs.

You will also be asked to select 2 photos one to be shown for the entrance of mourners and one for the exit. It can of course be the same photo used throughout.

These are often called the 'holding photos' and either myself or the funeral director will need these so they can be added to the crematorium system.

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Part of my role is to help you create an order of service giving a structure to your service. Within that we can discuss anything you might like to add in. I have created a separate document showing how the order of service can look. Usually it will include a couple of photos and maybe a copy of a poem that is read.

Recently I did one where we included a crossword about the person's life!

Usually you will thank the funeral director and celebrant and include any information about donations you may wish to make and where there may be a gathering following the funeral. This is probably the largest job of all for the family to engage with as it will reflect the whole ceremony.

Funeral Directors have templates for the order of service and will organise the printing once you have finished creating yours, or you can do your own and print it independently or, again, through the FD office.



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The key components of a ceremony are the eulogies which family members write and either present themselves or ask the celebrant to read out.

Please work on the premise of 100 words per minute. We naturally speak faster than this, but in presentation mode and when emotional, we slow down, and, whoever is reading, may have to stop and take a breath and reset.



If somebody is going to 'free style' during the ceremony - ie speak without a script - because they are very good at that - I still need to have a rough timing which they then need to stick to. It may be that this is better placed at the Wake where there is time for everybody to contribute, but it is lovely to hear spontaneous memories of course.

If that person goes on rather longer than intended, I may then have to curtail other parts of the service following, so it really is something to bear in mind! (Not my choice I assure you).

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One thing I like to add if possible are some of the tributes the family have received and I ask you to select key phrases that have touched or even amused you, maybe it is an anecdote or a memory. I love it when people say at the end of the ceremony that they never knew XYZ about the deceased. Often it is these moment that provide those revelations

At the end of the service I will need to know whether you would like the curtains around the coffin to remain open or to be shut. There will be closing words and a 'committal' which is when this happens. If somebody wishes to read or create a prayer for this moment, this too is a lovely inclusive moment.

The close family will lead the mourners out after the end of the ceremony but usually there is time for them to spend personal time at the coffin if they wish to. Sometimes this is a moment for close relatives and friends to place a flower on the coffin as they leave, if the curtains have remained open. **Please be aware that once you place something on the coffin, the funeral director and staff have a code of conduct that prevents them from removing it.** An **important** thing to note is that metal objects and plastics cannot be cremated. Please be prepared to remove these yourself prior to leaving the chapel: a photoframe or a workman's tool to give two examples I have encountered.

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While it is natural to talk with the funeral arranger, once you bring me on board, they will expect most communication to be conducted through me. This prevents lots of different ideas being communicated and resulting in confusion.

I am here for you at any time and will steer you through what can feel like an overwhelming process so that your farewell is meaningful and dignified and also a joyful celebration of a life well lived.



Janet is a proud member of two professional industry organisations who provide training and ongoing support

*AOIC: association of independent celebrants
Fellowship of Professional celebrants*