

# Talking Points and Suggestions

## For Approaching Hospitals

1. *"We're here to request that you consider modifying your body release policy to allow families to bring their loved ones home after death."*
2. *"We would be happy to participate in any way helpful to you, and have some sample policy language from hospitals around the country to share that will make the job easier."*
3. *"It's important for your staff to know what to say and do should a family exercise their rights to custody and control so the process is seamless and doesn't make for more work for anyone."*
4. *"We know your nurses and support staff have the best interests of families at heart, and this is one more way of smoothing the way for bereaved families."*
  - a. Bring copies of samples found in *Building Bridges Along the Death Care Continuum*:
    - Sample Body Release Form
    - Sample Body Release Language
    - Example of Hospital Body Release Language
    - Example of Body Release Policy
  - b. Request a copy of their current policy and highlight areas that could be modified.
  - c. Suggest that you lead an in-service for staff to educate them about what to expect and what paperwork is necessary if a home funeral family wants to receive and transport the body. Include Emergency Room staff for unanticipated deaths.
  - d. At minimum, ask that the nurses ask the question "How would you like to handle things from here? Your choices are 1) you can arrange to take your loved one's body home or 2) we can call a funeral director to collect the body and take it to their place of business" rather than "What funeral home do you want us to call?"

## For Approaching Hospices

1. *"We're here to offer our help in educating your staff and volunteers about home funerals by conducting an in-service."*
2. *"It's important for your staff to know what to say and do should a family exercise their rights to custody and control so the process is seamless and doesn't make for more work for anyone."*

3. *“We know your hospice nurses and support staff have the best interests of families at heart, and this is one more way of smoothing the way for bereaved families.”*
4. *“Hospice and home funeral advocates share a philosophy of care that patients and families will be full participants in care decisions when possible; will be treated with honesty, respect, compassion and dignity; and can trust us to ensure that the sanctity of the body will be respected.”*
  - a. Suggest that you lead an in-service for staff to education them about what to expect and what paperwork is necessary for home funeral families with a loved one who is on hospice service.
  - b. At minimum, ask that the nurses ask the question “How would you like to handle things from here?” rather than “What funeral home do you want us to call?”
  - c. Offer to provide funeral planning consultations that inform patients of all their funeral options, including local funeral goods, comparative industry price lists, developing an action plan.

### **For Approaching Funeral Directors**

1. *“We’re here to introduce ourselves, explain what we do, and ask for your partnership in assisting families who choose to bring or keep a loved one home after death.”*
2. *“Our goal is to educate families so they may make informed choices about home and blended funerals.”*
3. *“We are also seeking your willingness to assist families with specific services at corresponding rates.”*
4. *“We know that you and your staff have the interests of families at heart, and this is one more way of smoothing the way for bereaved families.”*
  - a. Suggest that you lead an in-service for staff to education them about what to expect from home funeral families and from you.
  - b. Bring a kit of brochures, resource lists and other materials to leave.
  - c. Ask whether they would be willing to provide individual services specifically for home funeral families without requiring a non-declinable fee.
  - d. If the funeral home has a crematory, ask if they are willing to accept bodies directly from families without paying a non-declinable fee.

### **For Approaching Cemeterians, Trustees**

1. *"We're here to request that you consider modifying your cemetery policy or bylaws to allow burial without a vault or outer burial container in a section of the cemetery if not all."*
2. *"We would be happy to participate in any way helpful to you, and have some sample language from green burial cemeteries around the country to share that will make the job easier."*
3. *"Green burial excludes embalming fluids, non-bio-degradable containers, herbicides and pesticide use, and in no way inhibits natural decomposition."*
4. *"There are close to 175 hybrid, natural, and conservation burial sites in the US and Canada, and more are being created weekly."*
  - a. Link to the [NHFREA.org](http://NHFREA.org) *Green Burial Cemeteries in the US and Canada* webpage and explain how many cemeteries, including Catholic, are setting aside green space. The list gives them numbers to call for first-hand information and persuasion. Connect them to each other.
  - b. Ask for your cemetery's revenue sheets, particularly their most recent P&Ls. You might be able to do a general revenue stream projection based on what you learn from other green burial hybrid cemeteries. Find out what they charge for green interment and then remember to compare by separating out the perpetual care and other unnecessary charges to get the true apples-to-apples comparison on costs. Suggest that they can charge a small amount when any "divet" occurs to bring in additional soil to fill the hole.
  - c. Provide Billy Campbell's website photos that demonstrate the simplicity of the burial process and how the mounds are built, and all that stuff that may help to quell the unfounded safety fears they have re: falling through rotting coffin tops and wild animal raids.
  - d. Get your state Attorney General to write a letter confirming the legality of dispensing with concrete and plastic vaults.
  - e. Add a sense-of-the-meeting item to your next community-wide government meeting. Do your homework and educate key people in the community who will attend, along with officials who will be there, and see if you can get consensus to at least form an exploratory committee to begin a grassroots effort to put some pressure on the cemetery gatekeepers.
  - f. For that matter, just form a group and start getting in the public eye. Eventually they won't be able to ignore you. And it all depends on how the trustees or commissioners or whatever are put in place — by election

or paid (harder to oust them), but you might want to push replacing them if you can't get them to change their minds.

- g. Educate your church Social Justice Committee and get them to connect with other groups in your area to take up the cause. They're experienced in challenging the norm.

## For Interviews with the Media

### About Home Funerals

1. *"Home funerals occur when the body of a loved one stays or is brought home after death to be cared for by family, friends, and others volunteering their help."*
2. *"Home funeral ceremonies or services can occur in the home or in another venue, such as a church or hall."*
3. *"Home funerals are private, not public, yet may include visitation, a service, other ritual, or nothing. It is up to the family to direct what occurs from the time of death to the time of final disposition."*
4. *"Blended funerals occur when a funeral director is hired to assist in any capacity, such as filing the paperwork, providing transportation, any preparation of the body, or other facet as may be required by state law."*
5. *"Home funerals allow survivors to set the pace and to participate in care of the deceased and attend to details as they choose."*
6. *"Home funerals allow for spontaneous, organic expressions of grief and caring."*
7. *"Home funerals are affordable, environmentally responsible, and safe."*
8. *"The CDC, WHO, PAHO, and CID all agree that dead bodies do not pose an increased health risk. Universal precautions are employed when desired."*
9. *"Bodies may be kept for extended periods of time with appropriate cooling methods, such as ice, air conditioning, opening windows in cold weather."*
10. *"Embalming is not necessary or required by any state or province, and reportedly poses an 8-times higher risk for embalmers to contract leukemia."*

### About Home Funeral Families

1. *"Home funeral families, by and large, do not want strangers doing everything for them; they don't want everything to be made easy for them."*

2. *“Home funeral families want to take responsibility themselves, to exercise the privilege of caring for their own loved ones.”*
3. *“Home funeral families want to create services and hold them in places of personal meaning, want to conduct the experience led by their hearts.”*
4. *“Home funeral families want to work through the death experience authentically, working through their grief by participating in the process.”*
5. *“Home funeral families want to be environmentally responsible, avoiding toxic chemicals and invasive procedures such as embalming.”*

### **About Home Funeral Guides**

1. *“Home funeral guides are first and foremost educators. They have taken on the “midwife” responsibilities of death care where the family does the work.”*
2. *“Home funeral guides make sure that families know how to conduct home funerals properly and legally.”*
3. *“Home funeral guides are often called upon to lend ideas, to demonstrate techniques, to suggest possibilities, to share knowledge, and to bear witness.”*
4. *“Home funeral guides believe that facing our mortality, dealing with death straight on, finding ways to experience and share our grief result in healthy, integrated healing for all involved.”*
5. *“There are many kinds of home funeral guides, and where we live, what our background is, and what is culturally acceptable all factor in to what we offer”.*
6. *“Some home funeral guides are also celebrants, bringing spiritual support and officiating in funeral services in the home or elsewhere.”*

### **About Funeral Professionals**

1. *“Funeral directors are available 24/7. They are in the profession to make money to support their homes and families like any other businessperson.”*
2. *“Home funeral guides do not do what funeral directors do, and they don’t do what we do. Funeral directors cannot, by definition, provide this authentic home experience for clients in their establishments.”*
3. *“Blended home funerals and home funeral-friendly funeral directors offering a la carte services and charges present an opportunity for home funeral guides and professionals to work together to provide families with real choices and true service.”*

## **About Costs**

1. *“According to Lisa Carlson, the excess number of funeral homes is responsible for the rise in funeral pricing. Every body has to represent more revenue to support their facilities.”*
2. *“Many funeral homes have stopped handling services for the indigent. There are only a few businesses that own and operate crematories and they bear the brunt of providing free and discounted services. Viewings and services are not included in welfare dispositions.”*
3. *“Cremations are on the rise, in part because it is all families can afford, and some can’t even afford that. The result is fractures in the cultural, spiritual, and emotional fabric that supports those left behind in the absence of wakes and visitations and rituals. Inability to afford a gathering for family and friends in the way they have become accustomed to leaves them feeling incomplete, guilty, and ashamed. Home funerals fill that void by making meaningful funerals affordable.”*

## **About the NHFA**

1. *“The NHFA was created in 2009 to unify home funeral guides under one roof, to create a networking body that was mutually supporting, and that would eventually give public voice to this work.”*
2. *“Our mission is to educate and empower families and communities to care for their own dead.”*
3. *“We provide a website that includes directories of home funeral providers and extensive educational resources for anyone wanting to learn more about home funeral and green burial.”*
4. *“We provide access to trainings and workshops, and to a biennial conference, as well as connections to other funeral related organizations and people.”*
5. *“Our members come from all 50 states, 5 provinces and 6 countries. This includes professionals in the physical health, mental health, spiritual, education, business and nonprofit sectors.”*
6. *“Our goal is to reach as many people as possible with reliable, accurate information regarding their right to care for their own dead, and to provide informational support to families in charge of their own funerals.”*

7. *“The NHFA seeks to provide information and opportunities for home funeral advocates to interact and share information.”*
8. *“The NHFA works in concert with the Funeral Consumers Alliance to ensure that funeral laws preserve the rights of families to care for their own.”*
9. *“Obstacles we need to overcome include a pervasive cultural mindset that holds the current funeral model as the only possibility. This crosses all socio-economic lines.”*
10. *“We work to partner with the existing funeral industry to find ways to serve families.”*