

The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Austin, TX
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Bahá'í Funerals Information and Check List

The following information about Bahá'í funerals, followed by a check list of items to be considered at the time of the death of a member of the Bahá'í community, has been gathered together in this format in order to be of assistance to the family and friends of the departed and to help ensure a dignified funeral honoring the soul in a befitting manner.

“The burial of the dead is an occasion of great solemnity and importance, and while the conduct of the funeral service and the arrangements for the interment may be left to the relatives of the deceased, the Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility for educating the believers in the essential requirements of the Bahá'í law of burial as at present applied, and in courteously and tactfully drawing these requirements to the attention of the relatives if there is any indication that they may fail to observe them. These requirements are: that the body not be cremated; that it not be transported more than an hour's journey from the place of death to the place of burial; that the Prayer for the Dead be recited if the deceased is a Bahá'í of fifteen years of age or more; and that the funeral be carried out in a simple and dignified manner that would be a credit to the community.”

Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, National Spiritual Assembly, 1998, p. 18.1

General Information

a. At the time of learning of the passing of a member of the Bahá'í community, the family of the deceased must be contacted. On occasion, it may be that the family will contact the Bahá'í community notifying it of the passing of a member who may have been homebound for some time or hospitalized requesting information about Bahá'í funerals. The family as well as the Spiritual Assembly and/or its designated representative/s may find the check list helpful as well as becoming informed or being reminded of specific details regarding Bahá'í funerals noted below.

b. All funeral homes in Austin were sent some years ago information about the requirements of Bahá'í burial as it applied to preparation of the body i.e. no embalming, washing and wrapping the body, placing a Bahá'í burial ring on the finger, etc. However, the washing and wrapping of the body are not currently binding on the Western believers. Various funeral homes in Austin have been used for Bahá'í funerals including for grave side services.

c.. Headstones:

Mathews Memorials is a nationwide company that provides headstones. They have the letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States which provides information for appropriate designs of headstones.

d.. Ring stones:- a specially designed ring is available to place on a finger of the deceased and are available from the Spiritual Assembly of Austin.

e. Services (Prayers, etc.) Regarding the Bahá'í funeral service: "The utmost simplicity and flexibility should be observed, and a selection from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings would serve the purpose at the present time." from *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, (1998)

NOTE: Further information may be found in the foregoing reference book.

First priorities

- Establish contact with the deceased's family: Consult with them regarding relevant Bahá'í laws, the funeral arrangements, or other assistance they may require.
- Is there a will? Who is the executor? If a will exists, make provisions to have it read as soon as possible following notification of death.

Preparation of the body and burial arrangements

- Select a funeral home and review with the management the Bahá'í laws regarding preparation and burial.
- Who will prepare the body and when? What costs are associated, and who will pay?
[NOTE: The Spiritual Assembly of Austin will provide the burial ring.]
- Is a burial plot available for purchase or has one been prearranged? What costs are associated, and who will pay?

The funeral service: program content and related issues

- Will there be a funeral service at the Bahá'í Center, a funeral home, and at the grave site?
At the grave site only?
- Will a history of the deceased's life be shared? Who will prepare this? Who will deliver it at the service?
- Which Bahá'í writings will be used? In addition to the *Prayer for the Dead* (the reading of which is obligatory for believers over the age of 15), which Bahá'í prayers will be included in the program?
- Will other religious or secular writings be used?
- Will there be music? What type, who will provide it, and at what point will it occur in the program?
- Is a chairperson or master of ceremonies desired?
- Will there be ushers at the service?
- Who will be asked to serve as pallbearers?
- Will there be flowers from the sponsoring Bahá'í community or institution?
- Will specific individual(s) be asked in advance to share remembrances?
- Will spontaneous remembrances be encouraged?
- Will there be a program at the grave side?
- Will there be a guest book at the service?
- Is the proper manner for reciting the Prayer for the Dead understood? Who will read it?
[Note: a copy of the prayer for easy reading is available.]

- ___ Are there any announcements or acknowledgments that need to be made? Who will prepare and deliver them?

Funeral services: printed program

- ___ Will a history of the deceased's life be printed in the program? Who will gather the information and prepare it? What will be included (e.g., work/occupation, date of enrollment, nature of Bahá'í service, etc.)?
- ___ Will Bahá'í Writings or any other religious or secular writings be included?
- ___ Is a photo of the deceased to be included?
- ___ Who will typeset/prepare the printed text? How will it be copied?
- ___ Will a statement of thanks from the deceased's family, sponsoring institution or community be printed in the program? What will it say?
- ___ Will the readings/prayers to be used in the service be referenced in the printed program?
- ___ Will there be a reception following burial? if so, will it be announced in the program?

Miscellaneous issues

- ___ Who should be notified concerning the believer's passing, and how will this be done? Who will handle this?
- ___ Who will write the obituary and/or supply personal data to the funeral home?
- ___ Is the deceased of a stature that the Bahá'í National Center or Bahá'í World Center should be notified immediately?
- ___ Who will notify the Bahá'í National Center's department of membership and records and *The American Bahá'í* or other appropriate Bahá'í publications?
- ___ If there will be a reception following the burial, who will plan and coordinate it? Where will it be held? Will there be refreshments? How and when will this be announced? What cost is involved and who will pay?
- ___ Will there be a visitation prior to the funeral service?
- ___ Will the sponsoring institution send than-you notes to individuals who assisted in some way with the service or other aspects of the funeral arrangements? Who will coordinate this?

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[Handbook, Funerals, Rev. 02.11.27]

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