



MODULE 4	SPECIALIST FUNERAL SERVICES	UNIT 8	A FUNERAL FOR MORE THAN ONE DECEASED
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Purpose and Aim of the Unit:	The purpose of the unit is to develop learners' understanding of the additional responsibilities associated with managing a funeral for more than one deceased.
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LEARNING OUTCOMES This unit has 3 learning outcomes	
The learner will:	
1	Know how to plan for the funerals for more than one deceased
2	Understand how to prepare for a multiple funeral.
3	Know the financial implications when costing a multiple funeral.



Introduction

From time to time circumstances may arise which require us to arrange and conduct two or more funerals at one time. For example members of the same family might die in an accident, or a mother and baby may die during the birth. It is not unknown for a spouse to pass away naturally so soon after their partner that both funerals are performed together.

However arising, such funerals pose particular challenges for the funeral director. For one thing, few crematoria or cemetery chapels are designed to accommodate two (or more) coffins at one time.

There will also be issues of the documentation which may be required, decisions to be made by the family about how to effect burial if that is chosen, as well as administrative and staffing issues for the funeral director to consider.

In the following it is assumed that a double funeral is under discussion. In the case of greater numbers, the principles may be extended accordingly. As always in our profession, no two cases are ever the same.



Learning Outcome 1	Know how to plan for the funerals for more than one deceased
Learning Outcome 2	Understand how to prepare for a multiple funeral.

Issues to consider

It is worth establishing early on whether a joint funeral really is the family's wish. Although it may seem to be the obvious step, it is not necessarily the best option, especially if one party had expressed a wish for cremation and the other for burial. It may even be that the two parties come from different faith positions. Some clergy and non-religious officiants are content to celebrate jointly with other faiths, whilst others are not.

Something else to bear in mind, is that though from the funeral director's point of view one funeral may be taking place, it is likely that the two or more deceased persons, whilst having mourners in common, they will also have their own wider and distinct groups of mourners. This is going to result in an excess of, for example, floral tributes and donations. Consequently carefully monitored procedures must be in place for keeping track of these, especially where a single surname is in use.

More than ever, the funeral director must be adaptable in this situation, and this is where their role as advisor comes to the fore, without trying to apply a dogmatic, traditional approach.



Practical matters: Cremation

One of the myths of cremation is that it is illegal to cremate more than one body at one time but this is not the case. Indeed, crematoria routinely carry out multiple cremations for fetuses under hospital contract funerals. The fact that multiple adult cremations do not take place is merely a matter of practicality and convention, albeit a convention that only a brave crematorium manager would flout.

The most likely request for a multiple cremation is that of a mother and baby, or parent and child. The practical issue here is an obvious one: space. However if it is possible to use one coffin the funeral director is likely to find that the cremation authority will be sympathetic as the cremation of two parties in one coffin is more likely to be possible than the cremation of two coffins in one chamber. In either event, the applicant should be made aware that joint cremation will result in mixed ashes. However there will come a time when it is impractical to use a single coffin due to the required size and consequent weight which would make it too large for the cremation chamber.

The cremation authority will require separate sets of forms for each deceased party and possibly also a separate, non-statutory, application or letter requesting joint cremation. Two cremation numbers will be issued but because the ashes will be mingled and the certificate is non-statutory there may only be one ashes certificate.

In the case of separate coffins it will be necessary to determine their placement in the crematorium chapel. A catafalque usually, although not always, occupies a central position and may only be suitable for one coffin, however if it is of a suitable width then perhaps both coffins may be placed side by side. It may be that the catafalque is removable thus allowing the coffins to be placed side by side on either trestles or wheeled biers of equal height.



If the catafalque is not movable then one coffin might be placed on trestles before the catafalque in the line of stride but this in all probability will preclude a curtain committal. An alternative which does require very careful management is perhaps to have the coffins in a separate location to the catafalque but still within the chapel, and then to commit each coffin separately. This might be with two or more curtain committals or, in the case of a crematorium with a moving coffin committal, using that facility in sequence. It is clear that this may be a time-consuming exercise, and may have significant emotional implications.

Some crematoria will allow the booking of a double slot and consideration should be given to the necessity of this in consultation with both the family and the Officiant. However, if this facility is not available or permitted at the chosen crematorium then it may be necessary to look for an alternative venue.

Where cremation takes place separately the ashes will of course be returned separately (if requested). If they are subsequently to be buried a special casket may be supplied to contain both sets of cremated remains, whether mingled or partitioned. There is something to be said, if space permits, for burying separate caskets adjacent, rather than one above the other.

Practical matters: Burial

Interpretation of the law on burial has varied with regard to multiple burials. The point of contention is what, if anything, should separate the coffins buried one atop the other. Precise reading of the law suggests that the requirement for a 6" separation of earth applies when a grave is reopened for a later burial, not when two burials take place at one time.

The guidance of the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management, following consultation with the Ministry of Justice, is that although separation of the coffins should be achieved this need not necessarily be of earth. There is a tradition in some areas of the use of coffin boards - padded boards laid on top of the first coffin onto which the next coffin is



placed. Another possibility is the placing of battens across the first coffin to support the second. When deciding how best to proceed on this matter the funeral director should consider:-

- the requirements of the cemetery authority concerned, which may make the whole discussion moot
- the wishes of the family
- practicality
- aesthetics

The problem with a partial backfill is that it is messy and time-consuming. There is also an emotional impact on the family and mourners of either having to watch the process or be ushered away somewhere (even supposing there is anywhere for them to go, which in a small cemetery there may not be) and come back again.

Coffin boards are neater and more attractive although they may impede coverage of earth to the first coffin, resulting in sudden and significant settlement at a later time. A coffin board may also be lowered with dignity by a team of bearers. Battens are less attractive and less easy to place, but do make it more likely that the backfill will properly enclose both coffins.

If burial is taking place into separate graves the officiant may deliver a single committal and simultaneous lowering will be possible. Alternatively the officiant may proceed from one grave to the next. From the funeral director's point of view the same protocol for carrying out the burial (eg use of trestles, putlogs, direct lowering) which will naturally vary according to the individual and local practice, should be followed for each coffin and bearer party.



Generic issues

Vehicles & Bearers

A matching fleet of vehicles is always preferred, as aesthetically the two hearses will look better one following the other, with the limousines then following behind. As with many matters relating to this sort of arrangement, however, the family should be consulted as to their preferences. Distinct mourner groups might wish to follow each hearse directly in their limousines, possibly even from separate or sequenced pickup points. In any event, each coffin should be accompanied by a funeral director, with a separate funeral director overseeing the whole. Similarly, each coffin should have its own bearer party with funeral director attending.

Elegance suggests that the bearer parties remove, shoulder and turn in concert although, as before, the families should be consulted for their view.

Tradition holds that in death, as in life, a woman should precede a man. It may well be that this is the family's wish. However it is worth asking the family in what order the deceased parties should proceed in cortege, and indeed into the chapel or other venue and at burial. No assumption of protocol should be made as the family may have their own view.

Mourners

The number of mourners will inevitably be higher than for a single funeral. Depending on how entry to the venue is being managed it will be worth trying to establish the number who will follow the bearer parties to ensure that sufficient seating is available for them. Where the mourner parties are distinct their seating positions should, if possible, be in relation to the positioning of the coffins. The coffins, in addition to the usual breastplate, could also bear a plate at the head end, visible to the mourner parties.



Where burial is taking place into separate graves this positioning of mourner parties should also be observed.

It is possible that the volume of mourners will exceed the capacity of an available venue. This may be overcome both by webcasting the ceremony and relaying it live to a supplementary venue.

Flowers & Commemoration

The risk of confusion with flowers is high so florists and families, if flowers are coming via them, should be asked to ensure that all flowers are carefully labelled with the full name of the deceased. It may be worthwhile restricting the number of flowers accompanying each coffin and having others travel separately to a display location.

Given that a double or multiple funeral is in hand the circumstances are likely to be more than usually tragic. In these situations the funeral director should be prepared for additional publicity and the use of new media to discuss and publicise the event. Notices in newspapers and the funeral director's own website may carry links to websites such as Facebook and Twitter where online commemoration is taking place. The funeral director's own website may itself carry the facility for online commemoration and the recording of tributes and condolences.



Learning Outcome 3**Know the financial implications when costing a multiple funeral.***Costs*

Third parties involved in multiple funerals may give special consideration to the cost for their services when two funerals are taking place at one time.

It is not unreasonable that this courtesy should extend to the funeral director. While all NAFD members should publish openly the cost of their services, a multiple funeral draws additionally on the funeral director's time and effort in some quarters, while combining her services with others, not least in the carrying out of the funeral itself.

It is most important that the client should be fully informed in good time of the cost of a multiple funeral. Ideally one person only should receive the account, but it may be that the circumstances require the funeral director to present separate accounts to more than one party for a single funeral ceremony. If this happens the division of costs should be very carefully set out and agreed in advance in writing with all parties.



Proof of Learning – Assessment Criteria

Unit 8	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
	The learner can:
4.8.1	Describe the planning required for the funerals of more than one deceased.
4.8.2a	Explain the following for a multiple funeral: a) the documentation required;
4.8.2b	b) the procedures to follow;
4.8.2c	c) any additional resources required.
4.8.3	Identify the financial implications when costing a multiple funeral.