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## If We Consider Flowers Impractical, What Are We Saying?

by Terry Henriksen

We have all heard this phrase—in fact, maybe we have even promoted it. After all hauling flowers from funeral home to church to nursing home and hospital (especially in the winter) isn't a lot of fun. A short time ago, a dear friend and neighbor from my farm days was gravely ill. My mother and I went to see her the day before she died and on the way out the door my mother said "I think I'll give a memorial to hospice." The following day, we were notified that Ruth had died. I told mom that we would send flowers because Ruth loved flowers so much. Her yard was full of flowers and she spent a great deal of time tending the gardens. My mother started to cry and said yes, we should send flowers but she didn't we were supposed to because they are so impractical.

I told mom that we don't always have to be practical and this is one of those times. We did order flowers and we did feel good about it. Although there were a good number of floral tributes at her funeral, we saw ours and the family certainly knew it was there. It made us feel better to give such a personal gift.

Is there a point to this story? I think there is. If we discourage the gift of flowers for funeral because we consider them impractical, what are we saying? Are we telling people that funerals should be practical? If we are, perhaps we could analyze what is practical about a funeral in the first place. Basically, the only practical part of the funeral is disposing of the body. If the act of memorializing the deceased should be practical, then it follows that just disposing of the body in the cheapest, easiest way, would be the thing to do.

We are funeral directors and most of us would be surprised what our client families expect from us. The expectations and for the most part are unaware of what is "appropriate" and what is "customary". Even those who turn away from "traditional" appreciate our expertise and knowledge and might benefit from our experience.

Think positively about what is meaningful and you do it for the families you serve. Funeral service is just what the name implies—service! The more we cut out to save ourselves time and energy, the less families will come to expect. You know the rest of the story. Instead of making subtle (or not so subtle) comments about floral tributes, make a positive statement. Flowers, like music, the eulogy, the nice casket or urn, the personalized memorial folders and register book all make the funeral meaningful to the survivors and friends. Think of a nice way to stress the importance of allowing friends to give of themselves in a way important to them rather than tell people to skip the flowers and send memorials.

I feel we need to get back to some basics. The very oldest funerary evidence shows traces of floral tributes buried with the bodies. It was a kind and gentle offering then. Perhaps it is just as important today.

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