

# Diocese of Wakefield

## Funeral arrangements

Dear colleague,

### **A letter to all stipendiary and self-supporting parish clergy - funeral arrangements**

Please find attached a copy of a letter that is being sent to all retired clergy about arrangements for funerals. That letter follows conversations between funeral directors and some Rural Deans about the various opportunities and difficulties experienced by those involved in making arrangements for funerals.

A number of issues were mentioned:

- At present there is little clear guidance about the process for making funeral arrangements.
- Some parish clergy are not easily contactable and some parish clergy seem reluctant to accept responsibility for funerals.
- Some retired clergy (not all of them Anglican) are taking a disproportionate number of funerals and some retired clergy are taking funerals without reference to parish clergy and follow-up offered by parishes.

We are writing this letter with the full support of the Bishop. It is a reminder that:

- Funeral ministry and care is an important aspect of parochial ministry. It is part of the general responsibility that we take on as parish priests.
- The normal and regular process for arranging a funeral, where Anglican ministry is requested, is for the undertaker to contact parish clergy.
- It is the responsibility of parish clergy to be **easily contactable** (or make arrangements for someone else to be easily contactable).
- It is the normal responsibility of parish clergy to **accept a funeral** and take details, whether they can take the service or not.
- If they cannot take it themselves the parish priest, not the undertaker, is responsible for **arranging a minister** for the service.

The only normal variation to this pattern will be where clergy in a cluster, Team or Group agree to accept and cover each other's funerals and form a network for mutual support in covering funerals. They should inform local undertakers that if a particular parish priest cannot be contacted then one of the others in the Group or cluster may be contacted and they will take details and arrange the funeral. Where there are retired or SSM priests or Readers who are part of a parish or cluster they may also be included in the above mutual support network for covering funerals.

In other words undertakers will know that (a) there is an accessible point(s) of contact for each parish for the purpose of arranging funerals and (b) - if this has been organised locally - they have a list of alternative contacts who are in a network of mutual support. If a parish is not part of a funeral support network then priests may find it helpful to contact their Rural Dean who may be able to suggest retired and SSM clergy who can be contacted if a priest is not able to cover a particular funeral.

Funeral directors will be asked to adopt and work with this pattern for arranging funerals. They will also be asked to build into their planning greater flexibility about when (and where) a funeral will take place. For example they should check parish clergy availability *before* making a booking at the crematorium so that clergy are not faced with a *fait accompli*.

The above pattern means that funeral directors should not normally be contacting retired clergy directly unless that retired clergy person is part of a support network. Parish clergy will take responsibility for 'their' funerals and make arrangements with retired or assistant clergy or Readers. We are asking retired clergy that on every occasion they take a funeral they pass on to parish clergy a brief report, including anything they feel is relevant to help good follow-up.

Rural Deans have been asked to keep an eye on funeral ministry within their Deanery and give support or guidance where problems may arise. Letters will be sent in August to all funeral directors and undertakers to inform them about this pattern and to clarify what we hope is a good and pastoral way of working together in arranging funerals.

In writing this letter we are aware that any attempt to give guidance about funerals will raise 1001 issues. We recognise that clergy, parishes, funeral directors and others involved in funerals are all different and therefore there can be no 'blueprint' for funerals. However to offer no framework or guidance gives no reference points for an area of ministry where there is sometimes confusion or frustration. We hope you will see this letter as giving a helpful steer to all involved, and that by establishing a baseline for funeral arrangements it will strengthen the good things already being done.

With all good wishes and many thanks for your ministry and care in these areas.

Archdeacon of Halifax

Archdeacon of Pontefract

July 2009