

R. Bryant Hightower Jr., CFSP, NFDA President Recommendations for Safe Funeral Gatherings During Pandemic

Brookfield, Wis. – The importance of having a funeral to honor the deceased and giving loved ones an opportunity to celebrate that life and begin to grieve is unquestioned. While the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) is deeply committed to promoting the value of a funeral, the unprecedented novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic requires the funeral profession to balance its long-held values with the need to: flatten the curve of the pandemic; protect the health of attendees, funeral home staff and clergy/celebrant; and reduce the potential for community spread and mass-fatalities.

Therefore, the association recommends that funeral homes limit the size of services to no more than 10 of the decedent's next-of-kin until further notice.

Issuing this recommendation is a serious step – one NFDA leaders never imagined taking. However, in light of the rising rate of infection and increasing deaths, it is a step they felt was necessary to prevent community spread of and deaths due to COVID-19.

NFDA recognizes this limit will be very difficult for families who are grieving the death of a loved one, but asks for their understanding during this challenging time. Funeral directors will continue to do all they can to help families understand the options they have for commemorating the life of a loved one in a manner that is safe for everyone involved.

This guidance is based on “The President’s Coronavirus Guidelines for America” developed to slow the spread of COVID-19. NFDA urges funeral directors to follow these recommendations for the safety of their funeral home’s staff and the families and community they serve. NFDA will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as necessary.

NFDA’s Specific Recommendations

Unless a state’s guidelines are more restrictive, NFDA strongly recommends that, until further notice, funerals be limited to no more than 10 of the decedent’s next-of-kin; this does not include funeral home staff, the clergy/celebrant or cemetery staff.

NFDA also recommends services be held at the gravesite whenever possible; however, the nature of the disposition, such as cremation, may mean a service in the funeral home is more appropriate. Funeral homes should also encourage attendees to follow current social distancing guidelines by setting up seating accordingly.

NFDA encourages funeral homes to discuss federal, state and local mandates and recommendations – as well as guidelines issued by local cemeteries – with families as they are planning services.

To keep families and funeral home staff safe, NFDA has shared recommendations with funeral homes about how technology, such as video conferencing, can be used for making funeral arrangements in lieu of an in-person arrangement conference. Tools such as webcasting or livestreaming can be used to broadcast funeral or memorial services to family and friends who are unable to attend a service.

NFDA is the world’s leading and largest funeral service association, serving more than 20,000 individual members who represent nearly 11,000 funeral homes in the United States and 49 countries around the world. NFDA is the trusted leader, beacon for ethics and the strongest advocate for the profession. NFDA is the association of choice because it offers funeral professionals comprehensive educational resources, tools to manage successful businesses, guidance to become pillars in their communities and the expertise to foster future generations of funeral professionals. NFDA is headquartered in Brookfield, Wis., and has an office in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit www.nfda.org.