

Common Sense Funeral Economics

By Todd Van Beck

I have been annoyed for years by the people who rant and rave about the cost of funerals. I call the ranting and ravings “myths” and in this article I would like to offer some practical realities concerning an analysis of funeral costs.

It is not necessary to cover the exaggerations of the anti-funeral people – their war cry is always the same and I suspect their verbosity will have no end.

This article is going to be short. The readers are thinking privately and possibly out loud, “Thank God Above, Glory Halleluiah, this time Todd will be short – it is a miracle.” I totally understand, you ought to try living with me day-to-day.

Here are the myths:

MYTH NUMBER 1: “Funerals are too expensive!”

Here are the facts:

- It takes 136 individual separate steps and services to complete one average adult funeral.
- The average funeral in 2008 was \$6,500.
- Basic cost analysis: For each and every service the funeral provides, based on the \$6,500 overall cost, each service to the client comes out to be: \$48 per service.

MYTH NUMBER 2: “A funeral is the third greatest expense in life after buying a house or car.”

Here are the facts:

- Ask anybody this question: “Have you ever remodeled your bathroom?”
- Ask anybody this question: “Do you have children in college?”
- Ask anybody this question: “Have you ever improved your kitchen?”
- Ask anybody this question: “Did you have to pay for your daughter’s wedding?” (This question I find particularly sobering when viewed in light of the fact that the divorce rate in the United States is 52%. One would have better chances of success in Vegas.)

MYTH NUMBER 3: “Funerals are just too expensive – period.”

Here are the facts:

- The average funeral in America costs roughly \$6,500.

- The average American (this does not include untimely or “young deaths”) lives an average of 75 years.
- Living 75 years equates into living 27,375 days.
- This means that the average 75 year old whose funeral costs \$6,500 has spent: 4.2 cents. For everyday of their life, for their own funeral.

MYTH NUMBER 4: “If we keep burying people at this rate the entire United States will become a cemetery.”

Here are the facts:

- The world’s population is approximately 5 billion people.
- One thousand people can be buried on one acre of land, each in a single grave space.
- If everyone across the globe died at the exact same moment the entire world’s population could be buried on: 7,812.50 square miles of land. 7,812.50 square miles of land is an area which is just a little smaller than the State of Massachusetts (8,257 square miles) and about six times larger than the State of Rhode Island (1,214 square miles) or about the size of Prince Edward Island in Canada.

MYTH NUMBER 5: “Wow, caskets are really expensive.”

Here are the facts:

- When President Abraham Lincoln died in 1865 his casket cost an even \$1,500. It was made of solid walnut, lead lined, cloth covered and was one of the finest burial receptacles made.
- What would this casket cost today, calculating a mere 5% inflation, which equates to 1.05 increases annually on \$1,500 over the last 144 years?
- The Lincoln casket today would sell for, if the casket price kept up with the economy over the last 144 years, the astounding fee of: \$2,480,625.
- There you have it – funeral demythologization in a nut shell. So next time you are at a cocktail party and some obnoxious, self-appointed, funeral service “reformer” starts that ancient babbling and rambling of the Jessica Mitford’s of the world (and remember my friends they are still out there), just pull up some of this stuff and you will stop the funeral service “reformers,” the funeral service critics, in their tracks. Also, it feels good to share this stuff.

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