

Background Information

Over 125 nonprofit memorial and funeral societies are operating in the U.S. and Canada, with the first urban one established in the late 1930s. They promote a consumer's right to choose a dignified, meaningful, and affordable funeral. They encourage people to accept the reality of death and plan for it.

In addition, many groups are active in monitoring the funeral industry in their states for the benefit of the public at large. Some members serve as the consumer representative on the state funeral board; others are involved in promoting consumer-oriented funeral legislation.

Because the funeral industry is now promoting for-profit "cremation societies," many of our affiliates are changing their names to "Funeral Consumers Alliance."

Gather Information

- Join Friends of FCA, \$25. You'll get the *FCA Newsletter*, to stay abreast of industry and member news.
- Do some reading. See the back panel for materials available from the national office. Check your library for additional books— especially those by Jessica Mitford, Leroy Bowman, and Ruth Harmer Carew.
- Talk or correspond with a nearby affiliate to decide whether to start a new society or a branch, and to learn of state laws and feasible modes of operation.
- Contact the consumer representative on the state funeral board (if there is one) to determine areas of consumer concern or needs.
- Purchase the *Guidebook for Running a Funeral Consumers Alliance* (\$10 includes shipping).
- Attend the biennial conference of affiliates held in even years.

Find a Nucleus of People

Three to eight people are a good beginning, especially if they are interested and eager to help. You may find them in related professions such as ministers or teachers, or in interest groups such as religious congregations, co-ops, Hospice, and senior citizen organizations.

Seek the support of at least one organization. It may be able to provide assistance with meeting rooms, photocopying, publicity, etc. Unitarian and Quaker groups have been particularly helpful in many cities. Or perhaps there's a Senior Center or Agency on Aging that would help.

The First Steps

Use the *Guidebook* to:

- Set up a steering committee.
- Select an appropriate name.
- Decide on the geographic area to be served.
- Identify the benefits that you will offer members in your area. It might include one-stop price shopping, or a discount on funeral-planning publications. ***A clear list of benefits is critical to attracting membership.***
- Design a membership brochure and, after approval by the Steering Committee, have a modest quantity printed. (See *Guidebook*.)
- Collect the general price lists from the funeral homes in your service area. Identify those with the most reasonable costs and pay a visit to discuss your new organization, if this was not done when picking up the price lists. (It is unlikely that a discount for members can be negotiated in the beginning stages.)
- Decide how you will evaluate, on an ongoing basis, any mortuary to which you might refer people. This will be critical to protecting the integrity of your work.

- Decide on a membership contribution (or range of contributions). Experience has shown that a one-time membership fee will not maintain the organization over an average 15-17 years of membership. Annual solicitation for voluntary dues or contributions is strongly recommended. Because affiliates need both money and volunteers, you might want to consider a two-tiered membership: one option could be \$15 plus annual volunteer credit, and the other \$30 plus dues.
- Draft by-laws (See the *Guidebook*).
- Present your plans to as many church and professional groups as you can and seek endorsements.

Plan a Public Meeting

Publicize the meeting through the interest groups you have identified and through the media: newspapers, radio, and TV. Prepare a news release with some human-interest feature, if possible. Sometimes a speaker is available from the national office to help you garner attention. Suggested titles for a public talk include "Can You Afford to Die?" and "The Changing Funeral Industry." Don't neglect the many free public announcements available in the media to note the time and date of your meeting.

After any beginning talk:

- Introduce the Steering Committee, any sponsors, and your attorney, if you have one. Stress their areas of expertise.
- Present your plans and benefits of membership.
- Recruit new volunteers
- Enroll members and collect fees.
- Set a date for the next steering committee meeting. The affiliates with the greatest growth schedule monthly or bimonthly meetings.

- Set a date for an annual membership meeting. At that one you will want to adopt by-laws and officially elect Board members.

Complete the Basic Organization

- Prepare incorporation papers. You should be able to find a lawyer who will do this *pro bono*. Have the attorney complete the incorporation procedure.
- Establish a mail address. A post office box is sufficient and may accommodate any future change in officers.
- Make arrangements for telephone contact. If your area of anticipated service is wide, you may want to consider a toll-free number. The cost for 800 (or 888) service has dropped in recent years. This can be added to any existing number, and, with call-forwarding, it should not be difficult to staff the phone with volunteers at home.
- Decide on forms and brochures for your publicity and membership. You may design your own or take advantage of those available through the national office.
- Set up procedures for handling memberships, record-keeping, and finances.
- Apply for membership in FCA. A two-year grace period is permitted while you are starting up before your obligation to support the national office begins.

The following pamphlets will be helpful and are sent as a benefit of your *Friends of FCA* membership. Be sure to ask for a directory of our affiliates.

- *Cremation Explained*
- *Death Away from Home*
- *Did You Forget?*
- *Earth Burial: A Tradition in Simplicity*
- *Environmentally friendly Death and*

Funeral Choices

- *Four Step Funeral Planning*
- *How to Help Grieving People*
- *How to Read a General Price List*
- *Light, Like the Sun—an essay on cremation*
- *No One Wants to Talk about Death*
- *Organ & Body Donation: A Gift to Science*
- *Prepaying Your Funeral: Benefits & Dangers*
- *Simple & Cheap, My Father Said—daughter of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black*
- *Ten Tips for Saving Funeral Dollars*
- *Veterans Funeral & Burial Benefits*
- *Viewing & Visitation: The Difference*
- *What Shall We Do with the Ashes?*
- *What You Should Know about Embalming*

Books

Books may be ordered at www.funerals.org, or by mail. Remember, if you are a member of *Friends of FCA*, you are entitled to a discount.

Dealing Creatively With Death: A Manual of Death Education and Simple Burial by Ernest Morgan, 14th ed., 160 pages, \$17.00.

Guidebook for Running A Funeral Consumers Alliance. Free to Friends of FCA. Gives detailed information.

Starting A Funeral Consumers Alliance

You Can Do It!



Funeral Consumers Alliance™
33 Patchen Road
South Burlington, VT 05403
802-865-8300

www.funerals.org