



First, be aware that you or your family will be responsible for paying the funeral bill. No charity will bail you out if you go into debt for a funeral. Take a realistic look at your budget, *before* calling a funeral home. Decide what you can comfortably afford—without sacrificing money you need for daily living. Keep that amount in mind as you make the arrangements.

Choose an affordable plan

A “typical” funeral can cost \$8,000 to \$10,000 or more; some families spend tens of thousands of dollars. But a heartfelt, meaningful memorial need not bankrupt your family if you make economical choices. Consider these affordable options:

■ **Direct cremation.** The body is cremated shortly after death, without embalming, viewing or visitation. Often an inexpensive alternative container is used, rather than a casket. The ashes may be kept, buried or scattered, eliminating the need for an expensive burial vault or full-size plot. The cost could be as low as \$1,200.

■ **Direct (immediate) burial.** By eliminating embalming, viewing, and visitation, the family can save thousands of dollars over a full-service funeral. Using an alternative container or plain casket can save thousands more. The burial vault, cemetery plot, and interment fees would be the most expensive component; expect to spend \$3,000 or more.

■ **Whole body donation.** Donating your body to the UR Medical Center for educational purposes is often free, or involves a small charge to transport the body, if death occurs in a place other than a hospital or nursing home or outside Monroe County. The

donor must complete the necessary paperwork ahead of time; the family cannot do so after death. Some medical conditions could disqualify a donor, be sure to check. Cremated remains are usually returned to the family about two years later. For more information, see our brochure, “Body, Organ, and Brain Donation.”

■ **Home funeral.** In New York State, only a licensed funeral director may transport the body and fill out necessary paperwork. But the family can still wash and dress the body and hold a private vigil at home, before the body is taken to the cemetery or crematory. The cost for this type of funeral would be minimal, and many find this a meaningful way to say goodbye to a loved one.

Comparison shop

Prices can vary dramatically among funeral homes for the very same items and services. Spending some time comparing prices could save you thousands of dollars. Visit our website, www.fcagr.com, to look at our most recent price surveys of funeral homes in Monroe and surrounding counties. Check for an affordable provider for your chosen arrangement. If you don’t have access to the internet, you can call our phone hotline at 585-461-1620, and a volunteer will be happy to assist you.

Set aside resources

If you can, set aside money for your own funeral ahead of time, and spare your grieving family the need to make financial sacrifices after your death.

■ **Savings.** By saving even a few dollars a week, you can accumulate a nice sum to cover your final arrangements. Upon your death, however, the funds will be held up for months while your Will is probated.

Your family could ask if the funeral home is willing to defer some of their charges until probate is completed. To avoid such delay, you could set up a joint account with a trusted family member “with rights of survivorship.” That person can withdraw the money after your death to pay for your arrangements.

■ **Payable on death account.** This special type of bank account, also called a POD account or Totten trust, ensures that the funds you set aside for your funeral will be released immediately after your death to the beneficiary you name, without the delay of probate. Unlike with a joint account, the beneficiary cannot touch the money while you are alive. These accounts are FDIC-insured, and you can withdraw money at any time.

■ **Insurance.** Insurance money will be disbursed soon after your death, avoiding the probate process. *Life insurance* provides a lump-sum amount to your designated beneficiaries after your death. It is meant to cover the general financial needs of the survivors.

We *don’t* recommend buying the following kinds of insurance, as you usually pay as much, *or more*, in premiums than the policy will pay out. *Burial insurance* is a life insurance policy intended to cover death-related expenses; in some states it can be sold by funeral homes. *Pre-need insurance* is a whole-life policy covering the predetermined cost of a funeral, and is sold by the funeral provider.

■ **Prepaying at funeral home.** When you prepay the cost of your funeral, the funeral director places the money into an interest-bearing trust account, and serves as the trustee. After your death, the funds are paid directly to the funeral provider acting as trustee. An *irrevocable trust* can’t be changed or dis-



solved without the permission of the trustee, though you can usually name a new trustee or funeral home if you change your mind or move. A **revocable trust** can be cashed out or cancelled at any time. We don't recommend prepaying a funeral, except in certain circumstances, such as qualifying for Medicaid. See our brochure, "Should You Prepay Your Funeral?" for more details.

Pay directly

Most families will use cash, check or credit card to pay for all or part of the funeral expenses. Most funeral homes today expect payment in full up front. Sometimes you can pay a portion using an installment plan negotiated with the funeral home. But do not disclose your finances or budget to the funeral director, and don't be coerced into purchasing products and services you don't need or want.

Get help

■ **Employer.** Some companies have survivor benefits available for the family of the deceased. Also, some unions may offer benefits to help cover or defray funeral costs.

■ **Veterans' benefits.** Most veterans are entitled to burial in a national VA cemetery, with no charge for the gravesite, headstone, vault and interment. Survivors of eligible veterans can receive a burial allowance to reimburse them for some burial, funeral and transportation costs; these benefits apply to all legal arrangements, including cremation, burial at sea, and body donation. Veterans' spouses and dependents are also entitled to some burial benefits. For more information, see our brochure "Veterans' Funeral and Burial Benefits" on our website, fcagr.com.

■ **Victims' assistance.** New York State Office of Victim Services provides financial relief to crime victims and their families, paying up to \$12,000 for the funeral of a homicide victim, as well as other compensation benefits.

■ **Other government agencies.** Surviving spouses of Social Security recipients can receive a lump-sum death payment of \$255.

In addition, families who cannot pay for a funeral may be eligible to receive a funeral assistance grant of up to \$2,500 from the Temporary Assistance program of the Monroe County Department of Human Services. The family should contact the Burial Assistance Coordinator at 585-232-3386 to schedule an appointment, and must bring financial information to verify need. Benefits in other counties will vary.

■ **Fund-raising.** Churches, businesses, clubs, and other groups sometimes help raise money to defray the costs for funerals for those in need. In some communities it is customary to hold special events, car washes or bake sales to help families with these expenses. You could also try crowd-funding websites like GoFundMe and Indiegogo, which allow individuals to set up pages to request donations.

■ **Borrowing.** Most ordinary lenders are reluctant to finance funerals. But some special loan companies offer their services online or through funeral homes. If your credit is good, you can borrow up to \$50,000 with interest rates of about 15%. But borrowing money to pay for funeral costs should be a last resort only, when **ALL** other avenues are exhausted. **No one should go into debt to bury or cremate a loved one.**



How to Pay for a Funeral Or Other Final Arrangements

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Rochester

*Dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose
a meaningful, dignified, and affordable funeral*