

HUMANIST FUNERALS

'How shall we bury you?' said Crito.

'Any way you like,' replied Socrates.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates' reply draws attention to a feeling shared by many humanists: that a funeral should be for the living, not for the dead. We may have wishes about what happens to our body once we are gone. However, for many humanists, the main purpose of a funeral is to provide an opportunity for the family and friends of the deceased to grieve, to share memories, and to celebrate the life of the person who has died.



Humanists do not believe in an afterlife. Many therefore feel that the words and sentiment at a religious funeral would be inappropriate for

them. A humanist ceremony is conducted by a **humanist celebrant** and there will often be music and readings chosen by the deceased or by family and friends. Sharing stories about the deceased can support the grieving process and help people to remember them. Rather than prayers, there will often be time for reflection.

“We recognise that this is the end of a life, the person is dead and we are saying goodbye to them, at the same time as celebrating the fact that this person lived, that they created so many profound relationships, so many memories. They have a profound legacy that they're leaving in the children that they created, in works they've left behind. When we commit somebody within a humanist funeral ceremony, we're not committing them to god, we are committing them to the hearts and minds and memories of those people who loved them and whose lives they impacted, and whose lives they will continue to impact. For us, in a sense, that's the afterlife.”

ISABEL, humanist celebrant

Connections are important to many humanists. Joy and meaning can be found in recognising the impact someone has had on our lives and on the world around them – an impact that can live on. A humanist funeral can also act as a reminder to those gathered that, while we are alive, we should make the most of our time in the here and now.



“We are beings who are connected and through the funeral we're able to bring those connections together and allow people to see not just an opportunity to release grief, which will happen in many cases, but more frequently for people to actually see joy in the fact that somebody has been part of their life and has changed their life indelibly.”

SIMON, humanist celebrant

Humanists UK has been conducting funerals since 1896 and humanist funerals are becoming increasingly popular (there were over 8,000 in the UK in 2019). The humanist approach is also beginning to influence other types of funerals.



QUESTIONS

- What comfort can be found following the death of a loved one for those who do not believe in an afterlife?
- What words and sentiments do you think you might find in a eulogy at a humanist funeral?