

Funeral Conciliation Case Studies Bulletin Two: 8th October 2007

Case Study One:

C complained that:

- She hadn't been given adequate information about where her mother's body was so she could not view in time;
- The arrangements for cards with the floral tribute had been unclear;
- F had not taken into account the difficulties of communication between mourners because of family disagreements;
- F had failed to give detailed instructions on the procession into the crematorium, resulting in the coffin entering and proceeding down the church unaccompanied, and
- F had not produced order of service sheets due to a misunderstanding.

F agreed that there may have been failures to adhere to procedures. F apologized and agreed to set out procedures earlier in the discussions with clients and amend those procedures relevant to C's concerns. C was happy that this would reduce the risk of similar problems occurring with other customers.

Case Study Two:

C complained that:

- F had failed to carry out hygienic treatment properly and had placed his father in a coffin that was too small, resulting in his father's body appearing cramped;
- F had removed his father's shoes and his clothing had been cut to fit into the coffin, with his head touching the top; and
- F had not entered the newspaper announcement on time so well wishers did not know about the funeral.

On raising these complaints with F, C complained that his complaints had not been addressed and when they were, his address had been wrong on four separate occasions. This indicated a general "not bothered" approach on the part of F.

F agreed with C's concerns, apologised and waived the charges for the professional fees and the coffin. C paid the outstanding balance.

Case Study Three:

C claimed that F had misrepresented the charges payable. He stated that at the meeting with F, he had been told the charges for the funeral were in full, with no additional costs. This had then been settled in full by C. The original estimate had included wording on removal of the headstone. C believed the fee he paid included cleaning and re-gilding of the headstone, with a new inscription. He was very unhappy to receive subsequent documentation about charges for cleaning, re-gilding and inscription. He believed this was a further demand for payment, contradicting the statement that there were no further costs.

F commented that the documentation stated very clearly and prominently on the first line that it was an estimate for cleaning, re-gilding and inscription. It said C was under no obligation to take such monumental masonry services and that it would be happy to replace the headstone or

arrange for it to be transferred to an alternative monumental mason. C was not satisfied and withdrew from the conciliation process.

Case Study Four:

C complained that her mother's ashes had been scattered after the cremation instead of being buried. She was particularly upset that F claimed the crematorium had got the paperwork wrong even though the documentation demonstrated this was not the case. F showed blatant disregard for the family by failing to communicate the error sensitively. C felt she had suffered anguish and distress and F did not provide any support in the family's time of bereavement. The solution that a photo of her mother be buried as an alternative went some way to recognise her distress but was in no way a substitute.

F acknowledged their mistake and apologized to C. C and F reached agreement over the level of fees to be paid.

Case Study Five:

C complained F delayed in collecting her mother's body from the house and caused serious distress to the family. The arrangements for the funeral were rushed and F demanded all fees up front without any explanation of the various payment options. F took cash and then failed to provide a receipt. F subsequently returned saying original quote was inaccurate and the costs were much higher and that further payment was required immediately. Charges for the catering arrangements were not as stated on the price list and when the catering arrived, it was wholly inadequate and did not match the description originally provided. F failed to arrive at the cemetery so C had to bury the ashes herself, with her family. C paid for a plaque but this did not arrive when expected and C had to chase for a further 3 months before it arrived.

F said that there had been an earlier request to attend and traffic jams, causing lateness. F indicated it had been trying to close its accounts for the month so had asked for cash up front, but because F received the cash rather than the accounts clerk, receipts could only be provided the following week when the clerk returned. F said it had used the wrong catering price list and agreed to refund the catering fee. F indicated it had failed to schedule the funeral in the diary so no-one was available to intern the ashes. F explained there had been some delays in passing documentation to the monumental mason so completion of the plaque did take longer than had originally been expected.

The case settled with F providing a discount on the funeral fee and passing C's concerns to the national team to ensure complaints raised about procedures were addressed through national process improvements.

Case Study Six:

C raised issues about a complete failure of F to carry out hygienic treatment, resulting in a terrible odour and stained clothing. The body was returned to the family on the day of the funeral to carry out a traditional Asian funeral, but C suffered distress when the coffin was opened to allow mourners to view because the decay was obvious and the odour was very strong and unpleasant. C raised his concerns with F but F was in too much of a hurry and appeared to take no corrective action.

F acknowledged the presentation of the deceased could have been improved and the way the complaints had been addressed was unsatisfactory. F acknowledged their mistake and apologised to C. C and F reached agreement over the level of fees to be paid.