

CREMATION BEST PRACTICES & CONSUMER OPTIONS

This year Lynch & Sons Funeral Directors in Milford and Brighton took the decision to address the single largest change in funeral and mortuary custom of the past half century -- the increased acceptance and selection of cremation as final disposition of our dead.

From our experience, the problem arises not from the practice of cremation but from seeing cremation not as an alternative to burial but as an alternative to both -- as an alternative to a funeral. Both the public at large and many funeral directors make this miscalculation and too often those who elect cremation are not properly advised about the options or best practices related to cremation.

As in years past, our firm has endeavored to reframe the conversation and reeducate the public both at the local and the national level. To accomplish the former, we conducted workshops in our local library, wrote articles for our local newspaper and served on and published the findings of a local community task force on cremation practices.

We also reconfigured our website to place the a CREMATION BEST PRACTICES AND CONSUMER OPTIONS prompt front and center on our home page. This linked to a series of essays and articles which outlined our firms protocols, prices, service options and alternatives all related to cremation.

At the beginning of the year we wrote and published in the local paper an article which highlighted the fact that for the first time ever, our local cremation rate had gone over 50%. The same article was linked on our website because it provided ongoing consumer information about positive choices about cremation.

Another initiative related to our local efforts was the publication on our website of the findings of our local townships Crematory Task Force -- a group chaired by Thomas Lynch and which included local clergy, officials and citizens -- and whose mission was to study the opening of a crematory in our local municipal cemetery.

To make a difference on the national level, we felt that the reeducation of the clergy, hospice and health care workers on matters related to cremation could make a significant difference since they spend so much time with families of the dying and the dead and play a significant role in decisions made related to same. Towards this end, Thomas Lynch accepted an invitation to keynote to the Association for Death Education and Counseling's national conference in April, 2010 in Kansas City. He also keynoted to the New York State Hospice & Palliative Care Association in May, 2010 and presented at the Calvin College Festival of Faith and Writing in April, 2010. Additionally he presented to Finger Lakes NY Funeral Directors and the state associations of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho in June, 2010.

But the most significant opportunity to reframe the discussion on cremation nationally presented itself when Thomas Lynch was invited to write on the subject for *The Christian Century* -- the largest circulation publication to the mainstream Protestant clergy in the country. After reading the article, the editorial staff decided to make it the "cover story," for the April, 2010 issue. Because the response to the article was so positive and widespread they further dedicated two pages of the June issue to publish letters to the editor about the

essay and Lynch's response to those letters. The essay, which remains both on *The Christian Century's* website and LynchFuneralDirectors.com can be linked to Facebook pages and personal and professional websites and reprinted for use at lectures and seminars by clergy and funeral directors at will. It calls on clergy and people of faith to see cremation as a "Holy Fire," in need of ceremonial and cultural and religious observance, just as we do with burial. The placement of this essay in a national journal related to faith, religious practice and cultural norms gives it special credibility with clergy, educators and the general public. As such, like other national media efforts of Lynch & Sons, it upholds the value of the funeral and the place of the funeral director in the culture.

It is our hope that this "Cremation Best Practices & Consumer Options" initiative -- which has involved all of our staff, from funeral directors to web designers and public speakers -- be considered for Best of the Best recognition in Lynch & Sons Milford's longstanding *Pursuit of Excellence*.