**Pray Funeral Home, Inc., Charlotte, Michigan**

The most popular page visited on our prayfuneral.com website is an essay written by Joe E. Pray about Viking Funerals. In fact, each year we receive at least a few legitimate requests for Viking funerals based on both this article and our participation and exhibition at the Nordic Fire Festival, one of our town’s largest annual festivals. More regularly, however, we are approached with questions about not only Viking funerals, but funeral customs the world over. To this end, one member of our community, Inna Phelps, approached Joe with an idea for a program. Originally from Russia, Inna immigrated to the United States in 2000 and settled in the Charlotte area. Many recognize her as a talented hairdresser, a dedicated paraprofessional in local schools, or a passionate storyteller and performer. She previously curated a Russian room at the Courthouse Square Museum, hosted Russian tea parties, and performed at various local venues. Inna was now curious to team up with our staff to host a Tea Party at the funeral home revolving around Russian heritage and funeral customs.

Food is a central part of Russian culture, including both the traditional Russian Tea and funeral gatherings. Joe E. Pray used his creative approach to transform our visitation room into a Russian tea room, complete with a samovar, a beautifully ornate Russian tea urn that symbolizes hospitalities. Guests also enjoyed a delightful selection of authentic hors d’oeuvres and sweets, including the famous Napoleon cake and Sharlotka apple pie—a charming coincidence, given its name and our city, Charlotte. Additionally, Inna provided a stunning display of Russian nesting dolls and cultural souvenirs, offering a glimpse into the country’s artistry and heritage.

Nearly 100 people attended from up to 30 miles away, far exceeding expectations. Once guests had a chance to experience the warmth and camaraderie of the tea room and specialty food and displays, guests settled in for an interesting presentation and discussion with Inna about her own family funeral experiences back home in Russia, and the way many immigrants experience their customs at home in the United States. Guests and the funeral staff alike were surprised at some of the differences in traditions, as well as many of the similarities. In this way, the event benefited both the funeral home staff and the community at large, offering insights into death and memorialization and providing an open dialogue within the community. The funeral home staff thus developed a further appreciation for our services to families in need.

The success of the event has led it become the first in a planned series at Pray Funeral Home, showcasing funeral traditions from around the world.