

C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors Danvers, Massachusetts

On Monday, December 5, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors hosted a "Holiday Service of Light and Remembrance" at the funeral home. This memorial service was held for our families who had lost a loved one during 2022. Invitations were sent out in early November 2022 asking families to RSVP to the service.

We had approximately seventy-five people in attendance. The Rev. Terri Powell Bracy performed the service. Rev. Bracy is the funeral celebrant for C.R. Lyons & Sons. Rev. Bracy created a service that helped our families to be able to get through the holiday season. Rev. Bracy helped the attendees to remember their loved ones during this time of the year. Poems and readings were read, live music was performed, and prayers were said. Candles were lit to honor the children, family members, spouses, and partners who had passed away. Rev. Bracy invited all the attendees to come forward to help light the candles for their loved ones and say their names out loud. If they had more than one family member that had passed away, they were allowed to light multiple candles for those people.

The funeral directors and staff worked with Rev. Bracy to put together a thoughtful and meaningful service for all those in attendance. Funeral Director Amanda Lyons Brinkley helped with the lighting of the memorial candles. Musicians Anne Farmer and Jody Myer, from Saint Mary of the Annunciation Parish provided the live music. They worked with Rev. Bracy on selecting music that would be appropriate for this type of service at this time of year. Office manager Mary Beth Verry created the program that was handed out to all the attendees upon entrance into the funeral home.

This program had the outline of the service so that the attendees could follow along. As a tribute, included in the program were the names of all those that C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors served during 2022. Mary Beth also produced a video that played at the beginning of the program and at the end that displayed each person and their name who the funeral home took care of in 2022. This video also included instrumental music that played in the background.

At the conclusion of the service all families were presented with a keepsake of an Amaryllis plant to take home. One of the meanings of the Amaryllis plant is Love. We give these plants to our families so that they can feel the love of their family member that has passed. The beauty of this blooming plant has brightened many of our families' holidays even though it may be the first holiday without their loved one.

At the end of the service guests were invited to stay and have refreshments provided by the funeral home. Attendees were treated to fresh baked cookies, coffee, and water. The service lasted about an hour and a half. This was a great opportunity for the families that we served this past year to meet and commiserate with each other on their losses.

Many of the attendees were very grateful to have this opportunity to come and remember their loved ones. This year's service was held on a weeknight instead of the weekend. We thought this change would allow more people to attend since weekends can be busy for most people with other commitments. We also added the Live Music. In previous years we used to use pre-recorded music. This time we thought having live music would be more meaningful and a better experience in person.

Other members of the C.R. Lyons & Sons staff were on hand to help at the entrance holding the doors for people coming in and helping attendees find seating once inside. This year's event returned to the funeral home since the previous two years the event was held virtually or at an off-site location due to the Pandemic.

Gamble Funeral Service Savannah, Georgia

In 2000, we held our first annual Service of Remembrance and Hope when we were with the former Sipple Mortuary. The idea of such a program came during a regularly scheduled staff meeting, where our Sipple Mortuary funeral home family explored a number of topics focused on providing our families with aftercare assistance and bereavement support. An enthusiastic consensus was reached among the staff that we should pursue an observance that would help bring strength, encouragement, and healing to families and individuals during their grieving progression. With that vision in mind, the staff began a strategic planning process to construct a fitting Service of Remembrance and Hope. This vision has continued annually since Gamble Funeral Service was founded in October 2003.

The final product has been followed each year, only with minor adjustments. A huge Tree of Remembrance is placed in the front of our chapel and is adorned with striking ornaments that have the name and date of death of each person who died in the past year. This is a service provided by our funeral home and is offered without any cost to the public. Much thought has been given to these three areas: the title of our service, the timing of our service, and the type of our service.

A) The title of the service—Our staff felt that most of the families had previously been through a funeral or memorial service for their loved one. We determined this service should be more than just a message of hope but rather a service designed to deal with the brokenness that grief brings and a service of reflection, thankfulness, and simple tribute. This is why the staff chose to title the occasion as the Service of Remembrance and Hope.

B) The timing of the service—Most services of this type are held before Christmas Day. There is certainly nothing wrong with this approach, however, our observance is typically held the Sunday evening following Christmas Day. Our staff felt that most friends and family members are keenly attentive to the close survivors until Christmas Day. Unfortunately, after that special day, most of the friends and family members return to their homes and go about living their own lives, without giving personal support to the other members of their family.

C) The type of service—The staff and management of Gamble Funeral Service desired our observance to be a non-denominational program and not related to a particular religion. We wanted to avoid offending any particular family that we had served or a family we may serve in the future. The order of service includes an opening hymn, a prayer, scripture reading, special music from a local group, the citing of those whose names are on the Tree of Remembrance, a message of hope, a prayer, the closing hymn, and benediction. At the conclusion of the service, the attendees are invited to enjoy a time of fellowship where refreshments have been prepared.

The actual planning of the service begins at our staff meeting in August and September when we gather names of potential clergy in the community who have demonstrated their ability to connect with bereaving people and can articulate solace. We contact the selected clergy shortly after their selection in order to eliminate any scheduling conflicts and to collaborate with them concerning desired scriptures and music that may be used during the service.

The next phase is the process of personalizing the ornaments for the Tree of Remembrance. The initial group of ornaments are designated for those individuals who were served by our funeral home from December 1st of the past year through November 30th of the current year. Insuring each ornament is correct and legible is a very time-consuming process.

In November, the staff turns to social media to provide public service announcements concerning the upcoming service. These messages inform others in the community of this program who may not have a connection to Gamble Funeral Service and would like to attend.

On December 5th we typically mail a personal letter to the next of kin of each deceased person we provided a service for during the past year. The letter invites all of the family members and friends to

share in our service, and reminds them of our offer to provide an ornament for other members of their family who have died.

Throughout the process, we make certain the officiating clergy, organist, and our staff members have communicated with each other to ensure a smooth flow with the order of service. The bulletin is proofed, printed and folded, and the refreshments are ordered during the final days of preparation.

The ground work for the next year's service begins with our first staff meeting following the Service of Remembrance and Hope. All of the staff are asked to share any positive or negative feedback they may have from the service. We challenge each other on every detail from the message and music presented, the availability of parking, the placement of our staff, to the refreshments offered. These comments and discussions have helped us "fine tune" our services over the years.

The Service of Remembrance and Hope has been unquestionably a very positive observance for our funeral home. It has provided us the opportunity to acknowledge the loss of loved ones and to share once again with grieving family members our compassionate attention as they take those steps towards healing.

The local newspaper, the ABC and NBC affiliate television stations have provided valued coverage to our funeral service after the service.

In 2016, we reached out to clergy members representing more than one denomination to participate in and lead the service. This gesture was intended to add more diversity to our service which aligns the service more closely to the families we serve. Our intentions are to continue with this practice.

Then in 2017, our staff opened the service to all families, not just the families for whom we had provided a service. Additionally, we do not charge for nor do we limit the number of ornaments requested and given to a family.

A number of improvements to the logistics of the service were made in 2018. Backlogs to families waiting to receive their ornaments after the service was becoming a trying experience for our staff. As a result, we increased the number of staff used to locate the ornaments on the tree in order to expedite families receiving their loved one's tribute. This change in process, coupled with pre-sorting the ornaments for families requesting multiple orders for other family members reduced the "wait-time" that previously caused the backlog. The staff is constantly trying not to cause anymore delay than necessary during an already stressful time to the family members and friends who are attending the service.

The 2019 Service of Remembrance and Hope saw continued improvements to the logistics and coordination between staff and families receiving ornaments. The staff initiated a new process to the program which now allows for the immediate production of additional ornaments requested by families at the time of the service by having two areas set up with extra blank ornaments, manned by staff who are able to reproduce any additional personalized ornaments in a timely manner. Additionally, Gamble Funeral Service offers to mail additional ornaments to requested family members or to those who are unable to attend the service in person.

The challenges of 2020 due to COVID-19 are of course well-documented. With concern for the health and safety of our staff and the families that we serve, the in-person service was suspended, and instead personal letters were delivered to the families of those who had lost a loved one in the past year. We reached out to the Reverend Dr. Drew Corbett, who is also a local hospice program chaplain, and were able to offer grief counseling as well as the personalized ornaments that were either mailed or hand delivered as requested by surviving family.

The 2021 Service of Remembrance and Hope saw us adjusting to the "new-normal" with the return of an in-person service. In addition to inviting families and the public at large, we also live streamed the service so those who were unable to attend in person could view the service and hear their loved ones name.

In 2022, we continued to make logistical improvements and were able to get families their ornaments more expediently by hanging them in alphabetical order from stanchions, as well as having additional staff on standby to create extra ornaments that could be individually boxed in a custom ornament display box for family members.

Gamble's Service of Remembrance and Hope is an integral part of our long-standing tradition of continuing to minister to our families in their journey of grief after the death of a loved one. We strive to live by our watchword of "Ask a family we have served."

H.E. Turner & Co., Inc.
Batavia, New York

H.E. Turner & Co., Inc. Funeral Homes, Bergen, NY; Bohm-Calarco-Smith Funeral Home, Batavia, NY; Burdett & Sanford Funeral Home, Oakfield, NY; Robinson and Hackemer Funeral Home, Warsaw, NY

Annually, our firm hosts an “Annual Service of Prayer and Remembrance” on the first Wednesday of December. The ecumenical service is held at one of several local churches that changes every two years. This past December, the service was held at the First Presbyterian Church of Batavia and was led by that church’s pastor, Rev. Dr. Roula Alkhouri.

Attendance at the service provides a time for quiet reflection and togetherness for those who are bereaved. Of note, we do not restrict attendance to only families we have served nor to those whose loss was in the past year. Instead, we offer this community service to all who mourn the loss of a loved one – regardless of when the death occurred or which funeral firm served the family. We often see families whose loss was decades prior or who selected a different funeral provider. Regardless of circumstances, we offer the service free of charge to any who attend.

Attendees are provided a personalized candle upon arrival which is then lit by the attendee using our “candle of unity.” The candle is then placed in one of our custom made candle holders near the church altar to burn throughout the length of the service. Prayers, scriptures, poems, and hymns are shared; along with a message of hope. The most powerful moment of the service is when the names of the deceased are read aloud by funeral home personnel. At the conclusion of the service, funeral home team members extinguish the flames. Attendees are then invited forward to take their candle before enjoying a gathering in the church fellowship hall for light refreshments. It is our hope that attendees will light their loved ones’ candle on Christmas or another special day in remembrance of those who have died.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, we began offering the service virtually for those who are unable to attend via our Webcasting partner, Sympathy Net. This allows those who may wish to attend but are not local, or otherwise feel uncomfortable attending, to do so virtually. This year we had over 100 virtual attendees in addition to the 400+ that attended in person. Virtual attendees are encouraged to contact us to make arrangements to receive their loved ones’ candle – either in advance or after the service.

The service provides a sense of community to those who are bereaved among us. Too often, after the flurry of calls, cards, visits, and services are over, families experience a period of almost complete aloneness. It is easy to forget that others are experiencing similar things. Coming together, regardless of an individual’s place in their grief journey, allows those who have experienced a loss to recognize that they are not alone.

Similarly, all funeral home team members are encouraged to participate to the extent they are comfortable in the service. Some only come to work, some come to reflect, and others to connect. We each have personally experienced loss and to that end, our loved ones are each represented with a candle. The experience of loss is a common element in each of us. The service provides an opportunity for our team to reconnect with families we have served – some decades ago – and to provide all with the recognition that we are all human traveling our own unique grief journey.

St. Peter Chapels Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines

In the Philippines, All Souls Day (November 2), or our version of the Day of the Dead, is such a venerated observance that long holidays are declared by the government to allow Filipinos to properly observe this holiday. In fact, All Saints Day (November 1), the day that immediately precedes it, is also declared a holiday of observation in order to provide Filipinos more time to pay respects to their beloved dead in cemeteries and memorial parks. During this special time, millions of Filipinos take this opportunity to go home to their respective provinces and hometowns in order to pay their respect to their loved ones who have gone before them.

The way Filipinos observe this long holiday reflects their inimitable character and colorful culture. In the cemeteries, specially the public ones, parking is a perennial problem that traffic is rerouted. The streets are filled with vendors, cars and people jostling each other for their own space. The crowds can get very thick and people are jampacked elbow-to-elbow at the entrance, in between tombstones, grave markers and columbaries. It is a very passionate observance of the holiday.

Despite the difficulties that Filipinos have to undergo to honor the dead, Undas, or the combined observance of All Saints Day and All Souls Day, is a sight to behold. A few days before Undas, there are already many people in the cemeteries as some families already tend to and clean the graves of their loved ones in preparation for the actual visit during the Undas holiday. The scene at the cemeteries is part camp-out, picnic and family reunion rolled into one. Food is abundant, tents have been set up for overnight vigils, pop music fills the air.

Last year, authorities estimated that in the main public cemetery of the nation's capital, Manila, 2 million visitors were expected in November 1 and 2. With the immense number of people expected in cemeteries, a departed loved one's grave can get very difficult to locate, specially if the graves have been left uncared for. The sheer number of people alone make graves challenging to find. At the North Cemetery in Manila, imagine locating a gravestone in a necropolis of 130 acres that hosts a community of an estimated ten to fifty thousand warm bodies that live alongside the over one million dead. It is not hard to conclude that with such a scenario, graves fall rapidly into disrepair and become decrepit.

St. Peter realizes all too well that many a grave, or "nitso" in Filipino, are either dilapidated, covered in dirt and overgrowth of plants and bushes, or simply unrecognizable. As millions flock to the cemeteries each year, there are also many who seldom visit their departed's place of rest, so, too, with those who hardly have the graves maintained, if at all. It is a sad sight to see thousands of unkempt graves in a sordid state of poor maintenance.

To give the dead the respect they deserve by way of making graves easier to locate and recognize during Nov. 1 and Nov. 2, St. Peter established the Linis Nitso ("Linis Nitso" is Filipino term for Grave cleaning) initiative project as part of the St. Peter DeathCare Week program in November 2022. The St. Peter DeathCare Week is St. Peter Chapel's annual Corporate Social Responsibility and Public Service program to promote awareness on DeathCare planning and preparation, which is celebrated annually from October 27 to November 2.

The Linis Nitso activity is not as simple as it sounds because the cleaning of a grave is by no means a simple task. Elbow grease is required, lots of it, and patience. In public cemeteries, large areas have to be cleared of grass, overgrowth of bushes and foliage. Graves, tombstones and markers need to be swept thoroughly and washed, painted, and the engraved names, dates and information on tombstones and markers needed to be re-lettered. Since the graves and cemeteries were neglected for at least two years due to the Covid pandemic, the cleaning task had become much more difficult.

And just when the St. Peter team was about to embark on the Linis Nitso project, Tropical Storm Nalgae, locally known as Typhoon Paeng ravaged large areas of the nation and turned numerous graves and cemeteries into muddy and flooded areas. Then it started to rain on the Linis Nitso cleaning day, October 27, and it seemed that the odds were against the St. Peter Linis Nitso Teams.

But the St. Peterians' resolve was waterproof. We set out to do what we promised to do. In 17 cemeteries around the country, a total of 340 St. Peter employees rendered a total of 136 man hours, cleaning no less than 1,700 graves.

What makes the Linis Nitso initiative truly gratifying is that the cleaning work was rendered by employees of St. Peter and not by third party suppliers or hired manpower. St. Peterians showed honest-to-goodness volunteerism and rendered personal service with no pay during a long holiday at that (sacrificing their own personal family time). And the only financial outlay for the project was the cost for cleaning tools, paint, shears, shovels and refreshments. The underlying objective was to accomplish so much with so little time and resources.

We believe we have succeeded in providing cleanliness and orderliness in many areas of the cemeteries we partnered with. Many families who were beneficiaries of the 1,700 graves which were cleaned were very grateful and happy with the Linis Nitso project. We believe that we were able to reunite families, in a sense those members who had gone ahead to Eternity and the family members who survived them by making it easy for people to find the graves they were looking for. We are confident we had put smiles on the faces of the spirits whose graves we had cleaned and improved. We believe that we had strengthened the bond between employees, reinforced the foundation between St. Peter and its community, and not only enhanced St. Peter's image in the eyes of the general public but also made each St. Peter Linis Nitso team proud for their selfless service and creating value. All these done at the expense and sacrifice of honoring their own departed relatives and instead choosing to serve others.