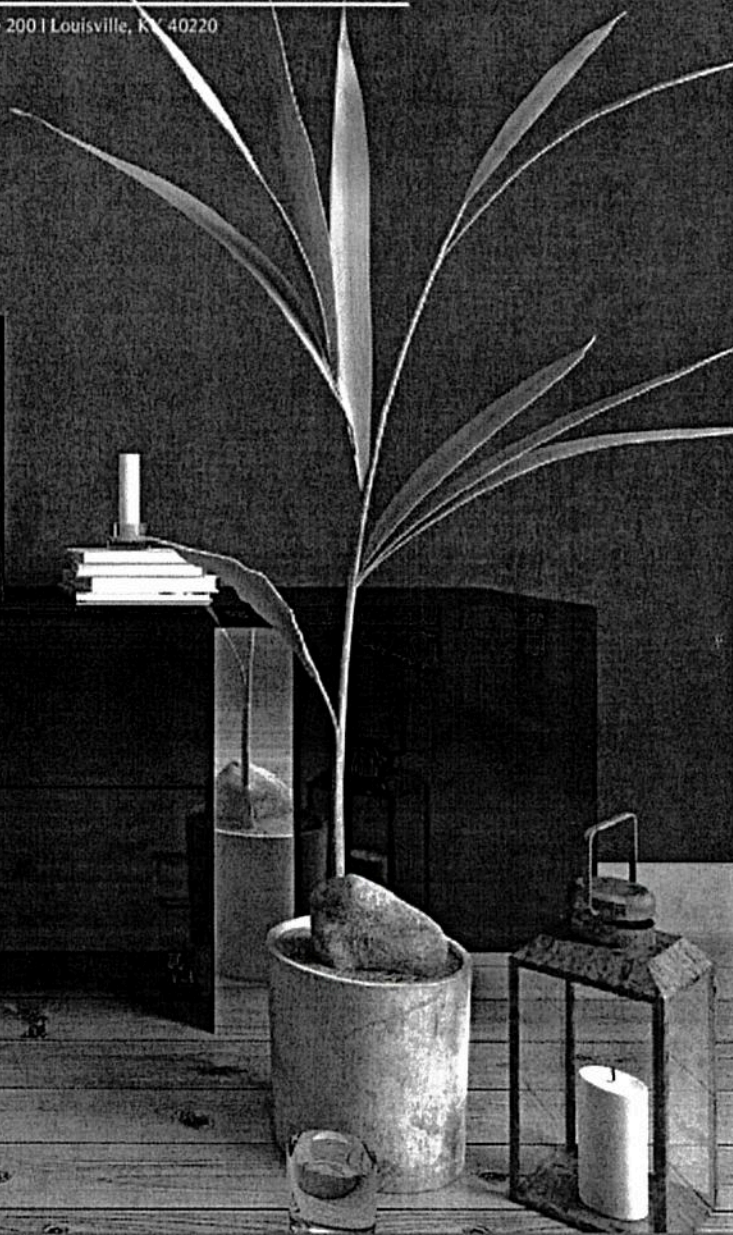


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THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION & ACCREDITATION

by Terry Parrish, CFSP

The importance of education has been consistently stressed across all professional domains and disciplines. Funeral service education is no exception. Students pursuing education in funeral service are not only trained in delivery of administrative or organizational support to the families but are also expected to have thorough academic and practical background in such disciplines as psychology, mental health, and counseling. Funeral service education aims to equip students with the knowledge and understanding of grief and bereavement that we all go through at some point in our lives. Individuals providing funeral services must not only be prepared to deal with the emotional side of the chosen profession but also be properly trained in cross-cultural sensitivity, psychological guidance, and social factors that directly shape the way funeral services are perceived, accessed and used.

Today, funeral service education programs are accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), the national accrediting agency for colleges and universities that offer programs in Funeral Service and Mortuary Science Education. The requirement to obtain a license is a vital element in ensuring services are provided by qualified professionals who are able to assist with the organization of a funeral and are also trained in helping families go through this emotionally intense periods of their lives. Currently in most states you must have attended and completed a program at an accredited school in order to obtain a license to assist a family at their time of need.

The question of accreditation deals not so much with the school attendance or recognition of the sufficient level of qualification to provide funeral service but rather, with the multi-faceted preparation to serve the public and the government. Accreditation and licensure are the proofs of professional competence. The ethics code of professional conduct issued by the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) specifically points out that funeral service providers have ethical obligations not only to families but also to the public and the government. It implies that licensed funeral service directors are competent in communication and responsiveness, care of the deceased, disposition and

visitation, business practice, and professionalism. These professional competencies can be combined under a single term "professional ethics". Although any professional practice is affected and guided by core competencies, funeral service is somewhat different because it is an extension of psychological counseling and administrative organization of funeral services. All which must be carried out in full compliance with ethical codes of professional conduct. As with any other professional practice that affects human subjects, funeral service education must be bound by obligatory accreditation.

Another important aspect that must be voiced is that funeral service professionals work with very diverse populations. They will deal with varied cultural backgrounds, ages, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and life philosophies. Death is a natural inevitable event in the life of every person, which brings funeral service professionals into the situation where they work with very different clients who are emotionally drained and are in need of support and encouragement in the organization of funeral services. Therefore, the core focus of funeral service education is to prepare students to find the balance between addressing the emotional needs of clients and managing the organization of funerals.

Without a license obtained in conjunction with an accredited program in funeral service education, funeral service providers are not in a position to comply with the highest standards of care and quality expected of them. Formal education in funeral service provides the guidance, skills, and knowledge on how to deliver professional services ethically and effectively. Accreditation is the symbol of commitment to ethical standards and core competencies of funeral service providers. Education not only serves as the guide for students as well as practicing professionals but also builds a solid foundation for further betterment of the quality and scope of services rendered to the public. Funeral services are used by all members of society, without exception; however, barriers to accessing such services still exist and one such barrier is the lack of qualifications of service providers. Accreditations as well as licensure are the only effective tools to remove those barriers, especially for the most vulnerable members of society. **FBA**



Terry Parrish is Registrar/Director of Admissions at Dallas Institute of Funeral Service, Dallas, Texas, and is a licensed funeral director and embalmer. Terry also is a Certified Funeral Service Practitioner (CFSP). Terry serves as the faculty sponsor of Women in Black and also serves as a member of the Dallas Institute of Funeral Service Lions Club. She currently serves on several committees for the Texas Funeral Directors Association and is also a member of the Dallas County Funeral Directors Association, the North Texas Funeral Directors Association, and the National Funeral Directors Association.