

Signs of God information sheet.

Interpreting at a funeral service

Information to find out:

Which service?
Which Hymns?
Which Bible readings?
Which Prayers?
Name of the deceased, names of any immediate family.

Text of Minister's sermon
Text of any tribute by friends or family
Text of any poem or songs that will be used

Is the service in a church or crematorium?

If Church:
Will the service be followed by cremation or burial?

Emotional issues

You may find interpreting at a funeral difficult emotionally, especially if you have been bereaved recently. Consider beforehand whether you are able to accept the assignment and whether you will need support after the event.

Practical considerations:

If Cremation:
Do you know the way to the crem? If not, can someone provide transport (Usually the undertaker or minister. Decide whether you mind travelling in the hearse, since sometimes the seat next to the coffin is the only one left!)

Take care where you stand. It is not usually socially appropriate to interpret with your back to the coffin, or across the coffin.

Take a music stand with you.

If Church followed by burial:
Wear suitable clothing and flat shoes – you may have to stand on wet soggy ground. Don't rely on having the printed text at a burial since rain or wind may make it impossible to see.

Sight lines are often very difficult in churches and even in crematoria. A phone call to the crematorium may obtain a podium for you to stand on.

Language issues

The language of funerals is often very "flowery". It's made worse by the fact that the usual service at the crem. is just 20 minutes so the minister may speak very fast. If you have the chance to suggest to the minister that he/she cuts out one or two prayers it may be helpful.

Since Deaf People cannot look in two directions at once, you may wish to stop signing while the coffin is being lowered or the curtain is pulled, even if the minister forgets and continues to speak.

Often the prayers at funeral services have a lot of subordinate clauses in them. They need careful preparation.

It is not unusual for family members or friends to read a poem or give a tribute and these may be in BSL so make sure you obtain copies of this information.

NB It is likely that the minister will not have used a Sign Language Interpreter before so be ready to do some "cross-cultural" educating! Funerals are everyday occurrences for most clergy and they may not understand that the interpreter is unfamiliar with the language of liturgy or the structure of the service. You may find it useful to give him/her the *Signs of God* briefing paper written for ministers.