



A Little Book About Funerals and Interfaith Ministers

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Contents

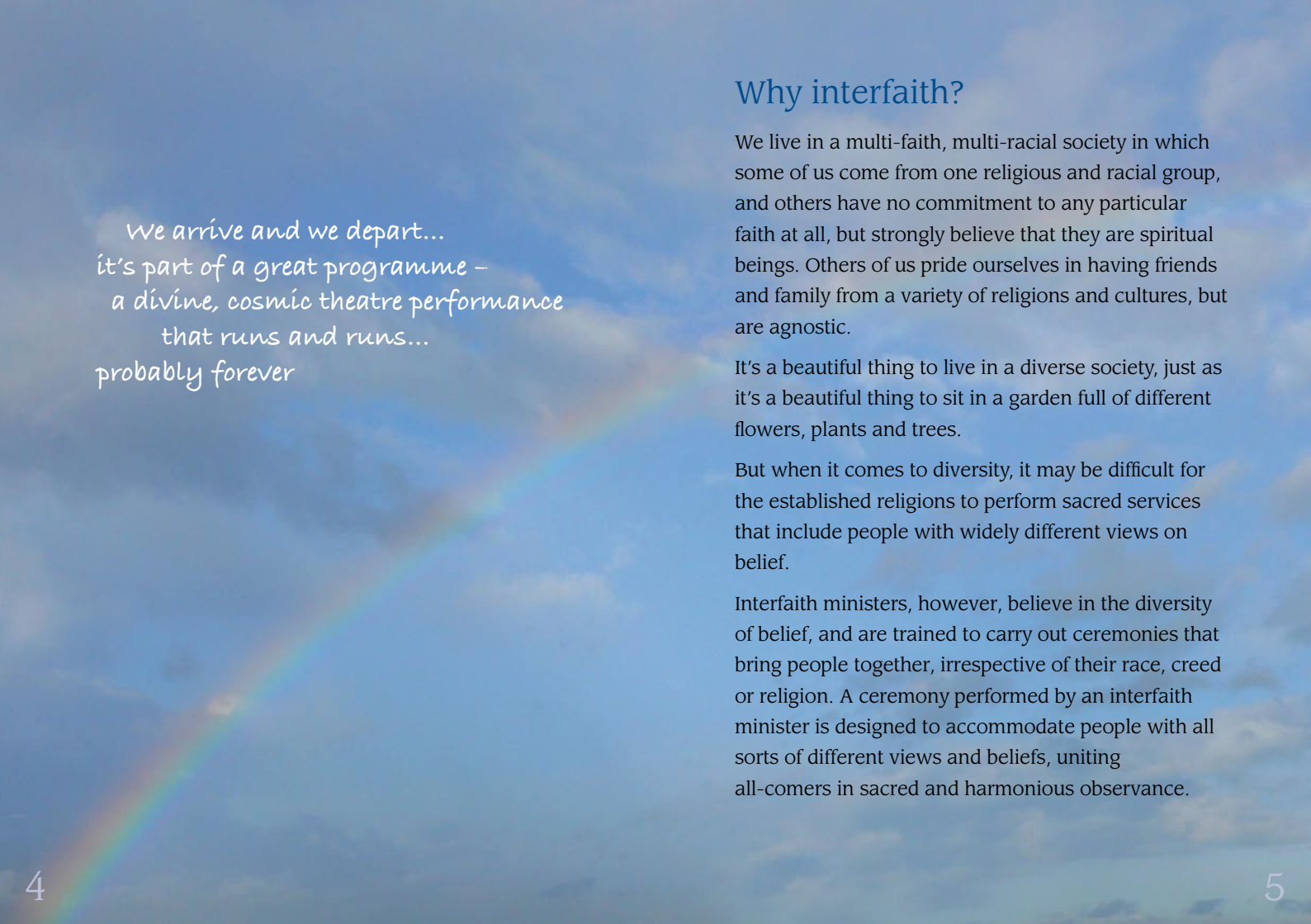
- 3 The loving funeral
- 4 Why interfaith?
- 6 What is an interfaith minister?
- 8 The funeral and the minister
- 10 Family and friends:
ways to make the funeral special
- 11 In Conclusion
- 12 Contacts

The loving funeral

When family and friends bid farewell to someone through death, it's important that the ceremony that follows is as special and sacred as possible. A life commemorated by a funeral must be lovingly honoured, and resonate with as many people as possible.

Death is a mysterious episode in the journey of the spirit; one door closes and another one opens

Funerals should be healing and inspirational. Properly conducted they have the power to bring people together in peace and love. An interfaith minister will respect your feelings and concerns, compassionately guiding you, your family and friends through a moment of stress and grief. She or he will also work closely with the undertaker to ensure that the occasion strikes the right tone for the ceremony.



*We arrive and we depart...
it's part of a great programme –
a divine, cosmic theatre performance
that runs and runs...
probably forever*

Why interfaith?

We live in a multi-faith, multi-racial society in which some of us come from one religious and racial group, and others have no commitment to any particular faith at all, but strongly believe that they are spiritual beings. Others of us pride ourselves in having friends and family from a variety of religions and cultures, but are agnostic.

It's a beautiful thing to live in a diverse society, just as it's a beautiful thing to sit in a garden full of different flowers, plants and trees.

But when it comes to diversity, it may be difficult for the established religions to perform sacred services that include people with widely different views on belief.

Interfaith ministers, however, believe in the diversity of belief, and are trained to carry out ceremonies that bring people together, irrespective of their race, creed or religion. A ceremony performed by an interfaith minister is designed to accommodate people with all sorts of different views and beliefs, uniting all-comers in sacred and harmonious observance.

What is an interfaith minister?

An interfaith minister respects all faiths. She or he will have been trained by The Interfaith Seminary which holds the view that there are 'many paths, one truth'. In the UK there are over 350 interfaith ministers and their training covers the study of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, the Hindu faith and also the Shaman tradition, amongst others.

An interfaith minister will carry out sacred, creative and loving ceremonies in which the emphasis is on the people concerned and their own intrinsic sacredness.

You will find interfaith ministers in many different working situations. Some work in centres of healing and worship, others are spiritual counsellors, nurses, doctors, executives and teachers. Some, like the author of this little book, do the kind of things that one associates with any priest.

*Life is eternal and love immortal.
Death is part of the pilgrimage.*

The funeral and the minister

Funerals represent an important opportunity to say goodbye to someone who has been a special part of our own lives and possibly that of our family and friends as well.

Listening to family and friends represents as much a part of the healing process as helping with the ceremony itself, and an interfaith minister will work to make the funeral a caring and compassionate experience.

If there are special faith concerns, the minister will address them as well as respecting different viewpoints. This all helps to make the ceremony an inclusive, harmonious and loving service.

*It is natural to mourn,
celebrate and also give thanks
for those lives that have travelled
with us, and then move on*

Family and friends: ways to make the funeral special

A funeral can pay homage and celebrate a good and loving life. When you choose an interfaith minister to perform a funeral, you may be asked to share your views on where and how you would like it to take place. You will also be asked what enthusiasms and passions the deceased may have held in life.

Beautiful music, prayers and poetry can all play a part in making the service sacred and meaningful. The minister may also suggest that members of the family or friends might wish to contribute to the occasion.

If you want a eulogy, the minister will help with this as well, assisting with its creation and delivering the tribute, if this is appropriate.

In Conclusion

The death of a close friend or relative often shocks us... even if it was expected. In reality, one of the tragedies of such moments of loss is that the stress can rob us of our powers of judgement. We want the best for a loved one, but what unfolds seems to happen so quickly that we don't have the opportunity to honour the dead as we would have wished. An interfaith minister will understand this problem and will gently guide you through some of the crucial decisions about the content and spirituality of the ceremony.

Rev Anthea Ballam is an interfaith minister based in Brighton, Sussex. She carries out funerals, weddings, blessings for civil partnerships and baby naming and blessing ceremonies as well as universal services in the UK and overseas.

Anthea is very committed to developing sacred services that represent the spirit and interests of the people involved. She has been commissioned to write prayers for ceremonies that she has conducted, and other services. As well as writing prayers, she also performs guided meditation sessions to aid health and provides spiritual counselling.

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