



FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 376-4747
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

Newsletter

Fall 2021



Join us (virtually, via Zoom) for our 2021 Annual Meeting & Program

Sunday, October 17, 2:00-4:00 pm

“Traditions Old & New: A Range of Rituals”

Funerals have evolved – everything old is new again – and then some!

Join **Gail Rubin**, Certified Thanatologist and The Doyenne of Death®, for an upbeat review of funeral traditions and new developments. She will address these topics:

- How ancient Jewish funeral traditions model modern green burials
- How the COVID-19 pandemic has generated changes in funeral services
- How new disposition options have emerged and old practices like home funerals have reemerged

Gail Rubin is a pioneering death educator. She uses humor, television and film clips, and outside-the-box activities to teach about death and grief. She encourages end-of-life planning before a crisis hits. An award-winning speaker and author, her books include *A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die* and *Kicking the Bucket List: 100 Downsizing and Organizing Things to Do Before You Die*. For more information, visit her website, www.AGoodGoodbye.com.

Pre-registration (free) is required. Please send email to fcawmass@gmail.com to indicate your interest, and we will send you the Zoom link and access instructions before October 17.

Schedule:

- 2:00 pm Welcome and introductions; brief reports from our President, Treasurer, and the Nominating Committee; election of candidates for the Board of Trustees and for Officers
- 2:30 pm Gail Rubin will speak (live from NM) on “**Traditions Old & New: A Range of Rituals**”
- 3:30 pm Q & A with Gail. Bring your questions!

Open to all. Please join us for this program.



Resources in Spanish

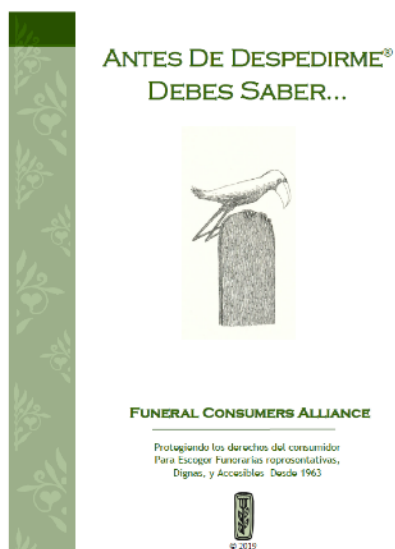
The national FCA website offers many Spanish language resources, including six downloadable FAQ pamphlets:

<https://funerals.org/resources/fagespanol/>

Six webpages:

<https://funerals.org/consumers/espanol/>

and the popular “Before I Go You Should Know” 32-page Funeral Planner, available in print (\$15) or digital (\$9.90) at funerals.org/bookstore/.



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Editor this issue: Sandy Ward

The FCA of Western Massachusetts is a non-sectarian, all-volunteer, non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral or memorial service.

Election for Board of Trustees

We have openings on our Board of Trustees, and will hold an election during the virtual Annual Meeting on Sunday, October 17, 2021, 2:00 pm.

We will be able to vote for up to four members. Two incumbents (Kate Mason, Cecile Richard) are running for re-election for 3-year terms. We have two open seats. As of press time, we have one new candidate to introduce:

Nathalie Vicencio

Nathalie is a civil rights activist working with fair housing organizations to protect the livelihoods of Massachusetts' most vulnerable people. She is more than a fearless protector; following in the footsteps of her father, world musician Mauricio Vicencio, Nathalie has become a consciousness awakener and arts advocate, connecting with her ancestral Andean roots through music, plant medicine, and earth wisdom. She is the proud mother of three little ones and is currently studying to become a death doula.

On October 17 we will ask, as usual, for any additional nominations of candidates “from the floor.” Would YOU like to join our board? Hope so.

We welcome people with perspectives from different cultures and experiences. Our bylaws specify a nine-person Board, with a pattern of staggered terms to “*encourage the election of interested persons who have not served before.*”

We also will vote for OFFICERS (1-year terms):

President: Cecile Richard
Vice-President: Jim Couchon
Treasurer: Joan Pillsbury
Secretary: Kate Mason

Volunteers for short-term projects are also welcome. Let us know if you are interested. Thanks!



Upcoming *Virtual* Programs from a Variety of Trusted Sources

Green Burial Massachusetts. Tuesday, October 5, 2021, 4:00 - 5:00 pm. **The Dirt on Soil:** The significance of soils, community, and natural burial practice. Three panelists will share their expertise about natural burial and the significance of soils in burial practices, followed by Q & A and discussion. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/virtual-speaker-series-1-the-dirt-on-soil-tickets-173957169577>

Peoples Memorial Association, Seattle, Washington. Daily 90-minute webinars (\$10 each) during **Death Careers Week, September 27-October 1,** [12:00 - 1:30 pm PT] 3:00 - 4:30 pm Eastern Time. “We reached out to deathcare colleagues of all kinds to come tell you about their backgrounds, their education, and the work they do to support the dead and dying.” Schedule: **Death Doulas** (Mon.), **Remove Technician** (Tues.), **Death Investigator/Medical Examiner’s Office** (Wed.), **Funeral Director** (Thurs.), and **Eye Bank Technicians** (Fri.). For details and to register, see <https://peoplesmemorial.org/education-and-advocacy/events.html>

National FCA Conference, October 15-17, 2021. Live presentations via Zoom (3 per day). Registration and payment required; details at funerals.org. (30% discount for FCA board members and volunteers). Two sessions are especially timely for us as MA legislators have filed a bill to allow these environmentally-friendly options in our state:

* **Natural Organic Reduction** (Friday, October 15, 2:45 to 4:15 pm Eastern time). Natural Organic Reduction (composting) of human remains is one of the newest methods of body disposition. **Anna Swenson** will describe how the Seattle company **Recompose** brought it to market, what the process entails, how much it costs, and more. Swenson is outreach manager at Recompose.



* **Alkaline Hydrolysis** (Saturday, October 16, 4:30 to 6:00 pm Eastern time). Sometimes called “water cremation,” alkaline hydrolysis is a new alternative to cremation. **Jason Bradshaw**, president of Bradshaw Funerals in Minnesota, will describe how it works, how much it costs, and what families who choose the process have to say about it.



Recordings of FCA’s 2020 conference (free) are at <https://funerals.org/conference-2020/>.

Gail Rubin invites us to the 5th Annual **Before I Die New Mexico Festival**, October 30-November 2, 2021. Although it happens in Albuquerque, many of the sessions will be accessible virtually. The Festival has entertaining and educational elements, with speakers, expert panel discussions, Death Cafe conversations, and more, covering a range of end-of-life issues. You can join in by registering for a small donation at www.BeforeIDieNM.com. You can also view videos from Festivals over the past few years.

For example, Gail’s fall 2020 interview with Amy Cunningham and Syd Walman (“Funeral Directors in COVID-19 Hot Spots”) is worth watching.

FCA of Eastern Massachusetts, November 14, 3-5pm. Annual Meeting and Program. “The Changing Nature of Funerals in Challenging Times.” Save the date, and visit their website (fcaemass.org/) for more information as the date approaches.



Consumer Groups Urge State Regulators to Make a Strong Commitment to Providing Consumer Information about Funerals

On June 28, 2021, the Consumer Federation of America (CFA) and the Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA) held a joint press conference to announce results of their recent study of consumer information on state funeral regulators' websites. Of the 50 websites examined, only seven were rated A (Excellent), meeting all of these criteria:

- A prominent link to consumer-focused information, on the “top-level,” and intuitively labeled, not nested underneath a menu of choices unrelated to consumer information.
- An explanation of a consumer’s basic rights under the Federal Trade Commission’s “Funeral Rule.”
- An explanation of a consumer’s rights when buying a prepaid funeral, including an explanation of how much a consumer would be refunded if the contract is cancelled before death, or if the prepaid money is assigned to a new funeral home at the customer’s request.
- Other information about how consumers can optimize their purchase of funeral services, including links to the FTC website or publications on “Shopping for Funeral Services.”
- A prominent link to file a complaint.
- Ability to see whether a funeral home has been subject to disciplinary action by the regulatory body.

Oregon (www.oregon.gov/omcb) and Arizona (funeralboard.az.gov/) were praised as excellent models.

Unfortunately, 33 state funeral service regulators provide **poor or no useful information** to consumers on their websites. Massachusetts was among the 33.

This national CFA-FCA report highlighted the problem. We – the local FCA affiliates in Massachusetts – responded by contacting the **Massachusetts Board of Registration in Embalming and Funeral Directing** to inform them of the study and recommend consumer-friendly resources. Patti Muldoon (FCAEM) and Sandy Ward (FCAWM) attended the Board’s July meeting and asked to be on the agenda for August. We sent written information in advance, and four of us (Sandy, Joan Pillsbury from FCAWM; Patti, Frank Singleton from FCAEM) attended their August 17th meeting. The Board listened respectfully, and agreed that adding good information for consumers IS worth doing. And yes, they would welcome help. Executive Director Thomas Burke spoke highly of the resources listed in our memo. He urged all of the board members to look at those “really informative” and “very helpful” websites before the next meeting (Tuesday September 21).

Our memo included this statement: *Please know that if clear consumer information is added to your website, Joshua Slocum of the national FCA office will be happy to announce a revised “grade” for Massachusetts. He is confident it could be “A”... if it meets the criteria in the recent Consumer Federation of America study.*

Mr. Burke advised the board to update the “Funeral Directors Consumer Fact Sheet” (2004) as a first step in this project, which will continue on their agenda for a while. Their meetings are open to the public and often conducted online; agendas and access information are posted a few days in advance at <https://www.mass.gov/board-of-registration-in-embalming-and-funeral-directing-meetings>.



New options coming to Mass.?

An Act Relative to Environmentally-Friendly Burial Alternatives

We are happy to report that two MA state legislators have filed a bill to EXPAND the death-care options available here, adding Natural Organic Reduction (NOR) and Alkaline Hydrolysis (water cremation).

On July 2, 2021, Rep. Jack Lewis (Framingham) contacted FCA of Eastern Massachusetts: “Seeking perspective and partnership on An Act Relative to Environmentally-Friendly Burial Alternatives.” He and Rep. Natalie Higgins (Leominster) based the act on similar legislation in Washington state.

“In this bill, we are looking to expand burial options for MA residents to include natural organic reduction and alkaline hydrolysis. These environmentally-friendly alternatives circumvent the need for toxic chemicals and offer significantly reduced carbon emissions compared to conventional burial and cremation, with lower price tags to MA families. We feel that this broadening of burial options is important in promoting sustainable land use, minimizing environmental impacts, and promoting consumer welfare, all while providing residents new, greener choices for their burial.”

Rep. Natalie Higgins hosted a Zoom meeting on July 27 with Rep. Lewis, their legislative aides, and representatives of both FCAEM and FCAWM. From our board Sandy Ward and Joan Pillsbury participated. The authors caution that adding these two options may take years to accomplish. They anticipate public hearings later this fall and will let us know when our input is most needed.

On July 29 the bill was assigned to the Joint Committee on Public Health. Several other legislators have signed on, including three from Western Massachusetts: Natalie Blais (1st Franklin), Lindsay Sabadosa (1st Hampshire) and Patricia Duffy (5th Hampden).

You can see the bill, H. 4306, and its status here: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H4036>



NOR? Water Cremation? Background information about these options

The Cremation Association of America (CANA) voted in 2010 to expand its definition of cremation to include **alkaline hydrolysis**, which uses water, alkaline chemicals, and heat to accelerate natural decomposition, leaving only bone fragments and a neutral liquid (effluent). That effluent can be discharged into wastewater systems. Alkaline hydrolysis (a.k.a. water cremation, or aquamation) is already legal in many states, including Florida, Illinois, Maine, Oregon, and Washington. For a basic overview, see <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/alkaline-hydrolysis-laws-your-state.html>.

Natural Organic Reduction (NOR) a.k.a. “human composting” is a newer option, implemented first in Washington state in 2020. Colorado and Oregon have approved it. See this Oregon handout about NOR: https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/marsh/Documents/HB2574_Natural_Organic_Reduction.pdf?ID=43.

“NOR gently transforms human remains into soil in 4-6 weeks.”

“The resulting soil is safe for gardens, trees, and general land use.”



Making a difference...

Your donations to FCAWM sustain the good work that we do. Thank you! Here's a prime example.

With money donated, we purchased an ad in the Funeral and Estate Planning special section published by the Daily Hampshire Gazette and the Amherst Bulletin in May 2021. This response came quickly:

"I appreciate your ad in the recent insert in the paper - good timing for me as I have been thinking about getting a cemetery plot, or a place in the cremation area, and it's all kind of confusing! And expensive! My questions:

- I am wondering if my sense is right that cremation is more affordable? It certainly seems like it could be more convenient for my survivors.*
- Can one work directly with a place that does direct cremation, or is a funeral home needed to arrange transportation, etc.?*
- Also, if my survivors want to scatter my ashes somewhere besides a cemetery, is that allowed in Massachusetts? How would one know? Where might that be legal in Western Mass.?"*

FCAWM Board member Jim Couchon, on duty that month to monitor incoming calls and emails, responded carefully and thoroughly to each of these questions. Good questions! He added, "I hope this is a good start to your research. Please let us know if we were helpful or if you'd like more information."

*"Wow, thank you! Yes, this was *hugely* helpful! I will definitely look into the website more, just didn't have time for an in-depth view so far and there was a LOT of detail, some of which was confusing for me - and I didn't see a "Search" option, maybe I missed it. ... Thanks again, for your email and placing that ad - you provide a much-needed valuable service!"*

Jim thanked her for the feedback. "Yes, we really need a search feature and need to re-organize our site." Re-design of the website is now underway, guided by Jim and webmaster Sandy Ward.



Appreciation from Empty Arms Bereavement Support

The infant coffins that FCAWM volunteers constructed in May (see article in our Spring 2021 newsletter) are of two sizes: 20" or 15" in overall length. They are made of beautiful pine with a light linseed oil finish; fitted pillows line the sides and bottom.

The staff at Empty Arms Bereavement Support (www.emptyarmsbereavement.org) appreciate the donation of these coffins and have already had need for three of them for newly bereaved families.

"...the family would be so grateful for a 20 inch infant coffin."

"There is another family with a loss who would like a burial but cannot afford a casket. Their baby is less than 20 weeks gestation and could easily use the 15 inch casket."

"It's very unusual to have this many (infant) burials! Since I've been at Empty Arms we usually see 90 percent cremation. I'm so grateful for your partnership! It's been a tremendous blessing and an opportunity to spread the word that you exist!"



Please make checks payable to **FCAWM** and send to FCAWM, P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302
or donate ONLINE by credit card or e-check: www.funeralconsumerswmass.org/donate.html

Your contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501c3 organization.

___ YES! I want to renew support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts and its mission of promoting and protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements: funeral or memorial services, care of the body and disposition of human remains (including burial, cremation or donation). I'm enclosing my voluntary contribution of

___ \$15 ___ \$30 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 or \$ _____

___ I'm NEW. Please enroll me and send the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner and membership package. (Suggested new member donation is \$30.) I am enclosing \$ _____

___ Please send me ___ copies of the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner. I enclose a donation of \$ _____ to reimburse FCAWM for the expenses of acquiring and mailing the 30-page spiral-bound planner. (Suggested minimum \$15 per copy.)

___ I have time and interest in helping FCAWM. Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name: _____ **Telephone:** _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____ **Prefer to receive newsletters via email? Yes No**

✂----- cut here -----

The Forgotten Dead

On September 17, 2021, *The Washington Post* began a new series, publishing an article titled “Alone in Death.” The authors, Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan, dive deeply into one case to share a story that illustrates an all-too-common problem: unclaimed bodies. “There are no official statistics about how many unclaimed bodies are buried across America, but a Washington Post investigation that included more than 100 interviews over six months with medical examiners and local officials from Maine to California found that every year tens of thousands of lives end this way.”

“... Even before the pandemic, this was a growing problem. A rare federally funded study published in 2020 found that in recent years in Los Angeles County, the nation’s most populous, 2 to 3 percent of about 60,000 deaths per year resulted in an unclaimed body. ... Unclaimed bodies are distinct from unidentified bodies. Often, quite a bit of information is known and local officials are able to track down relatives. But many decline to take on the responsibility, sometimes citing the cost of a funeral and burial, which can easily run over \$7,500.”

“Across the country, big cities and small towns increasingly have become the funeral director of last resort.”

Locally, we know that towns in Western Massachusetts have wrestled with this problem. We participated in a meeting held in spring 2020, and hosted a discussion on the “Bodies in Limbo” problem in November 2020 (see <https://funeralsma.org/bodies-in-limbo> for information).



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This issue includes these articles, and more:

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Sunday, October 17, 2021 “Traditions Old & New: A Range of Rituals” (p. 1)**

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NOTE: Please notify us if you change your address, wish to unsubscribe, or wish to change your preference (print vs. electronic) for our newsletters (2 per year). Call 413-376-4747 or send email to fcawmass@gmail.com. THANK YOU!