

The Book Project: Victory Over Death

In July of 2020, Arrington Funeral Directors, Jackson, Tennessee published a book entitled *Victory Over Death: Funeral Messages of Hope & Healing*. Bob Arrington, president/founder of Arrington Funeral Directors and NFDA past president, had a dream of providing a practical ministry tool to those new to the ministry. Knowing that ministers receive very little training in conducting a funeral in their Bible college or seminary education, a retired pastor of 25+ years, Rev. Ron Hale was added to the staff as Minister of Church Outreach to help launch the book project.

Experienced local pastors from various denominations were invited to submit funeral messages for the book. Funeral home staff wrote chapters on: Death and Grief, The Pastor's Response When a Church Member Dies, and Advice from a Funeral Director to those Leading the Funeral Service. These chapters give step-by-step instructions to the pastor/lay leader in working with the Funeral Director and the family in planning and conducting the funeral service.

Over fifteen funeral messages were published by seasoned pastors/lay leaders. The family of Dr. Adrian Rogers (1931-2005), the longtime pastor of the 15,000 member Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, TN released two of his messages on death and dying for the book project. Dr. Logan Hampton, the president of Lane College, a historic minority college in Jackson, Tennessee submitted a funeral message. The book concludes with helpful chapters on: The Purposeful Committal Service and A Church Remembrance Service.

The book received notice in local newsprint, radio, and television outlets as well as nationally in *The Director Magazine* and *The American Funeral Director*. The area Christian bookstore hosted an event on a Saturday highlighting the release and offered a free copy to students studying for the ministry, lay leaders and pastors.

The book has also been a great way for our Minister of Church Outreach to visit with pastors with this gift and discover needs and hurts during the COVID-19 pandemic. With over 11,500 COVID-19 cases in the city of Jackson and Madison County, Tennessee and 243 related deaths, the ministry and stress of making the right decision at the right time has taken a toll on many ministers. Some have called this "decision fatigue." Therefore, the book became available at an extremely crucial moment. One pastor shared, "After you gave me the book, I was able to pull ideas from it the very next week."

Another pastor shared, “I’ve been a pastor of the same church for over 14 years. I have preached over 110 funerals. This book is a HUGE resource of help and ideas for specific needs. It is helpful in not repeating the same funeral message to many of the same attendees.”

When evaluating the project and the dream of such a book, we can all see how *Victory Over Death* is a valuable resource for those on the frontline line of caring for the sick, dying, and grieving.

This book is dedicated to the life and legacy of Frances Arrington Harper (1926-2019), the mother of Bob and his biggest supporter. Books can be ordered through Amazon.

2021 CUSTOM PHOTO CALENDARS

Reeves and Baskerville Funeral Homes consist of 4 physical locations in Coal City, Gardner, Morris and Wilmington, Illinois. We are located approximately 60 miles southwest of Chicago, and though not far from the urban and suburban area - continue to be relatively rural. All four locations are within a 20 mile radius, serving a total population of roughly 40,000 between all the communities and we serve on average 225 families.

When the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic hit, we like every other business were struck with increased call volumes, and difficulty in securing merchandise and product.

In July of 2020 we were notified by the vendor of our annual church calendars that because of the inability to secure the products and shut down of industry in Singapore, where our calendars were produced - they had to make the difficult decision to cancel all orders for 2021, and they had no alternative.

When we received this notification our initial instinct was to just not provide such calendars, which we have donated as promotional products for countless years prior. We then did look into alternate resources and companies, however they just were not the same quality as we were accustomed.

It was then that Matt Baskerville, our owner decided to take this situation on himself... What families always loved about our calendars in all years previous were the picturesque photography. For the Roman Catholic Church, it was also the content which included the church seasons, holy days, saints' feasts and seasonal/liturgical colors.

Matt acquired the "Catholic Calendar" and started putting together the content. It was much easier for the protestant churches because we could utilize a stock

calendar with legal holidays and observances. Most importantly however for both versions was the photography and monthly pictures, which adorned the calendars. That is when Matt started setting appointments with the local church. With iPhone in hand and his eye for photography, Matt went church to church taking photographs of the buildings, sanctuaries, stained glass windows and anything of interest from both Protestant and Catholic churches.

Within just a few days, Matt then purchased and downloaded a black customizable photo calendar, and proceeded to make personalized calendars for all of the churches. Once completed, he saved the calendars on a flash drive and just took it to a local printer, who proceeded to print the calendars on nice quality glossy paper, stapled them, and made grommet holes to hang them.

Perfect! The churches were literally overwhelmed with the calendars! We were able to print them as we needed them, which alleviated waste of excess calendars not taken, and there was a record number of calendars taken because they were personalized for each church.

We have never received so many thank you notes and acknowledgment cards for these calendars. Some of the notes truly heartwarming! Even with restrictions in place as 2021 rolled in, we had people calling the funeral homes asking for calendars to be mailed, and we had stacks available to pick up at the funeral homes.

At the end of the day, a negative situation could not have turned out more positive. We created what many people were calling a “Keepsake”; we gave work to a local printer, and overall it was a tremendous amazing public relations project. We even created non church calendars with just beautiful travel photos from Matt’s personal travels around the globe, which flew out the door.

The calendars were such a success that we were called by a parish out of our diocese asking if we could create calendars for their cluster of parishes. Same situation, the local funeral homes always provided them in the past, but couldn't come through for the same reasons we created them ourselves. We went on to create another 750 calendars for parishes not even in our service area, which again we received countless accolades.

As far as the expense for the calendars, we actually spent less doing the calendars ourselves, as we were not held to minimum orders. Our longtime previous vendor required we order a minimum of 100 calendars, and some churches only needed 50-75 because of the size of their congregation.

The project was literally so easy and cost effective, hence we have already started taking photos of the local churches as we are there for services. For our 2022 calendars we are excited to be able to provide all year round seasonal photos, and we have plans possibly to even do a calendar series for some church, maybe just focusing on windows including little blurbs about meanings and significance.



Vertin Munson Funeral Home, Wahpeton, ND

Vertin-Munson Funeral Home collaborated with Breckenridge United Methodist Church, Joseph Vertin and Sons Funeral Home, Essentia Health, Prairie St. John's, CHI Health at Home (Hospice), Wilkin County Children's Collaborative, the North Dakota Community Foundation, and the Very Reverend Dale Lagodinski to present Soul Shop, a training to equip leaders of faith communities to minister to four groups impacted by suicidal desperation: (1) those who are currently considering suicide, (2) those who are anxious that a family member or friend might be considering suicide, (3) those that have lost a loved one to suicide, and (4) those who have experienced suicidal thinking in the past but are no longer. The training also addressed the needs of mental health professionals, with the goal for all to "move from quiet desperation to an honest conversation about suicide".

Rationale: It is believed that the four groups noted above constitute a substantial percentage of members in nearly all faith communities. These people often suffer in silence because of the stigma and shame still associated with suicide.

Description: Soul Shop has been endorsed by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. A condensed version (two hours) of the workshop was held Wednesday evening, June 9, 2021, for those who were unable to attend the full day on Thursday, June 10. Thursday's seminar ran from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and both were led by Michelle Snyder, Director of Soul Shop. We were given many statistics:

- Only 60% of completed suicides were carried out by those with a major depressive disorder at the time of their deaths, while 90% had some treatable mental disorder at the time of death.
- Combat and non-combat veterans die by suicide at equal rates.
- 40% of those completing suicide are intoxicated at the time of death.
- 70% of suicides completed in America are by white males ages 45-55.
- There are likely 25% more suicides than reported (auto "accidents", drug overdoses, etc.), and coroners may list cause of death as something other than suicide so that families can collect life insurance.
- More suicides occur during April than any other month.

It was stressed that suicides are carried out by those with a lack of social connection and feelings of hopelessness, so we would do well to create community.

We can use the word CALL to remind us to commit, ask, listen, and lead.

We were trained in starting a desperation conversation and did exercises with partners to practice new skills.

We talked about the 5 S's of Suicidal Desperation: stress, shame, sickness, signal, and shunning, and learned about being proactive in creating a soul safe community.

Benefits to funeral home and staff, to families, and the community at large: One of every three persons (one out of two in any congregation) has experienced the suicide of someone close enough that it has impacted their lives; therefore it is important for all in the culture to learn all we can about suicide and create a culture where we can safely have the conversation

Implementation by community/church groups: All planning was done locally by the Breckenridge Methodist Church, Vertin-Munson and Joseph Vertin and Sons Funeral Homes, and Prairie St. John's Psychiatric Hospital. This included lining up the speaker, advertising, securing a venue and vendors, lunch/snacks, invitations to 40-50 churches, collecting donations, and paying bills.