

Passare

Understanding Cultural Diversity at End-of-Life

eBook #15

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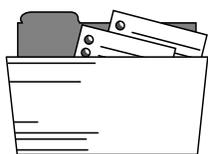
It's often said that appreciating differences in others helps us better understand ourselves, and that this is what ultimately unites humankind. Nobel Peace Prize winner Kofi Annan said, "We may have different religions, different languages and different colored skin, but we all belong to the same human race." The same is true for End-of-Life. Our cultures, ethnicities and faiths may differ, yet End-of-Life is something we will all experience.

As part of our eBook series, Passare™ shares guidance to help you explore and understand how different cultures observe and honor End-of-Life. Passare helps guide you through one of life's most important passages.



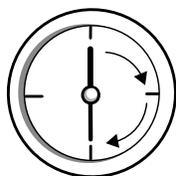
You Will Learn About:

1. What is Cultural Diversity?
2. The Importance of Cultural Diversity
3. Cultural Diversity at End-of-Life
4. How Different Cultures Manage End-of-Life Services
5. Talking About Cultural Diversity with Loved Ones
6. Summary



The eBook includes:

- A. Questions About Cultural Diversity at End-of-Life
- B. Culturally Diverse End-of-Life Customs



Estimated Time Required:

15 minutes

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What is Cultural Diversity?

To understand cultural diversity, it's important to recognize how culture and ethnicity create diversity. Culture refers to a particular group's values, beliefs and customs. Ethnicity refers to one's self-identified group. That group may include sub-groups of people that share common beliefs and values, or racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, political or social backgrounds. Age, gender, socioeconomic class, geographical location and physical appearance also influence the experiences and backgrounds of individuals and groups. So *cultural diversity* is the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a society.

The Importance of Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is important because it affects everyone. Each of us "identifies with" or belongs to multiple classifications or groups of people that influence the way we view the world around us. This includes how we view life-and End-of-Life.

Cultural connoisseur and author Stephen R. Covey said, "Strength lies in differences, not in similarities." Diversity provides an opportunity for each of us to be aware of those things that set us apart. Diversity allows us to understand and accept others for who they are and how they view the full scope of life experiences, including how they approach and honor End-of-Life. For example, Buddhist and Catholic faiths differ greatly in their observances, practices and End-of-Life events. Yet a practicing Buddhist may want to comfort a grieving Catholic friend or co-worker and attend final services for their deceased loved one. Gaining insight into Catholic rituals would naturally help bridge the cultural and religious differences.

Cultural Diversity at End-of-Life

- Talking about End-of-Life
- Decision-making about End-of-Life healthcare

Talking About End-of-Life

In some cultures, talking about End-of-Life or death is taboo. In others, it is encouraged. Different cultures have their own customs and beliefs that guide their choices to discuss or not discuss End-of-Life matters.

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The following paragraphs provide a broad perspective of how African, Asian, North American and South American cultures may consider talking about End-of-Life matters. There are of course variances to any generalization about cultural views.

African Cultures

Some African cultures believe it is harmful to speak about death. For example, some Somalis consider it cruel for a healthcare provider to tell a terminally-ill family member that he or she is at End-of-Life.

Asian Cultures

Many Asian cultures actively protect dying family members from knowing their prognosis. For many Southeast Asian families, the dying family member is not told about a terminal diagnosis or illness because they believe that talking about death might hasten it, or that doing so is disrespectful to the soon-to-be ancestor.

In Cambodian cultures many families prefer to discuss End-of-Life issues with the physician, protecting the patient from any knowledge of the prognosis.

Traditional Filipinos may request that the family member not be told he or she is nearing End-of-Life due to concern for the person's loss of hope and the belief that only a deity can decide a person's fate.

In Middle Eastern and Muslim cultures, talking about End-of-Life is taboo since it is believed that birth and End-of-Life are predestined by the deity Allah.

North American Cultures

Though individual traditions and customs vary greatly, discussing End-of-Life is acceptable in most North American cultures. In most Western societies, independence is encouraged and patient autonomy in healthcare is supported. Talking about End-of-Life is commonly at the discretion of the ailing loved one and according to their specific wishes.

Perspectives on talking about death vary among sub-cultures. For example, among the Zuni Native American tribe, speaking of a person's pending death is unacceptable practice because traditional beliefs hold that it might invite sadness, bad luck or hasten the demise of an ailing loved one.

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South American Cultures

Some South American, Latin American or Hispanic cultures believe it is harmful to tell patients about terminal or serious illnesses or to discuss End-of-Life. In these cultures, typically only the family unit should discuss End-of-Life.

Decision-Making About End-of-Life Healthcare

Collective decision-making is common in many cultures. This contrasts with the American value of autonomy and an individual's right to make their own decisions about healthcare and End-of-Life.

African Cultures

Some Somalis believe that healthcare decisions should involve the whole family, with a male family member as the final decision-maker and spokesperson, and the father as the bearer of any serious news to the patient.

In some traditional Ethiopian cultures, illness may be attributed to deities, destiny, nature, demonic spirits, or a breach of social taboos or vows. Ethiopian medicine relies on magical and supernatural beliefs, such as the belief that terminal illnesses are result of evil spirits. Some families may avoid disclosing serious illnesses for fear of being shunned. Religious elders often make decisions about final healthcare.

Asian Cultures

Many Asian cultures, including Pacific Islanders and Koreans, expect the eldest son to make the final decisions about a parent's End-of-Life care. Family and extended family ties are also very important to the Filipino and Hawaiian communities, with the extended family participating in the discussions and decision-making for the seriously ill family member.

In traditional Asian Indian cultures, Hindus and Sikhs believe in reincarnation, that the body dies, but the soul is immortal. When End-of-Life is near, the father, husband, or other responsible person decides whether to tell the ailing loved one and then informs all relatives and friends. Traditional Hindus and Sikhs believe that disease is due to karma, the result of one's actions in past lives. They may also attribute illness to body imbalances, which create toxins that can accumulate in weaker areas of the body, resulting in serious illnesses. They often prefer End-of-Life to take place at home, where they may perform religious rituals to facilitate a soul's reincarnation to another life.

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In Middle Eastern cultures among Muslims, a religious leader may be needed to facilitate the conversation with the male family leader and the healthcare provider about End-of-Life care. Reciting from the Qur'an at a patient's bedside ensures that the final words the person hears are from the Qur'an. Prayers allow the person's soul to enter paradise at End-of-Life. Muslims pray towards Mecca, so placing a patient's bed to face East towards Mecca may be an important part of End-of-Life care.

North American Cultures

North American and European cultures generally favor a shared approach to End-of-Life decision-making by physicians and family members. Physicians are expected to honor a patient's treatment preferences and to inform the family of the patient's clinical condition and prognosis. Typically, the ultimate responsibility for End-of-Life decisions is shared between the physician and the patient or family.

South American Cultures

In many traditional South American cultures, religious beliefs often influence perceptions about End-of-Life decision-making and care. Roman Catholics may request a visit by a priest or the hospital chaplain to receive the "Sacrament of Anointing the Sick." Rosary beads and religious medallions are often kept near the patient. If the patient passes away before the priest arrives, a sacrament takes place before the remains are removed. The elderly especially may wish to die at home. Some Latin Americans believe that the spirit may become lost in a hospital and should therefore pass away at home.

Advance Healthcare Directives (AHDs)

Key discussion topics when discussing End-of-Life healthcare include completing final directives and how a patient wants to manage pain.

An AHD is a legal document that states your healthcare preferences if you become unable to communicate for yourself. An AHD allows you to appoint a Healthcare Proxy who will make medical decisions if you are unable to. A trusted family member, friend or advisor who understands and will protect your personal values, cultural and spiritual beliefs and best interests is recommended to serve as a Healthcare Proxy.

Although ethnic groups differ in their views and use of AHDs, in general, Caucasian and Asian Americans may use AHDs more often than other cultures.

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Some traditional Korean-Americans support AHDs, but may be concerned that they could create inter-generational conflict if their eldest son disapproves. Cultural traditions that involve the concept of karma may be at odds with AHDs.

For Muslims, life-saving treatment that becomes futile is no longer mandatory. The Islamic Medical Association of North America encourages a living will with Do Not Resuscitate orders if brain death occurs.

Pain Management

Culture may affect a person's response to pain, both in meaning and expression. North American cultures generally favor the Western model of healthcare, where families often use palliative care and hospice care services to manage advanced illness at End-of-Life. Hospice care fits well for cultures where dying at home is valued.

Palliative and hospice care focus on relieving suffering and improving quality of life by providing physical, emotional, and spiritual support to the unique needs of each patient. Hospice specializes in care for people in the last stages of a terminal illness, and provides grief support for surviving loved ones. Hospice services are provided in the home or at healthcare facilities. Individuals may be visited by clergy and prayed for by members of a religious congregation. For information about cultural diversity and palliative care visit: www.culturaldiversity.com/au/resources/practice-guides/palliative-care, and www.hospicefoundation.org/hic-diversity to learn more about cultural diversity in hospice care.

Culture may influence the initiative a patient takes in asking for pain medication. For example, Cambodian culture values an indirect communication style, avoiding public display of emotion and confrontation, so the patient may wait to be asked if medication is needed rather than asking directly for pain medication. For many Somalis, the concept of autonomy is foreign, so they may wait for the healthcare provider to ask if the patient is experiencing pain.

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Take a few minutes to answer these questions.

1. What ethnic, socioeconomic or groups do you most identify with?
2. How do your close friends' or relative's cultural customs and beliefs differ from yours?
3. How do your cultural views influence how you think and decide End-of-Life matters?

How Different Cultures Manage End-of-Life Services

Awareness and sensitivity about culturally diverse traditions, customs and beliefs help ensure that a loved one's unique End-of-Life experience is respected and honored.

End of Life Events and Customs by Culture and Religion

End-of-Life events and rituals often include cultural and religious or spiritual elements. This section provides an introductory guide to help you understand different End-of-Life customs and traditions according to cultural or religious beliefs.

Asian Services

Traditional Asian culture teaches that a loved one who is buried without the proper customs may bring bad luck to the family. Cremation among traditional Asians is rare.

Final services consider how traditional the family is, age, social and marital status. Traditional Asian services are held at the home of the deceased. Wreaths, flowers and a picture of the deceased often sit atop the coffin. White or yellow mums are appreciated. White chrysanthemums are symbolic of lamentation and grief. Yellow chrysanthemums are also a traditional End-of-Life flower.

In Asian cultures, the deceased's family wears white to symbolize death during the final services. No jewelry is worn. Dark-colored clothing is increasingly acceptable at most modern Asian services. The color red is forbidden since it is the color of happiness.

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Final service attendees are expected to light incense and bow to the family as a sign of respect and sympathy. Typically there is a donation box and monetary offerings are appreciated.

At the burial site everyone must turn away as the coffin is moved from the hearse into the grave. Once the coffin is lowered, the guests and family members will turn around and place a handful of earth into the grave.

As a sign of respect and mourning, family members may wear a piece of cloth as an outward sign of grief over the next 100 days.

Buddhist Services

Buddhists believe they will return in another life and should prepare for death calmly and thoughtfully. The family and monks may wash and shroud the deceased's remains. Monks recite prayers and burn incense. Due to belief in rebirth, Buddhists rarely allow organ donations or autopsy.

White flowers are the traditional Buddhist flower of mourning and may be sent to the family as a condolence offering. Sending red flowers or gifts of food are not considered appropriate for Buddhist services. A monetary donation to the family or a designated charity in the deceased loved one's name is appropriate.

At the viewing, candles and incense burn until the deceased loved one is moved to the cemetery or crematorium. Visitors should greet the family and offer their condolences, then go to the casket and bow. They may then either stay for a moment of silence or discreetly exit.

Hindu Services

A Hindu priest conducts the final service with family members. The final ceremony followed by cremation is typically held within 24 hours after death. Mourners often dress casually in simple white clothes and arrive empty-handed. They do not bring flowers or other gifts to the final services. Guests should not exchange greetings with the official mourners, but instead nod or offer a brief embrace in sympathy. Flower garlands and mixed seasonal sprays of flowers may be laid in the open casket. Guests are expected to view the deceased loved one's remains.

Ten days after death a ceremony is held at the home of the deceased to liberate the soul for its ascent into Heaven. Visitors to the home are expected to bring an offering of fruit.

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Hispanic Services

Hispanic final services often follow the Roman Catholic faith and include a typical Sunday mass or church service. The wake may include mariachi music, overnight visitations and a family feast. Floral tributes are welcome. A simple bouquet or tribute in the shape of a cross, or lighting a candle in the church is an acceptable condolence gift to grieving loved ones.

Grieving loved ones often place personal items and gifts inside the casket to accompany the deceased to the afterworld. Burial follows the ceremony. Family members and friends often gather to eat, reminisce and comfort each other following the burial.

Mexican and Central American cultural beliefs hold that a loved one's spirit lives on once their body has passed away. This includes the belief that there are specific days during the year when the spirit of deceased loved ones return to walk among the living. Families may pray to them and ask their spirit for guidance and support.

Jewish Services

Some Jewish final services are held exclusively graveside while others occur at the synagogue or a funeral home and then proceed to the cemetery. Traditionally, burial takes place within 24 hours. Jewish final services cannot take place on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath or Shabbat, or on most Jewish holidays.

A rabbi performs the final service. Dark-colored clothing is acceptable to express grief. Men wear a head covering known as a yarmulke, which is provided by the funeral home.

Jewish tradition teaches that among the most important "mitzvot," or commandments is to help deceased loved ones find their final resting place. Placing earth in the grave of a loved one is an important part of the service and a powerful act of love and devotion.

For seven days after the burial, the immediate family sits in mourning or "Shiva" at home. Family and friends may make a Shiva call to pay their respects to the family. Desserts, fruit and kosher food baskets are traditionally given or sent to the home. Flowers and charitable donations are fitting memorial gifts, yet flowers are not considered appropriate for a Shiva call.

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Mormon End-of-Life Services: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Mormon final services are typically held within one week of death. The final service is typically 60 to 90 minutes in length, and may take place in a church, funeral home or at graveside. The bishop of the deceased's congregation typically conducts the service. Use of a cross or crucifix is not permitted because Latter-day Saints believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. There may be an open casket if the family chooses.

It is appropriate to visit or contact the family to offer condolences before and after the funeral service. Non-Mormon guests may participate in the funeral service. Modest, respectful attire is appropriate. No head covering is required. Guests typically attend the burial that follows the final service.

Floral tributes are encouraged and appropriate for a Mormon ceremony, yet condolences in the shape of a cross are not considered an appropriate condolence offering.

Muslim Final Services

According to Islamic law, or sharia, the deceased loved one's remains should be buried as soon as possible after the time of death. This means that final service planning and preparations begin immediately after death. A local Islamic community organization should be contacted immediately. They will help make arrangements for the final service and burial, assist the family in identifying an appropriate venue and coordinate with the service provider.

Organ donation is generally acceptable for Muslims, as it follows the Qur'an's teaching, "Whosoever saves the life of one person it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind."

Customs vary as to whether it is appropriate to send or display flowers at an Islamic funeral. Some interpretations of the Islamic make gifts of flowers unsuitable. Other interpretations believe that sending flowers is appropriate. Ask a local Muslim religious leader or the family if flowers are appropriate. If so, fragrant flowers such as roses may be given. Palm branches, other greens or individual flowers are often placed on the grave at a Muslim burial service.

Protestant Customs: Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian and Baptist

The Protestant final ceremony emphasizes the afterlife and celebrates the deceased loved one's life through testimonials and remembrances. A minister typically conducts the service with participation from family and friends. Funeral guests dress respectfully and conservatively, although most people no longer wear traditional black clothing.

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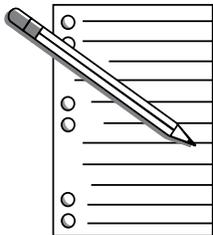
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Roman Catholic Final Services

In the Catholic faith, final service rituals originate from deep-rooted history and tradition. Respectful and somber floral arrangements may be sent to the funeral home or to the family's residence. Monetary donations are appropriate and may be sent in the deceased's name to their preferred charity.

Before the final service, Catholics hold a Vigil, sometimes called a Wake. Candles and flowers decorate the Wake, the funeral service and the burial site. It is customary to make a brief visit and spend a few moments in private prayer and then to pay respects personally to the deceased's family members.

A priest performs the final church service or mass, also called the Requiem, in a Catholic church. At the Mass, lighting a candle to honor the deceased helps comfort the mourners. After the burial, family and friends gather at the home of a family member to share a meal and remembrances of their deceased loved one.



Take a few minutes to answer these questions.

1. How does your family's culture or religion honor deceased loved ones?
2. If more than one culture or religion is represented in your family, how will you manage your own or your loved one's final services?
3. Where can you learn about your close friends' and family member's different cultural or religious End-of-Life rituals?

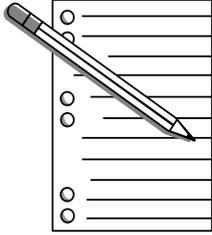
Talking About Cultural Diversity with Loved Ones

Few things are more personal than making decisions about your own End-of-Life care and services. Having a conversation with your loved ones about cultural differences and your respective choices encourages understanding and mutual trust. It's important to be sensitive and respectful of others' cultural views, even if they differ from yours. Everyone is entitled to his or her own End-of-Life choices. You can learn more about cultural diversity at End-of-Life by asking healthcare or hospice professionals, religious and spiritual leaders, ethnic or cultural organizations and funeral service providers for guidance.

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Take a few minutes to answer these questions.

1. Which End-of-Life beliefs, customs and traditions are most important to you and your loved ones?
2. What service options does your funeral service provider offer that support your cultural traditions or customs?

Summary

The anonymous quote, “Diversity is the one true thing we have in common,” is a reminder that appreciating different cultures keeps our world interesting and helps us achieve personal growth.

However you personally choose to think about your End-of-Life, whether it is a ceremony or series of events, religious or personal in nature, we hope this eBook gives you insights, guidance and resources to help you explore and understand how different cultures think about, plan and honor the passing of a loved one.

Please go to: www.passare.com for expert resources on many End-of-Life Management topics.

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Understanding Cultural Diversity at End-Of-Life

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Why is cultural diversity an important End-of-Life consideration?

Simply stated, cultural diversity is the existence of multiple cultural or ethnic groups within a society. Each one of us “identifies with” or belongs to many different groups of people that influence the way we view our world. This includes how we view life and End-Of-Life.

Awareness and sensitivity about culturally diverse traditions, customs and beliefs helps ensure that our own and our loved one’s unique End-of-Life experience is respected and honored.

2. How does my own culture affect my End-of-Life decisions?

Your culture will likely influence how you think and feel about your final living arrangements and healthcare, including care choices, perspectives on pain and suffering, and hospice and palliative care.

Culture also plays a major role in determining your religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, and how those may impact your decisions about rituals surrounding death, dying and End-of-Life services.

3. How do I ensure that my End-of-Life cultural preferences are honored?

We suggest you complete an Advance Healthcare Directive (AHD) and appoint a Healthcare Proxy. An AHD is a legal document that states your healthcare preferences if you become unable to communicate for yourself.

An AHD allows you to appoint a Healthcare Proxy who will make medical decisions if you are unable to. Appoint a trusted family member, friend or advisor who understands and will protect your personal values, cultural and spiritual beliefs and best interests.

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4. My elderly parent does not have an AHD or Healthcare Proxy; how do I honor cultural preferences for End-of-Life care?

When there is no AHD or will, discuss religious, cultural and spiritual beliefs with a healthcare and/or hospice provider. Many hospice programs provide culturally diverse guidance and support. Next, discuss with other close family members and trusted friends how to best honor their cultural preferences. Check with religious or spiritual organizations and leaders that are important to your loved one.

5. What should I know about attending a Jewish funeral service?

When attending a Jewish funeral service, wear dark-colored clothing to express grief. Men wear a head covering known as a yarmulke, which is provided by the funeral home.

Jewish tradition teaches that one of the most important “mitzvoth,” or commandments you can perform is helping deceased loved ones to their final resting place. Placing earth in the grave of a loved one is an important part of the service and a powerful act of love.

For seven days following the burial, the immediate family sits in mourning or “Shiva” in their home. Family and friends may come to pay respects. Desserts, fruit and kosher food baskets may be given or sent to the home. Charitable donations are acceptable memorial gifts, yet flowers are not considered appropriate for a Shiva call.

6. Where can I learn more about End-of-Life cultural diversity?

You can learn more about cultural diversity at End-Of-Life by asking healthcare professionals, religious and spiritual organizations, ethnic or cultural organizations and funeral service providers for guidance.

You may also visit: www.culturaldiversity.com/au/resources/practice-guides/palliative-care for information about how cultural diversity affects palliative care, and www.hospicefoundation.org/hic-diversity to learn more about cultural diversity in Hospice care.

Go to: www.passare.com for expert resources and information about cultural diversity and other important End-of-Life topics.

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Culturally Diverse End-of-Life Customs

There are many fascinating differences in how different cultures and religions observe and honor End-of-Life. Here are some customs and traditions to know:

Buddhist Services

- Final services are often held at the home of the deceased
- White and yellow chrysanthemums are symbolic of lamentation and grief
- The deceased's family wears white during the final services; red is forbidden
- Attendees light incense and bow to the family to show respect and sympathy
- Monetary donations are appropriate condolence offerings

Hindu Services

- A Hindu priest conducts the final service within 24 hours after death
- Guests are expected to view the deceased loved one's remains
- Mourners often dress casually in simple white clothes and arrive empty-handed
- Guests may nod or may offer a brief embrace in sympathy
- A ceremony is held ten days after death to liberate the soul; visitors bring fruit

Mormon Services

- Final services are typically held within one week of death
- The service is typically 60 to 90 minutes long; a bishop conducts the ceremony
- Floral tributes are encouraged and appropriate for the final service
- Non-Mormon guests may participate in the funeral service
- Guests are expected to attend the burial following the final service

Muslim Final Services

- Islamic law decrees that burial should take place immediately after death
- A local Islamic community organization should arrange the service
- Ask a local Muslim religious leader or the family if flowers are appropriate
- If approved, fragrant flowers like roses may be given as a condolence offering
- Palm branches or individual flowers are placed on the grave at the burial service

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Protestant-based Services: Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian and Baptist

- Final services emphasize the afterlife
- Final services celebrate the deceased's life with testimonials and remembrances
- A minister conducts the service with participation from family and friends
- Guests dress conservatively yet are no longer required to wear black clothing
- Friends and family are expected to attend the visitation and final service
- Condolence cards and flowers may be sent to the family's home or funeral home
- Food, donations or other condolence offerings may be sent to the family's home

Roman Catholic Final Services

- Before the final service, Catholics hold a Vigil, also called a Wake
- Candles and flowers decorate the Wake, funeral service and burial site
- Mourners typically pay respects personally to the deceased's family members
- Mourners briefly view the deceased, then spend a few moments in prayer
- A priest performs the final service or mass, also called the Requiem, in a church
- At the Mass, lighting a candle to honor the deceased comforts the mourners
- Conservative floral arrangements may be sent to the funeral or family home
- Before the final service, Catholics hold a Vigil, also called a Wake
- Candles and flowers decorate the Wake, funeral service and burial site
- Mourners typically pay respects personally to the deceased's family members
- Monetary donations may be sent in the deceased's name to a preferred charity
- After the burial, family and friends gather to share a meal and remembrances

Go to: www.passare.com for expert resources and information about cultural diversity and other important End-of-Life topics.

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From birth to death, life is a series of passages. Only Passare allows you to connect and collaborate with your family any time, anywhere to easily explore and plan for End-of-Life.

With Passare, you can engage with trusted End-of-Life experts and relevant resources that guide you through one of life's most important passages and ensure that the specific needs and wishes of you and your family are honored. Please visit www.passare.com for more information on how we can help simplify End-of Life Management.

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