

**THIS LETTER WAS SENT TO THE ANGLICAN AND CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOPS OF  
MELBOURNE AND THE MODERATOR OF THE UNITING CHURCH**

13-3-97

I write to you as the President of the Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants on a matter of mutual interest.

For some years now our members have been complementing the clergy in their ministry to bereaved families by conducting funerals for people who have no affiliation with a church.

I feel sure that you will be aware that our members have aspired to the highest professional standards in their service of families. Normally they will visit families and gather a great deal of information from them. Subsequently the celebrant carefully prepares an appropriate ceremony, the centre point of which is usually a sensitively written eulogy, which often involves hours of work, and which is carefully checked with the family to ensure its accuracy. After the funeral, the celebrant gives to the family a completed copy of the ceremony as presented.

In the judgement of our Federation an appropriate fee for the service that we currently offer is \$220, and this is what members charge.

Unfortunately, the situation sometimes arises where the clergy are albeit unfairly perceived to be undercutting this appropriate fee. We see nothing inappropriate in the clergy's charging only a very small fee (or perhaps no fee at all) for true members of their congregation. Indeed this principle may even apply to families who have not been active members of the church for some time but whose basic faith suggests that a church funeral is required. However, it is sometimes clear that families who ask in the first instance for a civil celebrant are influenced to settle for a member of the clergy when it is explained to them that this would simply be cheaper.

Our Federation has been wondering how this unhappy situation might be avoided in the future. Amongst the possible solutions, the following may be considered:

- a) The normal fee to be paid for clergy (which has stood at \$100 for some years not) could be raised to a more realistic figure. (We understand that the Orthodox churches have already done this, and that they now suggest \$120.)

b) Clergy could be encouraged to form with families unknown to them a professional relationship not dissimilar to that which a civil celebrant forms. Hence they might take the time to visit the family and get to know them and devise a funeral that is appropriate to the family's needs. For each service, we believe that \$220 would be the appropriate fee.

Perhaps there are other ways we can ensure that clergy and civil celebrants can continue to work in harmony with each other to ensure that bereaved families are served in the best possible way. We would like to assure you that our ideal is to complement the clergy in a spirit of mutual respect and co-operation.

FOR CATHOLICS ONLY

Perhaps you would be happy to refer this matter to the Senate of Priests who would have day to day knowledge of the issues we have raised and who would appreciate the opportunity to recommend any appropriate action.

Yours sincerely,

Dally Messenger

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