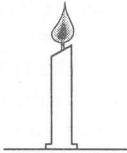




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# Celebrations

## Newsletter No. 24 - December 1997

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### National Conference: 25th Anniversary Celebration

As this goes to press no firm decision have been made by Attorney General, Daryl Williams, and the Attorney General's Department. I personally made a visit to Canberra on December 2, regarding these matters.

They are the only ones who can effectively organise an all embracing National Conference and 25th Anniversary Celebration. But now there is a tangible prospect of a double dissolution on the Wik issue, and a new election - anything might happen to anyone and anybody. A corollary to the Survey has been a suggested Conference to discuss the final conclusions which come from it and at the same time celebrate the 25th Anniversary of our program's foundation. The official date is July 19, 1998 - the day on which **Lois D'Arcy** was appointed in 1973. **Clem Dick** of the Department is certainly working on this, with ourselves and with other colleague celebrant organisations. We need to give the processes a bit more time.

My best guess is that nothing will happen until the dust settles - perhaps not before August 1998.

The bottom line is that, in the end all celebrants of goodwill should

### The Survey - a Great Opportunity!

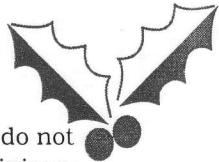
By now you will all have received copies of *The Survey* from the Attorney General's Department. The first thing to remember is that it is a discussion paper. Members are urged to seize this opportunity to encourage a productive leap forward in secular celebrancy. It is a wonderful chance we have to advise the government, not necessary about what we do, but what we know ought to be done. Some of us have got into bad habits and comfort zones. We don't need to defend these. There are reasons for it. But at least let our colleagues and successors improve themselves, educate themselves.

The relevant question in each section of the survey is - what is best for Australian as a Nation, what brings the greatest happiness and psychological strength to our clients, what contributes most to beauty and stability within our society and our culture, what respects the human and cultural rights of others? Those who fill in the survey from their own self

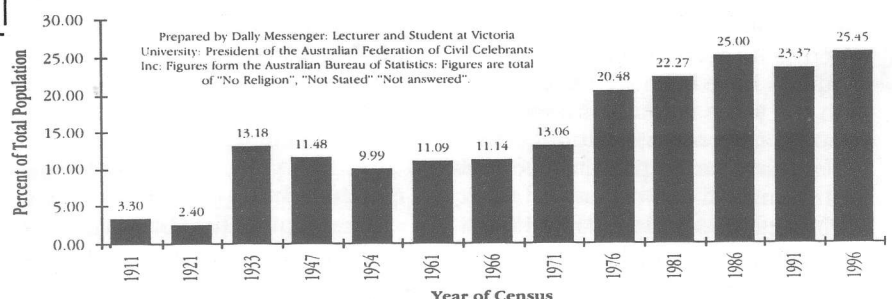
interested comfort zone do not deserve to have their opinions seriously considered.

Your Federation stands for what is best for the Australian Community, in the conviction that this ultimately is what is best for the celebrant as well. We believe good ceremonies are important in people's lives, that good ceremonies have good personal social and cultural effects, that to achieve this celebrants need to be inspired educated and trained, committed to high standards of service to the public and strict observance of codes of efficiency and ethics. Members should express opinions which achieve these ends.

It seems to me that no one has anything to fear from this Survey. Some feel threatened but they should not be. Members are familiar with our preoccupations on pursuing excellence in ceremonies, of understanding our cultural role, of giving freedom of choice, of having adequate encouragement and training in this office.



*Civil Celebrant Constituency: The Graph shows the growth in the number of people who declare themselves to be of No Religion. The last Census shows that they are the second largest group after Roman Catholics (29%). They are predominantly the younger generation. The actual figure is much greater as commentators are agreed that many who declare themselves a member of religious group often have no connection with it at all.*



Cont. p. 2

# The Real Truth about Funeral Directors

There are some wonderful people out there in Funeral Director land but the big picture is not that good. We face the perennial problem of standards and fees. The Funeral Service which people really want is one that is well prepared and checked. We are talking here of between five to fourteen hours work. For any contract work the lowest I hear of is \$25 per hour. The normal is about \$60 per hour but for professionally difficult work, we are talking about \$130 to \$300 per hour and more.

A contract fee is not what the contractor (e.g. celebrant) gets. The contractor's net income is between a half and third of the gross fee. Let us be conservative and say that the average Federation standard funeral takes 10 hours to travel to and from, to prepare, check, and deliver. To earn the *minimum* wage the Funeral Celebrant must gross \$800 per week. To earn the *average* wage the Funeral Celebrant must gross at least \$1200 per week.

At our guideline fee of \$220 this means averaging 4 to 6 funerals a week. Some of our members do this and do it well. They provide funerals as well prepared as any in the world, and we are proud of them for lifting the standard to this level.

As for myself, I have officiated at three and four in a week and have been emotionally wrecked. I have seen good celebrants leave this work because, satisfying as it is, in the end they suffer from "burn out" and have to give it away. Others

stay within the parameters of our standard but they take every short cut they can, as part of the personal struggle for survival.

The cost of a funeral varies between \$2000 and \$6000. One funeral director advertises the average at \$4500. Most of them see the cake as being this size and any increasing proportion which goes to the celebrant, or anyone else, means that they will get less of this cake. They cannot, in a highly competitive industry risk this. But we know that the ceremony is what matters most to people and it is where, therefore, the most important money should be spent.

The support is there in some enlightened quarters but in other places the opposition to our place under the sun is not very subtle. Some Funeral Directors have appointed their own "Funeral Celebrants". In one state every member of staff at the parlour is called a "Funeral Celebrant"! There are some exceptional Funeral Directors who do give the ceremony primacy of place, some of them are our members, but for most the ceremony is a small item, viewed small and paid small — the money is elsewhere.

Your Federation Committee has discussed this on a number of occasions. We are conscious that we have pioneered prepared personal funerals in this country, and indeed the world, but the industry (always with the exceptions) gives us little recognition, in fact, positively cuts

us out in all sorts of subtle ways.

What is the answer? How can the public, our clients, get what they really want, the professionally prepared funeral ceremony that is most appropriate to their needs?

Only when celebrants exercise their power and take charge. Every celebrant should have their clients on a data base and circularise them with the advice that when someone dies in a family *the Celebrant should be contacted first*. Then the celebrant should contact the chosen Funeral Director who understands the Celebrant's role and appreciates it. The celebrant should negotiate the cost of the funeral ceremony with the family directly. In short, we should seek out, support and recommend the Funeral Directors who support and recommend us — and treat us fairly.

As for myself I charge \$85 per hour. The last four funerals at which I have officiated have cost an average of \$1000 celebrant fee. The families have been well satisfied because this hourly rate (a low one by professional standards) has enabled me to spend all the time that was necessary to do the job properly. The Funeral Director lost nothing by the way - a good ceremony reflected well upon them and always will.

It amounts to this — your network of clients is replacing the religious parish of former times — your clients should be informed of the position and understand it fully.

Dally Messenger

Members will find this graph interesting. It shows the increased intensity of competition since 1987.

## Number of weddings performed each year each per Independent Civil Celebrant

These figures bring into account terminations i.e. resignations, deaths, and revocations

