



## **Funeral ripoffs, a diva and a great teacher.(organizations that provide information for affordable funeral services; other brief items)(Brief Article)**



*National Catholic Reporter; 5/28/1999; Farrell, Michael J.*

Because life is imperfect, we accept it as a given that we will be routinely ripped off in various ways from birth to death. Of these, the one that bothers me most is at the death end of the spectrum. It is no secret that exorbitant prices and fantastic profits are the rule rather than the exception in the funeral industry.

Jessica Mitford first blew the whistle back in 1963 with *The American Way of Death*. The most tireless crusader of the moment is Fr. Henry Wasielewski of Tempe, Ariz. For many years he worked to expose the steep charges of funeral directors, the taking advantage of bereaved people at a vulnerable time. NCR has reported on Wasielewski's activities and the funeral industry numerous times, including Oct. 30, 1987; Sept. 13, 1996; June 6, 1997; and Jan. 30, 1998.

The statistics on pricing are so blatant, the anecdotal evidence about guiltifying loved ones into overspending so constant, one would have expected an uproar if not a rebellion leading to reform. It turns out, the hardest people to galvanize are the bereaved. Wasielewski created a Web site to make it easier for people to compare prices and get better deals.

Then he established The Interfaith Funeral Information Committee. Now he has prepared a leaflet. He would like every household to have a copy the bereaved could pull down from the shelf when the time arrives. "People don't get ripped off because they are bereaved," he said in 1996. "They get ripped off because they are ignorant."

There's no reason to be ignorant any longer. Wasielewski, a raging pedagogue, has loaded the four pages with information. Taking the crusade a stage further, he has founded the Good Shepherd Funeral Program, which offers complete funerals in the state of Arizona. Good Shepherd, furthermore, will help people in other states who wish to start similar programs.

The leaflet does not deal with vague generalities; it's full of specific prices and has pictures of a

dozen popular caskets. For example, there is the "Last Supper" casket, which Good Shepherd sells for \$511. That is \$200 above wholesale price, which sounds hefty enough, but Wasielewski points out that most mortuaries charge from \$1,000 to \$3,000 above wholesale. And that's just the coffin; some charge \$4,000 to \$10,000 for a funeral.

The leaflet also lists the four most important consumer points media should include in every article:

1. Know what is a fair price (\$1,400-\$2,200 total) funeral and casket; then phone mortuaries until you find a fair-priced one -- regardless of its distance.
2. Have viewing and all services in your church so that you're not forced to use a high-priced mortuary nearby. (He notes that some clergy are promoting this, though it is also a fact of life that many clergy are uncomfortably cozy with the local undertaker, for seemingly mutual benefit.)
3. Don't buy costly, fraudulent, "protective-seal" caskets.
4. Don't buy prepay plans.

For 24-hour advice, the leaflet adds, or for printed materials -- including the new leaflet "How Much Should Funerals with Beautiful Cakes Cost?" -- phone the committee in Phoenix at (602) 253-6814; or write to 2535 E. University, #2, Tempe AZ 85281; or check the Web site: [www.xroads.com/~funerals](http://www.xroads.com/~funerals)

Our Feb. 26 cover story featured mezzo-soprano Barbara Dever whose singing career ranges from the world's opera houses to Sacred Heart Parish in Camden, N.J.

Now comes a CD called "Coming Home: Barbara Dever in Concert." This concert was not at the Met or Palermo but in St. Columcille Parish Church in the village of Aughnaccliffe, in the very middle of Ireland, the parish where Dever's Camden pastor, Fr. Michael Doyle, grew up.

In a program note Doyle writes of preparations for the big event in local North Longford townlands, especially the issue whether to schedule it before or after milking time. They opted for after: "Cows and milkers would be more content."

The program was modeled on the concerts of famed tenor John McCormack. Dever, who is blessed with an amazing voice, began with such religious pieces as "Ave Maria" and "He's Got the Whole World," then moved on to several Irish favorites, from "The Rose of Tralee" to "She Moved Through the Fair" to "Down by the Salley Gardens," written by W.B. Yeats. Finally, she sang several operatic pieces in foreign languages but came back home to end with "An Irish

Blessing." They hadn't heard the likes in Aughnaclyffe for a very long time.

For information about the CD, write to Box 372, Pitman NJ 08071 or by e-mail to [mezzodever@aol.com](mailto:mezzodever@aol.com)

You want to know how you know a good teacher? I'll tell you. A good teacher is one remembered years later by her or his students.

Congratulations, then, to NCR Special Report Writer Robert J. McClory, recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award from the Alumni Association of Northwestern University. McClory, who has been teaching at Northwestern's Madill School of Journalism for 11 years, was one of only four teachers to be so honored.

Since he has been writing for NCR since practically forever, we are very proud of him.

The Catholic News Service photo on the front page depicts a character from a popular video game. It is a jarring illustration of what, for too many of this country's kids, is a chilling cultural reality -- sexist, oversexed and violent. As this paper was going to bed on the one-month anniversary of the Littleton, Colo., shootings, the debate over teen violence, guns and media was still raging. And then there was another shooting just before press time, at a high school in Conyers, Ga. We hope that Teresa Malcolm's story on page 14 offers a helpful and different slant on the issue.

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