

# FCA REPORT

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FCA-GKC



## Natural burial returns local cemetery to its historic traditions

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Secretary



Family and friends of Donyce Moore Perelman gathered at Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village in May. There they carried out Donyce's desire for a natural burial, without embalming, in a cardboard casket. This was the first 'green' burial in recent memory at Highland.

The first natural burial in Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village in modern times took place May 31. No one knows how long it has been since the last one—the better part of a century, most likely.

When the cemetery was founded in the 1860s, all of its burials were natural—meaning they were carried out with no embalming, no grave liners, and using wooden (biodegradable) containers. Today there is a trend back to that ancient, natural practice.

Donyce (DON-iss) Moore Perelman, 70, of Shawnee, wanted natural burial for herself. Her son, Kevin R. Moore, saw that she got it. Kevin, 48, and his partner, Chad Gift, moved from Portland into Donyce's home to care for her during her last months, with the assistance of in-home hospice care.

Kevin believes his long-time concern about the environment influenced his mother's decision to seek a natural burial when it became clear that cancer would claim her life.

"We are affecting the climate," he said, adding that natural burial "has the least impact" on the environment.

Kevin led the graveside service, with Chad and several close friends of Donyce in attendance. The Highland Park Funeral Home

*See Natural, page 4*

## Free CEUs at Annual Meeting Death with Dignity: Ethical Considerations

By Nancy Petersen, LCSW  
FCA-GKC Board Member, FCA National Board  
Member, Conference Co-Chair

I like to buy my own tomatoes. I insist on buying my own shoes at a local shoe store. I am not taking quickly to services that want to shop for me, and I'm not a fan of buying clothes I see on an Internet site.

I feel the same way about vital services and important options. I prefer to be face to face, in person, with the people teaching me about life and death. I want to ask questions, meet the speaker, and interact with others. I believe I owe that to myself and my loved ones, who will surely be affected by these issues in the future.

We at FCA-GKC know that a personal learning experience is important to many others, so we have made it a core value to offer at least one *free* event each year in which speakers address interesting and topical subjects. We want to help you keep learning the old-fashioned way.

This year is no different. From 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 3, at the Kauffman Foundation Conference Center, we will present Karen Smith, PhD, who will help us grapple with the complex issues of death with dignity and its ethical considerations.

*See Annual Meeting, back page*

### Presentations available

Would your organization benefit from a presentation about important practical aspects of funeral planning? Call 816-561-6322 or email [fca.gkc@gmail.com](mailto:fca.gkc@gmail.com). We'll schedule one of our board members, at no charge.

## Gratitude for our supporters

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City could not exist without the support of its donors. With immense gratitude, we recognize the following donors who contributed \$1,140 since April.

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Because FCA is an all-volunteer, not-for-profit organization, your contributions are tax deductible. We call your attention to the self-addressed envelope in this newsletter and ask you to please use it. No amount is too small, and we pledge to make good use of the funds. Thank you!

*The FCA-GKC Board of Directors*



## A new website is in the works!

The FCA-GKC has had a website for many years, to provide the basics of what people may want and need to know as funeral consumers—everything from myths about burial legalities to the nuts and bolts of a home funeral and a natural burial.

The site has been our spot for posting updated funeral price surveys so families, especially those most financially vulnerable, can make decisions that feel right for them and won't create debt.

The website has long needed a sprucing up, though, and a more interactive, user-friendly format. We've contracted with a local computer consultant for redesign, and board members are hard at work organizing content. We hope to have the new site functioning by the end of November. When it's ready, we'll let you know and we'll credit everyone involved.

Until then, please keep visiting us at [www.funeralskc.org](http://www.funeralskc.org)!



## The big picture

By Frank Cockrell  
FCA-GKC President



### A tool for learning about your loved one's wishes

My opening remarks as FCA-GKC president last spring referenced a *Wall Street Journal* article titled "Planning Your Own Funeral Is Tough, But Do It Anyway."

I stated that during my tenure in office I would give that topic special attention, and invited readers to suggest how we might provide a better focus on that goal.

During recent FCA-GKC presentations, the audience has asked more than once what to do if an elderly relative dies during travel without having provided any kind of funeral advice, verbal or written. Those audience questions left us without good answers.

The other evening while I watched television with family members, children in the group insisted we watch a 1983 National Lampoon Vacation film that follows characters Clark and Ellen Griswold and their two children on a cross-country trip from Chicago to the California theme park Walley World. During the trip they make a stop in Coolidge, Kan., to visit Ellen's cousin and they end up being forced to take Aunt Edna as a passenger to Phoenix, Ariz., on their journey west.

Unfortunately, Aunt Edna dies en route. The Griswolds face multiple issues transporting her remains, and finally—absent better choices—drop her body off at cousin Normy's home on the back veranda.

We are not suggesting that readers may face an Aunt Edna scenario. But the simplest form of funeral planning can turn out to be extremely important, avoiding a not-so-comedic situation.

We have drafted a quick-to-prepare planning form that a family member might ask an elderly passenger to complete as a precursor to travel. This same document might be used during a family gathering as a means to get the funeral planning process started. (See form on page 6.)

We invite readers to use this planning tool in their own family and give us a report on the results. □

# As death visits Sisters of Charity, Sister Lucy responds to its call

By Marci Michnick, LMSW, FCA-GKC Member, and Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Secretary

Imagine having to manage 204 funerals and burials for your deceased family members and good friends.

Sister Lucy Walter has done that since 2000, when she became coordinator of the Mother House of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCLs) and Ross Hall, its nursing facility. True, the deceased were not blood relatives—but after years of living and working together in community, they function as one big family, serving God as educators and health care providers and in other ministries caring for the poor and vulnerable in the United States and other countries.

The SCLs, who first arrived in Leavenworth on a Missouri River steamboat in 1858, have seen many deaths among their own. The religious order grew in number until it peaked at 949 members in the 1950s and '60s. Since then it has followed the national and international trend of declining membership among religious orders until, today, the close-knit family numbers 209. Thirty-eight live in nursing care in Ross Hall, which adjoins the Mother House. The average age of SCLs today is 78.

Sister Lucy, 72, has managed the funerals of roughly half of those SCLs living at the time she assumed her position 17 years ago. Outsiders naturally ask how Sister Lucy deals with those losses. Does she sometimes get the feeling that she's managing the funeral of the order itself?

She said she takes comfort in being aware that the sisters who have died "are still with us and are always going to be a part of us." The deaths of her close friends are the hardest, she said, but her belief that they have joined the church's "Community of Saints" lessens her grief. Also, the order has an informal support system in which



The cemetery of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth has gathered the dead of the order since its founding in 1858. Sr. Lucy Walter has been coordinating the funerals of the sisters for 17 years.

the members minister to each other in times of trial and declining health. They do not die alone.

The blessing of an afterlife is what each sister has been waiting for, says Sister Lucy: "to return home, return to peace."

Regarding the order's steady decline in members, she said, "We just continue to remain hopeful and trust in divine providence."

The order is planning for its uncertain future. Possibilities include merging with another order in the national federation of Sisters of Charity.

Meanwhile, Sister Lucy attends to the practicalities of her ministry. All of the sisters complete a durable power of attorney for health care, naming the community's director, Sister Constance Phelps, or any other Sister of Charity to make health care decisions on their behalf if they are unable to act on their own.

Among the decisions each sister makes is which type of burial she desires in the community's cemetery. The sisters are encouraged to consider and express their wishes ahead of time. The three body disposition

options are traditional burial with embalming; cremation; and natural shroud burial without embalming. If a decision is not made before death, then a traditional body preparation (embalming) and burial is carried out. Sister Lucy, who holds degrees in history, elementary education, special education, and early childhood education, makes those arrangements.

The SCLs rotate among three locally owned funeral homes in Leavenworth: Belden-Larkin Funeral Home, Davis Funeral Chapel, and R.L. Leintz Funeral Home. Davis Funeral Chapel is the only one of the three with its own crematorium, so Davis handles all the cremations for the order.

When the sisters select natural burial, the order requires that they contact their immediate family to make them aware of their wishes. Sixteen sisters have chosen natural burial for themselves since the option became available in 2014. Twelve of them are still living. Many of the early burials in the cemetery were "natural" in that embalming did not

*See SCLs, page 4*



## **Natural, from page 1**



Donyce Perelman was a vivid, adventurous woman who had strong views about life and death—including the desire for a natural burial. Kevin R. Moore, Donyce Perelman's son, planned and organized her natural funeral.

delivered her body in a cardboard casket Kevin ordered from a website, placing the casket on planks above an open grave dug 4 feet deep. Donyce's son and friends brought her favorite flowers. Each shared a personal memory before placing a flower on her casket. Kevin read her favorite poem, "The Road Less Traveled," and played a recording of one of her favorite songs, "The Rose."

Finally they lifted the casket with straps, the planks were removed, and they lowered the casket into the grave. Each loved one shoveled some dirt into the grave, which was filled by hand later by an employee of the company that digs and fills graves at the cemetery. In line with Donyce's wishes, no funeral service occurred. A celebration of her life took place at her home two weeks later.

Kevin, a licensed massage therapist, described his mother as "fiercely independent." She was a native of Las Vegas, Nev., who was twice divorced and lived alone the last 16 or 17 years. In Las Vegas she trained emergency medical technicians, then worked as an account executive for radio stations. Beginning in the late 1980s she sold jewelry, becoming an authority on high-value wrist watches. She even worked with the Secret Service, assisting

in sting operations targeting watch counterfeiters. She became a licensed massage therapist later in life.

Highland Park Funeral Home charged \$1,000 for the direct burial and refrigeration of the body for a few days. The mail-order casket cost \$200, the gravesite cost \$800, and grave opening and closing cost \$420, for a total of \$2,420. Kevin said he and the others were quite pleased with the funeral home and cemetery services.

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City had advocated for 10 years for a natural burial option somewhere in this metro area.

"No money in it," said one cemetery manager, adding that the mound of dirt remaining after burial means more maintenance later for the cemetery staff.

Then, in 2015, FCA-GKC discovered the availability of the Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village, a one-acre bit of history in the middle of that city. Natural burial was the rule in the cemetery's founding days and still is available today. Three members of the FCA-GKC board and one other person formed a separate nonprofit corporation and took over management of the cemetery.

About 200 grave sites remained available at the time. Eighty of those have since been sold, all proceeds going into the cemetery's long-term maintenance fund, which currently stands at \$110,000. About half of the buyers plan natural burials, illustrating the demand for it. The board anticipates that plots will be sold out in a year or so.

The cemetery is in the 5000 block of West 65<sup>th</sup> Street between Roe and Nall avenues. Its website is [highlandcemeteryprairievillage.com](http://highlandcemeteryprairievillage.com). The information phone is 913-262-1560. For help with natural burial, call 913-624-4601. □

## **SCLs, from page 3**

occur and wooden (biodegradable) caskets often were used.

Occasionally a sister's family will offer to pay for funeral expenses, but the SCLs decline the offer and cover the expense because each sister "belongs to our community." Families are invited to participate in a vigil and viewing the night before the morning funeral mass. Following the vigil is a reception for family and other sisters. Typically, a video presentation is shown at the reception with pictures of the sister whose life is being celebrated. Families receive a copy of the video presentation as a keepsake.

When sisters elect cremation, they work with Sister Pam Hinkle, a ceramic artist, who designs and creates the urn that will hold the sister's cremated remains. Sister

Lucy said that some sisters place the urn out of sight but others, like Sister Mary Carlo Calibraro, do not. She displays her urn prominently as a piece of art, adorned with a rose on her windowsill.

Early this year, the SCLs awarded a \$10,000 grant to the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City. The money is earmarked to effect sustainable change on behalf of poor and disadvantaged persons. Teaching is the FCA-GKC sustainability method. We do it by providing information to organizations serving the poor. Our intent is to keep low-income residents from becoming trapped in debt for funeral services. We inform them of their rights and alternatives to expensive funerals. □

Sister Lucy Walter, coordinator of the Mother House of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth.



# National Home Funeral Alliance

## Supporting families in keeping death close to home

By Lynn Anderson, FCA-GKC Board Member

The handing over of after-death care to the funeral industry is so commonplace that most Americans don't even consider an alternative. It's helpful, then, to remember that until very recently *all* such care was provided at home.

Family members and friends washed and dressed the newly deceased loved one's body, laying it on a bed or on a door perched between sawhorses. They packed it in ice, set up fans, lit candles, and welcomed visitors from near and far. They sawed the boards to build a coffin and used shovels to dig the grave.

These rituals could be suffused with sorrow, but not with fear. Death was no stranger.

But so much has changed, so deeply. The American way of death has catapulted us into a foreign place, where after-death care is left to "professionals" and we remain as far-removed as we can be. Less than a decade ago, however, the provision of care began to move backward toward older, more meaningful traditions. And an organization arose to help with this shift.

The National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) was formed in 2009 by a small group of ordinary people who believed it was important to let others know about the deeply moving experience of taking care of a deceased loved one at home. Its vision includes promoting "environmentally sound

and culturally nurturing" death practices—the sorts of practices that were endemic to all people in our society until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Many of the original people who came together had been quietly training and giving workshops in what is now referred to as "home funerals" since the mid-1990s. Their commitment to the work led to the formation of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization with the mission of educating and empowering families and communities to care for their own dead.

The organization has an Internet presence, but most of its work is done face to face: holding workshops in communities across the country, teaching neighbors and friends how to reclaim the practice.

At-home after-death care is legal in every state, with nine "restrictive" states that require a licensed funeral director to handle specific parts of the funeral process, like filing the death certificate or transporting the body.

The transformative, comforting power of a home funeral is emotional and difficult to express in words, but people who have had the experience often feel compelled to share it with others.

The NHFA is open to anyone—funeral directors, hospice workers,



Ginny Farney, left, and Sarah Crews at the NHFA annual conference in September.

medical professionals, and the public, including those choosing to call themselves "home funeral guides." Anyone can become a member, participate on committees, use member resources and directories on the website, and request mentoring from an experienced home funeral guide. The organization has grown from a small group of 13 to more than 1,500 members from every state and several countries.

Sarah Crews, founder of Heart Land Prairie Cemetery in central Kansas, attended her first NHFA conference in Boulder, Colo., in 2010. In 2012 she signed up to serve on the legislative committee (now called the advocacy committee) of the board. And in 2013 she was asked to join the board of directors. This year Sarah became the fourth president to serve the organization, following three years of leadership by Lee Webster of New Hampshire.

In alternate years the NHFA holds a national conference. This year's event, held outside Baltimore, Md., had the theme of "Advocating for Home Funerals: Stepping it up a notch." Both Sarah and FCA-GKC board member Ginny Farney participated in the conference and came back feeling uplifted.

"It was interesting to find out how involved the FCA is in the NHFA, and the number of home funeral guides also involved in their



Vendors of shrouds and other natural-burial garments showed their work at the conference. Above left, "Garments for the Grave," by Pia Interlandi from Australia. Above right, "Last Dance Shrouds," by Dina Stander from Massachusetts.

*See NHFA, page 7*

## FUNERAL PLANNING WISHES

Complete this form, make photocopies, and share it with family and loved ones. Remember, your responses are neither right nor wrong. They just represent your wishes at the date noted, and you can always make changes.

My name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I acknowledge that funeral planning requires a beginning, and perhaps this is a place to start.

or

☐ I will travel soon from my home and have been asked to complete this form before my trip for those responsible for my well-being during travel.

☐ I have chosen \_\_\_\_\_ as my funeral home.

or

☐ I have identified no funeral home preference as yet.

I visualize an expenditure of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ being adequate for my funeral, with funding likely coming from:

☐ My estate   ☐ My family   ☐ I don't yet know.

I prefer as a funeral choice: ☐ Cremation   ☐ Body burial, embalming   ☐ Natural burial   ☐ Body donation

I prefer visitation at: ☐ The funeral home   ☐ The \_\_\_\_\_ church   ☐ Home   ☐ The burial site  
☐ No visitation

I prefer a funeral ceremony at: ☐ The funeral home   ☐ The church   ☐ Home   ☐ The burial site  
☐ No funeral ceremony

☐ I am considering direct cremation (\$675 to \$3,035 in 2017), and my funeral home/crematory choice is \_\_\_\_\_.

☐ I am considering immediate burial (\$895 to \$5,790 in 2017), and my funeral home of choice is listed above.

☐ I would like to explore a medical school willed-body donation. My preference is:

☐ The University of Kansas Medical Center   ☐ The Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences  
☐ I don't yet know.

☐ A plot for my remains exists at \_\_\_\_\_.

or

☐ No plot currently exists for my remains, but I would like \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of family member or friend) to identify grave choices, including cost.

I wish to share this preliminary planning document with:

☐ My spouse or significant other \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ My children, numbering \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ My attorney \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ My church and clergy member \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Funeral home \_\_\_\_\_

*Courtesy of Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City, 816-561-6322 or [www.funeralskc.org](http://www.funeralskc.org)*

# Supporting the death transition as a ‘birthing’

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Secretary



Ginny  
Farney

The FCA-GKC board includes people whose occupations were, or are, anatomy professor, corporate chief financial officer, journalist, social worker, and printer: all well-defined, traditional occupations.

Ginny Farney, our newest board member, is not so neatly categorized, although her 35 years as a registered nurse are common enough. But what about her credentials as a certified death midwife, end-of-life transition guide, home funeral guide, grief companion, certified hospice and palliative care RN, spiritual healer, and ordained minister?

Ginny, where do we *begin* with you, we wondered. What possesses you to be present at something like 300 deaths? Isn't it depressing?

For answers, we can look to her website, [thepassingwisdom.com](http://thepassingwisdom.com), which reflects the details of each occupation and avocation. We now begin with what possesses her.

No, it's not depressing, she says. Death is natural, unavoidable, and often beautiful. Her experience and intuition tell her that death is simply closing your eyes in one dimension and opening them in another. She sees it as “birthing souls into a new life,” and that transition is just as energy-charged as the birth of a baby.

A century ago people died at home, with family. By the time they were 10 or so, children had witnessed death and were not frightened by it. The common isolation of death in today's culture, however, renders it remote and scary.

Ginny's experience during her last nine years as a hospice nurse led her into fields of study involving other dimensions of existence than this one. For instance, massage school led her to Reiki, a form of energy healing. She saw with new awareness the unique energy changes that occur in the dying process. She also took a strong interest in the ancient spiritual practices of indigenous peoples, focusing on the Pachakuti Mesa Tradition, a shamanic practice from Peru.

Attending the deaths of her mother, sister, and aunt

gradually and painfully changed Ginny's priorities, leading her away from full-time hospice nursing into the other roles listed above. That transition continues.

“I sit with them, ask what I can do to help them, intuit what they need,” she says of her presence with people who are nearing death. “The soul is detaching from the body. I guide them and listen without judgment to their truth—good, bad, and ugly. I ‘lean into’ the difficult conversations that dying people need to have.”

Some people go through life facing their losses and dealing with them, she says. Others go through life collecting emotional baggage, but they cannot take their anger and regrets with them. Much of the pain and anxiety of dying is spiritual, emotional, and mental rather than physical. It's the ego trying to hold on, but ultimately it cannot.

As transition nears, she “thins the veil” that separates this life dimension from the next to assist the soul's release, she says. Each soul releases in its own way, in its own time.

“Dying is the ultimate grief journey,” she said. “You are losing everything. Those who know how to grieve and let go die more peacefully.”

Ginny has no formal psychoanalytical therapy training.

“God calls me to do it,” she said. “My life experiences have prepared me to do this.”

Then she caught herself for slipping into her childhood image of a male godhead.

“I dislike the term God,” she said. “I prefer The Divine Mother or All That Is.”

Regarding physical pain in the dying process, Ginny says the body knows how to die. When the heart, lungs, and kidneys begin to shut down, the brain is flooded with hormones and its awareness of body diminishes.

Ginny is one of the home funeral guides on the list below. □

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## **NHFA, from page 5**

local FCA affiliates, including the FCA-GKC,” Ginny said.

Josh Slocum, executive director of the National Funeral Consumers Alliance, spoke on a panel of presenters discussing “Everyone Can Be an Advocate: Here's How.”

Regarding home funerals, Josh commented that we have “the right to choose *not* to be a consumer” —even though some laws currently limit this choice.

### **To learn more about the National Home Funeral Alliance**

Visit [homefuneralalliance.org](http://homefuneralalliance.org). The website contains resources and basic information, inviting you to explore the concept of home funerals. Membership in the NHFA is free.

### **To receive counsel or assistance in planning and carrying out a home funeral**

Reach out to one of several local home-funeral guides. These include:

*Sarah Crews*, Salina, Kan.  
[crews.sarah.j@gmail.com](mailto:crews.sarah.j@gmail.com)

*Ginny Farney*, Prairie Village, Kan.  
[ginny@thepassingwisdom.com](mailto:ginny@thepassingwisdom.com)

*Shannon Hodges*, Lawrence, Kan.  
[shannonhodges\\_12@yahoo.com](mailto:shannonhodges_12@yahoo.com)

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**► FCA-GKC Annual Meeting ◀**  
**Friday, Nov. 3 • 2:30–4:30 p.m.**  
Kauffman Foundation Conference Center  
4801 Rockhill Road, Kansas City, Mo.



Karen Smith, PhD

### **Annual Meeting, from page 1**

Karen is the medical ethicist for the 800-bed Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Mich. Her work includes speaking to families who face unimaginable decisions and educating medical professionals about ethical principles and how to apply those. Karen is a member of her local FCA affiliate and sits on the FCA National Board as well. Her dedication to serving patients, families, and consumers as they navigate the world of death and dying is undeniable. And she's a joy to know!

Please join us on Nov. 3 by registering on our Facebook page, "Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City"; emailing us at fca.gkc@gmail.com or calling 816-561-6322 and stating your name and a best means of contact; or visiting [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com) and typing fcagkc in the search box.

This event is designed for every kind of participant. We

hope to draw professionals of all kinds and interested lay people from all over the metro area. Education is vital for everyone, and it helps us understand the complicated world we live in.

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City looks forward to continuing its relationship with many of you and making connections with even more who may be unaware of our values and mission to educate and advocate for consumers of the funeral industry. For professionals interested in continuing education units, we will provide a certificate for 1.5 hours of ethics CEUs.

Your registration will help us plan, but walk-in participants are very welcome.

If you have questions, please email me with "Ethics Event" in the subject line at fca.gkc@gmail.com. We hope to see you there! □