

Indigent Burials in North Dakota

Who pays for funerals for the indigent?

If no family member or other person comes forward to pay for the funeral of an indigent person, the funeral home in that county negotiates with the county how much it will pay the funeral home to dispose of the body. In Cass County, the amount allotted by the county for disposing of the body is set at \$1,800. This amount can vary in North Dakota from \$1,600 in one county to \$2,500 in another county, so people need to check what the rate is in their county. This county rate is for the purchase of a casket and to dig the grave. This county rate is adjusted annually for inflation.

A family member who comes forward who is not able to pay for the funeral of a person can apply to the county personally for assistance, which might be a similar amount to that the funeral home would receive if it requested county assistance (John said this is kind of a negotiated thing, so perhaps a family member might receive more than what the funeral home would receive – he wasn't sure if the amount would be more than the funeral home received). In Cass County, the family member who came forward for an indigent's funeral could contact Darla at Cass County Social Services.

The disposal of the body either would be a ground burial or a cremation, depending on the family's preferences (if it came forward). Cass County has a paupers grave in north Fargo called Springville Cemetery (32nd Avenue North). If a family can come up with an additional \$200, then a funeral home would be able to provide some minimal services, such as a minister who would do a graveside service, or a service in the funeral home chapel.

*John Runsvold, funeral director,
Hanson Runsvold Funeral Home, Fargo, N.D.,
personal communication, Aug. 29, 2005*

Other than the family, there are veteran, union and other organizational benefits to pay for funerals, including, in certain instances, a lump-sum death payment from Social Security. In North Dakota, individual counties have burial assistance for indigent people. Most funeral directors are aware of the various benefits and know how to obtain them for the indigent. However, funeral directors often absorb costs above and beyond what is allowed by the county.

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