

about

FUNERALS, CREMATIONS AND BURIALS

TYPES OF GRAVES | FINAL RESTING PLACE | FUNERAL CEREMONIES
FUNERAL, BURIAL AND CREMATION LEGISLATION | BURIAL FEE

About funerals, cremations and burials

The Church of Sweden Employers' Association

EDITORIAL GROUP Eva Grönwall, Sofia Skog, Eva Årbrandt Johansson

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Foreword

This brochure is designed for everyone who has questions about how funerals, cremations and burials take place in Sweden. The brochure explains what such activities consist of and what the burial fee includes. Questions about funerals, cremations and burials do not usually arise until a close relative has died. These questions may be about what relatives can do for themselves, what society pays for and what the deceased's estate should pay for. It is a good idea to find out the answers to these questions in advance and to explain – in order to help your relatives – how you would like your own funeral-related matters to be organised.

The community has placed the responsibility for cremation and burial of the deceased on the parishes and groups of parishes of the Church of Sweden and the Municipalities of Stockholm and Tranås. The Church's responsibility for these matters dates back a long way – to about 1000 years ago. In the vast majority of cases there are public cemeteries on Church land. The parishes are required to conduct funeral, cremation and burial activities in a faith-neutral manner in accordance with legislation and to provide for other beliefs and views of life in a respectful manner. Sweden's multicultural society is increasingly reflected in cemeteries. In this brochure we differentiate between the Church's task as a burial authority as stated in the Burial Act (Begravningslagen), and the activities of the Church of Sweden Faith Community for its members.

This brochure follows the order in which relatives usually face various matters that must be decided on when someone dies. We hope that the brochure will always be available, as a complement to parishes' own websites, when someone is searching for factual information about funerals, cremations and burials.

Stockholm, September 2016
The Church of Sweden Employers' Association

Eva Grönwall
Sofia Skog
Eva Årbrandt Johansson

Legislation and responsibility for funerals, cremations and burials

In Sweden such activities are regulated in a law entitled the Burial Act (Begravningslagen – 1990:1144), and in an ordinance called the Burial Ordinance (Begravningsförordningen – 1990:1147). The Burial Act defines *begravningsverksamhet*, funeral, cremation and burial activities, as all measures directly connected to the management of public cemeteries.¹

In Sweden the responsibility for these activities has been assigned to parishes and groups of parishes (that work together) within the Church of Sweden² and to the City of Stockholm and Tranås Municipality.

The entity that is responsible for funerals, cremations and burials is called the burial authority. The burial authority is responsible for these activities within a specific geographic area called the administrative district. There may be several burial authorities within a municipality, and the administrative district of a burial authority may be located in several municipalities. The population register determines which burial authority people belong to.

The burial authority must provide and maintain a sufficient number of graves. The authority must also provide special graves for people who are not members of a Christian faith community. Funerals, cremations and burials also include receiving the body of a deceased person for storage and viewing, performing cremations and burials, and providing premises without religious symbols for a funeral ceremony. The responsibility includes provision of staff, buildings, machinery and everything else required for the work, as well as establishing, maintaining and looking after the public areas of the cemeteries. The burial authority's responsibility does not include maintenance of individual graves for which someone holds burial rights. However, some monitoring of the condition of these graves is included.

¹ The legislation only uses the term burial ground. This brochure uses the words burial ground, cemetery and graveyard synonymously.

² Burial authorities of the Church

Everyone must be buried or their ashes must be buried or scattered

It is a matter of societal and private importance to give a deceased person a final resting place. All the deceased must be buried or their ashes must be buried or scattered, and the burial authority is obliged to provide a grave for all deceased residents registered in the population register in the authority's administrative district.

In a public cemetery a grave must be prepared for those who at the time of their death were registered in the population register as residents in a property in the parish or municipality.

CHAPTER 2, SECTION 3, PARAGRAPH 1, FIRST SENTENCE OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

The burial authority must also provide a grave for a stillborn baby that died after the end of the 22nd week of pregnancy if the woman is registered in the population register in the burial authority's administrative district. The same applies to a stillborn baby that died before the end of the 22nd week of pregnancy, if the woman requests a grave and a doctor's certificate of the death is submitted to the burial authority. Special rules apply for a person who when they died was only registered in the population register in the municipality or under the heading "residence unknown".

It is important that the body of a deceased person is cremated or buried as soon as possible. The longest time permitted between the time of death and cremation or burial is one month. If there are special reasons, the Swedish Tax Agency can grant a delay for the cremation or burial.

Relatives, or another person, are responsible for planning and organising a funeral and related matters. If there is no one who can or wants to take care of it, the municipality is responsible for doing so instead. Regardless of who organises the funeral, the wishes of the deceased concerning their cremation and burial should be followed if possible. If the estate of the deceased lacks financial assets, the funeral and cremation and/or burial are organised with financial assistance from the municipality. The sum of this assistance varies throughout Sweden. The municipality's social services office in the location where the deceased was most recently registered in the population register can provide information about what applies in that specific municipality.

Burial fee

Everyone who is registered in the population register in Sweden and pays municipal income tax pays the burial fee. As of 2017, this applies throughout Sweden, except in the City of Stockholm and Tranås Municipality. The burial fee is intended to cover what the law defines as the most necessary costs in connection with giving a deceased person a final resting place.

The burial fee is a levy, which means it is stated on a taxpayer's tax certificate. The fee is calculated on the basis of each person's municipal taxable income. The size of the fee is shown on each person's annual final tax statement (*slutskattebesked*).

Before the start of each budget year, the municipal councils in Stockholm and Tranås decide the size of the burial fee that the inhabitants in these municipalities will pay. With the help of proposals from the burial authorities of the Church, a government authority called Kammarkollegiet sets the burial fee that is payable in the rest of Sweden. The scale of fees is the same for everyone, regardless of whether they are members of the Church of Sweden or not.

The burial fee is payable to the burial authorities within the Church of Sweden, or, if a person obliged to pay the fee is registered in the population register in a municipality that is a burial authority, to that municipality.

CHAPTER 9, SECTION 2, PARAGRAPH 1 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

What is included in the burial fee

All people registered in the population register in Sweden are entitled to the services listed in the Burial Act. It is also possible to receive these services free of charge from a different burial authority, if the burial or scattering of ashes will take place within a different administrative district to the one in which the deceased was registered in the population register. See the section titled *Graves in other locations*.

For people who were registered in the population register within a burial authority's administrative district at the time of death, the burial authority must provide the following at no cost to the estate of the deceased:

- a grave or equivalent in a public cemetery for 25 years,
- burial, including opening a grave, backfilling (filling in) and putting an opened grave in order,
- transportation from when the burial authority has taken over responsibility for the body until burial or the scattering of ashes has taken place, with the exception of transport for burial or scattering ashes outside the burial authority's administrative district, unless the transport is because of an agreement on the provision of special graves,
- cremation,
- premises for storage and viewing of the body, and
- premises for a funeral ceremony without religious symbols.

CHAPTER 9, SECTION 6 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

In addition, the burial fee finances all the various measures that are directly connected to management of the public cemeteries, such as related administration, the establishment of new cemeteries, maintenance of public areas in cemeteries and care and preservation of graves that are of particular historical value. The work of funeral representatives is also financed via the burial fee; see the section titled *Supervision*.

What is *not* included in the burial fee

In addition to the services that are financed using the burial fee, in most cases there will be a number of costs that the relatives decide on. These costs are *not* covered by the burial fee and they vary from one case to another. The estate or relatives of the deceased person must pay for:

- A coffin and the preparation and dressing of the deceased
- Transportation of the body in the coffin from home/hospital to the burial authority's designated premises for storage and viewing of the body
- Death notices
- Coffin decoration
- A funeral ceremony including a funeral celebrant or officiant. A deceased person who was a member of the Church of Sweden is entitled to a funeral service at no charge to the estate of the deceased.
- Funeral reception
- Urn
- The making, installation and maintenance of gravestones or other fixed grave memorials
- For details on how graves are looked after, see the section titled *Maintenance of graves*.

Choices and wishes in connection with funerals, cremations and burials

When someone dies it is important that the relatives, or other people who organise the funeral, follow the wishes of the deceased regarding cremation and burial as closely as possible. These wishes may concern the type of grave and location of the final resting place.

When someone dies, his or her wishes regarding cremation and burial should be followed as closely as possible by the relative, close friend or other person who organises these matters.

CHAPTER 5, SECTION 1 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

REASONS FOR WRITING DOWN YOUR WISHES

Neither the Burial Act nor other legislation states that people must write down their wishes about their own funeral, but there are good reasons for doing so. People can formulate their wishes freely, or use the brochure titled *Mina önskemål*, My wishes.³ The important thing is that surviving relatives are made aware of the deceased's wishes concerning his or her own funeral. The document stating these wishes can be kept at a solicitor's office, in a safe-deposit box in a bank or at home, for example.

The document can contain the following details and wishes about a person's funeral:

- Place and cemetery
- Cremation or coffin burial
- Type of grave, such as a garden of remembrance, (*minneslund* or *askgravlund*), a grave for cremated remains (*askgravplats*), an existing family grave, a coffin grave or an urn grave; see the section titled *Types of graves*.
- Scattering ashes over land or water
- Choice of coffin and urn
- Choice of how the deceased is prepared before being placed in the coffin and choice of clothing or gown worn in the coffin
- Funeral ceremony/farewell
- Funeral reception

³*Mina önskemål* (My wishes) can be downloaded from www.svenskakyrkan.se/begravning.

Sometimes relatives disagree about where and how the deceased should be laid to rest. Should it be a coffin burial or cremation? Should the burial be in an existing family grave, perhaps in a different location, or in a new grave in the village, town or city where the deceased lived? Burial or cremation of the deceased before the relatives have resolved their dispute is not permitted. In such cases, the body is stored in a refrigerated or freezer facility at a mortuary.

If the dispute is a question of coffin burial or cremation or of the location of the final resting place, the parties must be offered mediation on request. The burial authority in the location where the deceased was last registered in the population register acts as the mediator. If the parties cannot agree during the mediation process, the county administrative board will take over the matter and rule on who/which of the parties may decide on the dispute. The procedure for handling such disputes may take time. One good way of preventing a dispute is for people to write down their wishes and inform their close relatives of them.

CHOICE OF COFFIN AND URN

According to the Burial Act, the body does not need to be placed in a coffin, but for health and safety reasons for the burial authority's employees, a coffin is usually used in coffin burials. A coffin must always be used in cremations. No urn is required if the ashes will be scattered in a *minneslund* garden of remembrance, buried directly in the grave following cremation or scattered over land or water. In such cases, the ashes are transported in a special bag or cardboard box from the crematorium.

Making a coffin or urn and painting and decorating purchased coffins or urns is permitted, but only according to certain rules. The crematorium or cemetery management can provide information about which materials and sizes are permitted.

There are special urns for children's ashes and urns that can contain two sets of ashes. These can also be home-made.

Funeral ceremony

The Burial Act regulates burial and cremation. It does not, however, regulate other aspects of funerals. The way in which relatives choose to pay their last respects to the deceased is an entirely private matter.

Relatives have extensive freedom to make the farewell as personal as they wish. It can take place in a church, chapel, parish hall or a garden, at home, on a beach, by the graveside in a cemetery or in other suitable locations. Coffin transportation for funeral ceremonies in the home, a private garden, on a beach or the like is not normally paid for out of the funeral fee.

The nature of the funeral ceremony is a matter of choice for those involved. So there is no rule stating that the ceremony must be held at the coffin. People can pay their last respects and say farewell before the deceased is placed in the coffin in hospital or at home, or after the cremation with an urn.

There is also the option of not having any farewell ceremony. In such cases, the body is transported in the coffin from home or hospital directly to the cemetery for burial or to the crematorium for cremation, and then to the cemetery where the ashes are buried or scattered.

FUNERAL SERVICE FOR MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN

Members of the Church of Sweden pay a church fee. The size of the fee is shown on each member's annual final tax statement (*slutskattebesked*). The church fee includes a funeral service in a church with a priest (Lutheran minister), church musician/organist, coffin bearers (also known as pallbearers) and the assistance of a verger. This also applies if the funeral service is held in a different parish to the deceased's home parish.

The priest/Lutheran minister who will lead the service, the relatives, the church musician/organist and other participants decide on the content of the service together. Many parishes have a policy called a *begravningspastoral* for funeral services, which describes the task of the parish in funeral-related matters. The policy varies between parishes.

Funeral services are normally held in a church or a funeral chapel. The parish and the priest/minister who will lead the funeral service decide whether the service can be held in an alternative location such as a person's home or in a garden.

The Church of Sweden's services are open to everyone and visitors cannot be denied permission to attend. This also applies to funeral services. Publishing a death notice after the funeral service has taken place can be a way to limit the number of people at the service if this is preferred.

The funeral service can be concluded in two ways:

- If the service ends in the **cemetery** it concludes with the coffin being lowered into the grave. The mourners gather at the graveside to pay their last respects and the priest/minister says the concluding prayer. The coffin has been brought to the grave in a procession by pallbearers (people who carry the coffin). The parish determines the standard of the coffin-bearing service provided. For example, it may consist of a wheeled catafalque (bier or platform) and a coffin-lowering device paid for by the parish. If they wish, relatives and friends may carry the coffin to the grave themselves as a final mark of respect for the deceased.
- If the funeral service is concluded in the **church/chapel**, the mourners gather at the coffin or urn to pay their last respects. After the ceremony, when the relatives have left the room, the coffin is taken to the crematorium or to the grave, as is the urn.

FUNERAL SERVICE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN

A funeral service may be held for non-members of the Church of Sweden if there are special reasons for doing so and this reflects the wishes of the deceased. The vicar (head priest) in the parish concerned decides whether a funeral service will be held. In such cases a fee is charged for the funeral service. The cost may vary in different parishes.

It is important to talk to the parish in plenty of time about the possibility of having a funeral service using the Church of Sweden's order of service and about the financial terms for doing so.

FUNERAL CEREMONIES IN OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES

Several different faith communities exist in Sweden, in addition to the Church of Sweden. Many of them provide a funeral ceremony for their members. When the deceased has been a member of a faith community, the person organising the funeral should contact representatives of the faith community to plan the farewell ceremony.

CIVIL FUNERALS

A funeral ceremony that does not follow the Church of Sweden's order of service for funerals or an order of service according to a different faith community is called a civil funeral. All burial authorities must provide a venue without religious symbols for farewell ceremonies. The cost of using such premises is included in the burial fee. Relatives organise and are responsible for a civil funeral ceremony themselves and they decide on what it will contain, how it will be held and who may attend.

Civil funeral celebrants are available in several, but not all, municipalities. No special authorisation or permit is required in order to be a civil funeral celebrant, and there is nothing to stop relatives and friends from leading the civil ceremony themselves. The cost of a funeral celebrant is not included in the burial fee and must be paid for by the estate of the deceased.

Graves

The burial fee includes a grave or equivalent in a public cemetery for a period of 25 years. There are various types of graves such as a *kistgravplats* (coffin grave), *urngravplats* (urn grave), *askgravplats* (cremated remains grave); and a space in a *minneslund* (a type of garden of remembrance), *kistminneslund* (e.g. a woodland burial ground where coffins are buried in a collective area) or an *askgravlund* (a burial ground for collective use like a garden of remembrance, but in which the ashes are buried not scattered); and a niche in a *kolumbarium* or *urnmur* (indoor or outdoor columbarium). There is no entitlement to be granted a grave in advance.

SPECIAL GRAVES

The right to burial in a public cemetery should not be determined by whether the deceased belonged to a particular faith community. However, this does not apply to the right of burial in special graves for those not belonging to any Christian faith community. At no charge to the estate of the deceased, all burial authorities are obliged, within their own administrative district or within a nearby administrative district, to provide special graves for people who are not members of a Christian faith community. The deceased or their relatives may wish to have a special design for these graves or that they have a specific position in a certain location. The burial authority must also provide transport to the special graves at no charge to the estate of the deceased.

GRAVES IN OTHER LOCATIONS

The burial authority is obliged to provide a grave for all deceased persons registered in the population register in the authority's administrative district. The Swedish Burial Act entitles the deceased to be laid to rest free of charge in a location other than where he or she was registered in the population register, provided that a grave site is available. For information about availability of graves, contact the relevant burial authority.

Subject to the availability of land for graves, graves for other people may also be provided there.

CHAPTER 2, SECTION 3, PARAGRAPH 3 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

HOLDERS OF BURIAL RIGHTS

Burial rights apply to all specific graves, in contrast with graves for collective use, to which burial rights do not apply. See section *Types of graves*. Burial rights do not automatically apply in connection with a burial. Instead, they arise on burial rights being granted by the congregation/parish group to someone, usually a member of

the deceased's family, or close relative. The person or persons to whom burial rights are granted are called burial rights holders. The burial rights holders are recorded in the burial authority's register of graves. Only the burial rights holder or holders can exercise the burial rights. Burial rights come with both rights and obligations.

– burial rights: the rights that arise when use of a specific grave in a public cemetery is granted by the entity that manages the cemetery to someone for the purpose of burial.

CHAPTER 1, SECTION 1 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

People can become burial rights holders in several ways. When use of a new grave is granted, it is for the surviving relatives to decide which person(s) among the surviving relatives should be appointed as burial rights holder(s). An application should be submitted at the earliest opportunity to the burial authority in whose district the deceased was buried. No one can be forced to be a burial rights holder. If no one wishes to act as burial rights holder, the burial authority should be informed. If no one can or wants to be the burial rights holder, the grave is still reserved for the deceased for 25 years. The burial authority is then responsible for management of the grave. For relatives to be allowed to set up a grave memorial, the burial authority may require payment for maintenance. If a burial rights holder dies, the rights are transferred to someone within a specific circle of people. Relatives or people closely connected to the deceased or to a deceased person buried in the grave are the only people who can take over the burial rights. The estate of the deceased burial rights holder must within six months of the death notify the grantor - the burial authority - which person or persons is/are to act as burial rights holder, or that there is no-one to whom the burial rights may be transferred. A burial rights holder may specify in writing the person to whom the burial rights should pass upon his/her death. The person thus specified must be related or otherwise closely connected to either the burial rights holder or someone who is buried in the grave concerned. If the burial rights holder has specified someone to take over the burial rights, the estate is not to notify any new burial rights holder.

Burial rights can also be transferred during the lifetime of their current holder. Burial rights may only be transferred to someone who is related to or otherwise closely connected to the transferor or to someone who is buried in the grave. The burial authority ultimately decides who can act as burial rights holder. An appeal against the decision of the burial authority may be lodged with the county administrative board (länsstyrelsen). The burial rights may also be returned to the transferor before the period of the rights has expired. When the burial rights expire, they may be renewed for a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 50 years at a time. Each burial authority

establishes its own conditions for renewal of burial rights. The renewal fee is set by the parish assembly or the municipal council. A burial rights holder is entitled to decide which people can be buried in the grave, regardless of whether they are relatives or are closely linked in any other way. In most cases, the rights holder is also entitled himself or herself to be buried in the grave. In order for a deceased person who was not sole burial rights holder to be buried in a grave, all holders of the burial rights to the grave must give their permission. If the burial rights holders cannot reach an agreement, the grantor (burial authority) decides whether the deceased may be buried in the grave. The burial authority's decision may be appealed against.

TYPES OF GRAVES

There are various types of grave in Sweden. Not all types are offered by all burial authorities. The range offered is determined by factors such as the demand among parishioners. Different burial authorities may have local names and descriptions for the various types of grave. Some graves have burial rights, some have limited burial rights and others have none. The types of grave **with burial rights** are *kistgravplatser* (coffin graves), with space for one or more coffins (or urns), and *urngravplatser* (urn graves), with space for one or more urns. The rights include entitlement to decorate the grave and, after obtaining approval from the burial authority, to have a gravestone or other fixed memorial erected or installed. Gravestones are not obligatory. The burial rights holder can place flowers and candles/lanterns on a grave even when there is no gravestone. Grave memorials are paid for by, and are the property of, the burial rights holder. Burial rights holders are obliged to keep the grave in a neat and dignified condition. In addition to maintaining the grave – see section *Maintenance of graves* – this includes ensuring that the gravestone or other memorial does not jeopardise safety at the grave or in the immediate vicinity. The burial rights holder must therefore take, and pay for, measures to ensure that the gravestone or other memorial is not a safety risk. If action is required to prevent potential accidents, the burial authority must take the appropriate measures. The burial rights holder must be informed of such measures as soon as possible. Safety or repair measures carried out on the gravestone or other memorial are in most cases paid for by the burial rights holder.

Graves with **limited burial rights** include restrictions as to the burial rights holder's right to decide on the appearance and nature of the grave memorial and other aspects of the decoration and arrangement of the grave. The grantor has right of decision in such cases. The grantor is responsible for maintaining the grave as a service

for the burial rights holder. The grantor charges a fee for the maintenance when use of the grave is granted. This applies to *graves for cremated remains called askgravplatser, a niche in a kolumbarium* (an indoor columbarium) and a niche in an *urnmur* (an outdoor columbarium), literally an “urn wall”, which may have space for one or more urns. Types of graves **without burial rights** are *askgravlund* (a garden of remembrance in which ashes are buried not scattered), a *minneslund* (a garden of remembrance) and a *kistminneslund* – like a woodland burial ground where coffins are buried in a collective area. The burial authority takes care of the maintenance in these areas. Relatives are usually invited to attend the burial of ashes in the type of garden of remembrance called an *askgravlund*. A plaque stating the name of the buried person can be ordered and mounted by the burial authority in a designated area. The plaque is usually paid for by the estate or relatives of the deceased. The *minneslund* and *kistminneslund* are anonymous burial areas, where cemetery staff scatter/bury the ashes or bury the coffin without relatives of the deceased being present. For the two types of gardens of remembrance, *askgravlund* and *minneslund*, specially designated collective areas are provided for decoration by relatives.

MAINTENANCE OF GRAVES

In addition to the responsibility for fixed memorials such as gravestones, the burial rights holder is obliged to keep the grave in a neat and dignified condition.

The burial rights holder must keep the grave in a neat and dignified condition.

CHAPTER 7, SECTION 3 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

This applies to graves with burial rights, i.e. *kistgravplatser* (coffin graves) and *urngravplatser* (urn graves). Maintaining a grave normally involves planting and watering plants and flowers, weeding, removing wilted flowers and trimming/tidying the grass around the border and gravestone, or, in the case of gravel-covered graves, removing weeds from the gravel surface. The rights holder can himself/herself maintain the grave or purchase the service, for example from the cemetery management department. Most parishes/groups of parishes offer contracts for maintenance of graves. The level of maintenance determines the cost to the burial rights holder. The price varies between parishes/groups of parishes. Contracts for the maintenance of graves are not regulated in the Swedish Burial Act. Burial rights holders must assess and compare the price and quality of the service themselves. If the burial rights holder maintains the grave and the burial authority considers that the grave has been clearly neglected, the authority may declare the burial rights forfeited, in other words, the rights are returned to the authority.

Cremation

Under the Swedish Burial Act, only those who operate a public cemetery or parish may establish and operate crematoriums.

The body is cremated as soon as possible after the funeral ceremony. Before cremation can take place, a cremation certificate must be obtained from the Swedish Tax Agency. In many cases, the funeral directors can help the relatives with this. Due to the decomposition process that starts in the body of a deceased person and out of consideration for the people who are to handle the body, it is very important that cremation takes place as soon as possible.

The body of a deceased person [...] must be cremated or buried as soon as possible and no later than one month after death. The Swedish Tax Agency may, however, grant a delay in cremation or burial if there are special reasons for doing so.

CHAPTER 5 SECTION 10 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

Relatives are permitted to attend the cremation and should contact the crematorium for more information.

After cremation, any metal items larger than 3 mm are separated from the ashes and sent for recycling. These may consist of implants in the body and fittings/hardware from the coffin. As no guarantees can be given for jewellery that the deceased was wearing will be added to the urn together with the ashes, the relatives should remove items of jewellery before the deceased is placed into the coffin. If relatives wish to place any items of jewellery into the urn before the lid is fitted, the crematorium staff should be contacted well in advance so that they can explain how this can be done.

Depending on the type of grave chosen, a special bag or box may be an alternative to an urn. In certain circumstances, the ashes can be collected by the relatives.

After cremation, the ashes may only be collected by an individual if he or she will

- take the ashes to a cemetery that is not located at the crematorium,*
- bury or scatter the ashes somewhere other than in a cemetery,*
- or take the ashes out of Sweden.*

CHAPTER 5, SECTION 10 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

Burial of coffins and burial or scattering of ashes

Due to the decomposition process that starts in the body of a deceased person and out of consideration for the deceased, it is very important that the burial takes place as soon as possible.

The body of a deceased person [...] must be cremated or buried as soon as possible and no later than one month after death. The Swedish Tax Agency may, however, grant a delay in cremation or burial if there are special reasons for doing so.

CHAPTER 5, SECTION 10 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

Before burial can take place, a burial certificate must be obtained from the Swedish Tax Agency. The funeral directors can help the relatives with this. If a certificate for cremation has been obtained, it also applies to burial of the urn or ashes.

The Burial Act defines what is meant by *gravsättning*, the burial of coffins and burial or scattering of ashes.

... burial: placing of the body or ashes within a specific grave or within a burial area for collective use without specific graves or the scattering of the ashes in a garden of remembrance or in a location other than a cemetery.

CHAPTER 1, SECTION 1 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

The main rule is that the burial or scattering takes place in a cemetery. After obtaining permission from the county administrative board, it is also possible to scatter ashes in a different location.

The body or ashes of a deceased person may only be buried or scattered in a public or private cemetery. However, the government may, however, issue directions stating that ashes should be dealt with in a different manner. Decisions on such matters are issued by the county administrative board.

CHAPTER 5, SECTION 5 OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

Ashes must be buried or scattered no later than one year after the cremation. If the ashes have been brought into Sweden from abroad, they must be buried or scattered no later than one year after being brought into Sweden.

It is entirely possible for relatives to lower a coffin or an urn into the grave themselves. This must be arranged with the burial authority in advance. For safety reasons, relatives are not permitted to dig or refill (backfill) a coffin grave. However, relatives are permitted to be present or help to refill the grave.

SCATTERING ASHES OVER LAND OR WATER

The Burial Act enables the opportunity of scattering ashes over land or water after permission has been obtained from the county administrative board. The board sets the terms for the scattering of ashes within its own area of responsibility. The place where the relatives wish to scatter the ashes must be suitable and the ashes must be handled respectfully. An application for permission cannot be assessed in advance, only after someone has died. An application to scatter the ashes of a deceased person can be made online using an e-service at www.lansstyrelsen.se.

The person who has received a permit to scatter the ashes must, within the period of time set by the county administrative board, submit a certificate to the board stating that the ashes have been scattered in accordance with the permit.

County administrative boards in the following counties process applications for the scattering of ashes: Skåne, Östergötland, Västra Götaland, Stockholm, Dalarna, Västernorrland and Norrbotten.

Supervision of funerals, cremations and burials

The county administrative board is responsible for supervision of funerals, cremations and burials in Sweden, regardless of whether the burial authority is a parish, group of parishes or a municipality. Besides contacting the county administrative board, people may also submit requests and criticism concerning funerals, cremations and burials to the *begravningsombud* (funeral representative), the parish or a municipality, depending on who the burial authority is in the area.

THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARDS

Each *länsstyrelse*, county administrative board, has several duties stipulated in the Burial Act. Individuals who have complaints or questions about funeral, burial or cremation work can phone or write to the board. These questions may concern the burial fee or how the burial authority deals with matters, for example. As the first instance, the county administrative board also assesses appeals against decisions made by the burial authority in individual cases according to the Burial Act. The same county administrative boards process applications for scattering ashes, process complaints and assess appeals in funeral, burial and cremation work; see the section *Scattering ashes over land or water*.

FUNERAL REPRESENTATIVES

When a parish is the burial authority, the county administrative board must appoint one or more funeral representatives to assess how the parish safeguards the interests of the people who are not members of the Church of Sweden.

CHAPTER 10, SECTION 2, PARAGRAPH 1, OF THE SWEDISH BURIAL ACT

In addition to performing supervision and reviews, the county administrative board appoints funeral representatives. The task of the *begravningsombud* is to assess how the parish looks after the interests of people who are not members of the Church of Sweden. The representative is the extended arm of the county administrative board in supervision of the Church's burial authorities. The board appoints one or more funeral representatives in all locations where the municipality does not have the role of burial authority. The county administrative board and the burial authority can inform the general public of who the funeral representatives are in the municipality.

The representative must inform those who are not members of the Church of Sweden about his or her role and maintain contact with representatives of other faith communities. The representative must find out their requests concerning funerals, cremations and burials and forward them to the responsible entities. This also applies to requests concerning the ceremony venue without religious symbols.

The representative must have access to all documents regarding funeral, burial and cremation work in the parish and be informed of how fees paid are used. The burial fee must only be used for funeral, burial and cremation work.

The representative must also ensure that special graves for those who are not members of Christian faith communities are provided within an acceptable geographic distance. The burial authority – the parish/group of parishes or the municipality – is the entity that must provide special graves.

Checklist for relatives

RELATIVES OR OTHERS CLOSE TO THE DECEASED MAY DO THE FOLLOWING THEMSELVES IN CONNECTION WITH THE FUNERAL, CREMATION OR BURIAL:

- Transport of the deceased from hospital to the burial authority's premises or to the cemetery
- Keep the body of the deceased at home before the body is placed in the coffin/ before the farewell ceremony/before the deceased is taken to their final resting place.
- Select or make a coffin and urn. For information about conditions that apply to making a coffin and/or urn, please contact the burial authority.
- Organise clothes or a gown for the deceased and the placing of the body into the coffin.
- Place small items or letters into the coffin (talk to the burial authority about this first).
- Select a church, chapel or other premises for a funeral service or other farewell ceremony.
- Write a death notice for publication.
- Plan the funeral ceremony (usually together with a priest/minister or other funeral celebrant).
- Organise a funeral reception.
- Decorate the coffin and premises for the farewell ceremony.
- Use their own choice of pall/mortcloth (a cloth to cover the coffin)
- Carry and transport the coffin or urn.
- Attend a cremation.
- Lower the coffin or urn into the grave.
- Scatter the ashes in a location other than in a cemetery – after obtaining permission from the county administrative board, *länsstyrelse*.
- Choose or make a gravestone or other grave memorial. This must be approved by the burial authority before it is put in place.
- Decorate the grave.

RELATIVES OR OTHER MOURNERS CLOSE TO THE DECEASED ARE NOT PERMITTED TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Store the ashes at home.
- Divide up ashes. (The county administrative board may grant permission for the ash to be divided if very particular circumstances exist.)
- Open a grave in a public cemetery.
- Have a burial performed or have ashes scattered without a certificate for doing so from the Swedish Tax Agency.
- Have a burial performed without permission from the burial rights holder.
- Bury or scatter ashes in a *minneslund* (garden of remembrance).
- Scatter or bury ashes in a location other than in a cemetery without permission from the county administrative board
- Have a buried body or ashes moved. (The burial authority where the body/ashes are buried may grant permission for them to be moved if particular circumstances exist.)

A–Z Glossary and page references

ASKA – ASHES the remains after cremation, the burning of the deceased's body in his or her coffin. The ashes can be buried in various types of graves: an *urngravplats* (urn grave), *askgravplats* (cremated remains grave) or *askgravlund* (a form of garden of remembrance) or in a *kolumbarium/urnmur* (an indoor/outdoor columbarium), they can be buried or scattered in a *minneslund* (a form of garden of remembrance), or after permission has been obtained from the *länsstyrelse* (county administrative board) the ashes can be scattered over land or water.

ASKGRAVLUND – A FORM OF GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE is a collective burial ground for ashes and it is similar to a garden of remembrance. It has a collective area for the names of the deceased and decoration. Relatives can attend when the ashes are buried. The use of a grave in an *askgravlund* is usually granted without burial rights. The concept is not interpreted in the same way everywhere and local deviations may apply. *See page 17.*

ASKGRAVPLATS – CREMATED REMAINS GRAVE is a grave for ashes/urns. It is possible for spouses/partners/relatives to have their final resting place together in a cremated remains grave. Limited burial rights apply to this kind of grave. The limitation concerns the appearance and nature of the grave memorial and other aspects of the decoration and arrangement of the grave. The concept of an *askgravplats* is not interpreted in the same way everywhere and local deviations may apply. *See page 17.*

BEGRAVNINGSAVGIFT – BURIAL FEE
See page 6.

BEGRAVNINGS CEREMONI – FUNERAL CEREMONY *See page 11.*

BEGRAVNINGS HUVUDMAN – BURIAL AUTHORITY *See Huvudman*

BEGRAVNINGS OMBUD – FUNERAL REPRESENTATIVE *See page 21.*

BEGRAVNINGSPLATSER – both public and private, are cemeteries – in other words areas that have been duly established as the final resting place of the bodies or ashes of deceased persons. The difference between public and private cemeteries is that public ones are established by parishes or municipalities, while private ones are established by foundations and other faith communities. All people registered in the population register in the burial authority's administrative district are entitled to be buried or have their ashes scattered in a public cemetery. This right does not apply in private cemeteries. The terms burial ground and cemetery are often used synonymously.

BISÄTTNING can be defined in different ways. Its meaning may vary from one place to another, but it encompasses all the elements connected with placing the body in a coffin and its transportation to a funeral ceremony, burial or cremation. The following elements may be included in *bisättning*: dressing the body, placing the body into the coffin, transportation of the coffin and receiving the body in the coffin at premises for storage and viewing. Such premises are sometimes called a chapel of rest in English.

BORGERLIG BEGRAVNING – CIVIL FUNERAL

This means that the farewell ceremony does not follow the order of service used in the Church of Sweden nor the order of service used in other faith communities. *See page 13.*

BORGERLIG BEGRAVNINGSFÖRRÄTTARE – CIVIL FUNERAL CELEBRANT

They are provided by some municipalities and funeral directors. Relatives or friends of the deceased may also act as civil funeral celebrants; no authorisation is required. *See page 13.*

BÅRTÄCKE – PALL OR MORTCLOTH. This is a cloth draped over the coffin. It usually covers the entire coffin, but some palls/mortcloths are smaller. It is used instead of coffin decoration. The parish can provide a pall, but relatives of the deceased may also use a cloth of their own.

BÄRARE – COFFIN BEARERS OR PALLBEARERS

are required to move the coffin during a funeral ceremony. If the funeral service is concluded outside in the cemetery, the carrying of the coffin in a procession to the graveside is included as part of the service and is covered by the church fee, so it is free of charge for members of the Church of Sweden. In other cases, the estate of the deceased may have to pay a fee. *See page 12.*

DÖDSANNONS – DEATH NOTICES FOR

PUBLICATION are optional. Relatives decide on the size and appearance of the notice themselves. There is a great deal of freedom to choose a personal symbol, but there are certain limitations. Discuss your wishes with a funeral director.

DÖDSBO – THE ESTATE OF THE DECEASED

Is a legal term. The estate consists of the assets and liabilities of the deceased. The costs of a funeral, a cremation and/or burial that are not covered by the burial fee must be paid by the estate. If the estate lacks funds, the municipality will provide financial assistance.

FAMILJEGRAV – FAMILY GRAVE is not a legal term but is often used for an existing grave in which several members of a family have been buried.

FLYTTNING AV KISTA ELLER URNA – MOV-

ING A COFFIN OR URN from one grave to another is not permitted without special reasons once burial has taken place. The burial authority where the coffin or urn is buried assesses applications for moving the remains. If the authority rejects the request, an appeal can be lodged with the county administrative board (*länsstyrelse*).

GRAVRÄTT – BURIAL RIGHT is the right to use a specific grave. Some graves have burial rights, some have limited burial rights and others lack burial rights; also see *Grantors*. Burial rights come with both rights and obligations. *See page 14.*

GRAVSKÖTSEL means maintenance of a grave. The holder of the burial rights for graves that have such a right – *kistgravplats* (coffin grave) and *urngravplats* (urn grave) – must keep the grave in a neat and dignified state. The burial rights holders can maintain the graves themselves or buy this service, for example from the parish. *See page 17.*

GRAVSTEN – GRAVESTONE. Such a stone or other memorial is optional on graves. The burial authority must approve a proposed gravestone or other memorial before it can be erected or installed. If the authority rejects the request, an appeal can be lodged with the county administrative board (*länsstyrelse*). Any memorial on a coffin grave or an urn grave – that is, graves with burial rights – belongs to the burial rights holder, who is responsible for ensuring that it is safely erected or installed.

GRAVSÄTTNING – THE BURIAL OF A BODY OR THE BURIAL/SCATTERING OF ASHES must take place as soon as possible and no later than one month after death. The burial/scattering of ashes must take place as soon as possible and no later than one year after cremation. *See page 19.*

GRIFTEFRID/GRAVFRID – THE SANCTITY OF THE GRAVE. These words are not included in the Burial Act but they are in the preparatory work for the law. The basic principle that the sanctity of the grave must be respected is expressed in the restrictiveness that applies to allowing the body or ashes of a deceased person to be moved. The Swedish Penal Code states what constitutes desecration of the sanctity of a grave and the penalty for doing so.

HUVUDMAN – IN THIS CONTEXT THIS IS A BURIAL AUTHORITY. The authority is responsible for funeral, cremation and burial work in a specific geographic area. *See page 4.*

KISTA – COFFIN which is used in both burials and cremations. *See page 10.*

KOLUMBARIUM – COLUMBARIUM comes from the Latin word *columba*, meaning dove, because the structures resemble dovecotes in which doves live. The word columbarium is used as the name of a burial wall containing small niches for urns of ashes. Limited burial rights apply to use of a columbarium. *See page 17.*

KREMERING – CREMATION comes from *cremare* in Latin, meaning to burn. Cremation must take place no later than one month after death. *See page 18.*

KYRKOAVGIFT – THE CHURCH FEE is paid by members of the Church of Sweden. This fee includes a funeral service with a priest (Lutheran minister), church musician/organist, coffin bearers and the service of a verger. *See page 11.*

LOKAL FÖR FÖRVARING OCH VISNING – THE USE OF PREMISES FOR STORAGE AND VIEWING is included in the burial fee. The deceased lies in their coffin before the funeral ceremony if such a ceremony is to take place. In the vicinity of the storage premises, a room must be available in which the deceased person may be viewed if this is requested by the relatives. Such a room is sometimes called a chapel of rest in English.

MINNESLUND – GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE. This is a burial ground for collective use, without burial rights, in which ashes are buried or scattered. The burial ground is anonymous, so relatives cannot attend the burial or scattering of the ashes. Names of those whose ashes have been buried or scattered in the garden are not displayed, but there is a communal area for decoration where cut flowers and candles/lanterns can be placed. *See page 17.*

MINNESSTUND – FUNERAL RECEPTION. It is organised by relatives and is usually held after the end of the funeral ceremony.

MINNESSAKER I KISTA OCH URNA – MEMENTOS OR OTHER PERSONAL ITEMS in the coffin or urn are permitted. However, objects that could damage the environment, premises or equipment, or harm the people handling the coffin, are not permitted. An item of jewellery may be placed with the ashes in the urn before the lid is riveted into place. Crematorium staff should be contacted in plenty of time in advance so that they can explain how this is arranged.

PROCESSIONSBÄRNING, *See Bärare – coffin bearer or pallbearer.*

STOFT is the Swedish word for the body of a deceased person. The body of the deceased can be buried in a coffin or cremated.

SVEPNING can mean both the material in which the body is dressed and the preparation of the body before the body is placed into the coffin.

SVEPDRÄKT is a word also used for the clothes or gown the deceased wears in the coffin. Relatives decide on the clothes or gown and the preparation and dressing of the deceased. Natural materials are recommended.

SÄRSKILDA GRAVPLATSER – SPECIAL GRAVES – must be provided for deceased persons who are not members of a Christian faith community. Examples are Jewish or Muslim graves.

TRANSPORTKOSTNADER – TRANSPORT COSTS refer to two types: those payable by the estate of the deceased and those covered by the burial fee. The estate pays for transportation of the coffin containing the deceased from the hospital, nursing home or private home to the premises where the burial authority takes over responsibility for the body. These premises may be in a church, chapel, a ceremony hall or at a crematorium. Transportation of the coffin from the storage premises until the burial/scattering of ashes has taken place within the burial authority's administrative district is included in the burial fee. The cost of transportation to a special grave or crematorium is covered by the burial fee even if it is located outside the burial authority's geographic area. *See page 7.*

UPPLÅTARE – THE GRANTOR grants the use of burial rights for a grave. The grantor is usually the burial authority, but may also be a parish that manages a public cemetery without being a burial authority.

URNMUR – OUTDOOR COLUMBARIUM
See page 17.



This brochure *About funerals, cremations and burials* is designed for everyone who has questions about how funerals, cremations and burials take place in Sweden. The brochure explains what such activities consist of and what the burial fee includes.

There is a special section titled *Mina önskemål* (My wishes) in the centre of the brochure. There you can fill in details of what you would like your own funeral to consist of – to help your relatives.

Questions about funerals, cremations or burials?

In the first instance, contact the burial authority in the location in which the matter applies.

Contact details are available at

www.svenskakyrkan.se/kontakt (search for a parish)

for matters in locations where the Church of Sweden's parishes and groups of parishes are the burial authorities. General information about funeral, burial and cremation work and the funeral service is also provided there.

www.stockholm.se (click on stöd & familj/begravning & kyrkogårdar)

for matters in the City of Stockholm.

www.tranas.se (click on familj & omsorg/begravning & griftegårdar)

for matters in Tranås Municipality.

The Church of Sweden Employers' Association is the employer and service organisation for the Church's parishes, groups of parishes and dioceses. The association provides advice and support regarding funeral, cremation and burial work to the parishes and groups of parishes that are burial authorities.

Fill in, remove
and save

TO THE PERSON
ORGANISING MY FUNERAL

My wishes



To the person organising my funeral – My wishes

Name

Personal identity number

Place and date

Signature

I have told the following person/people
about my wishes

I would like the following person to organise my funeral, for example by contacting a
funeral director (funeral home), the burial authority (parish/group of parishes/municipi-
pality) and a funeral celebrant or officiant.

.....

Address

Other contact details

I would like to be buried in a coffin

- in a new grave in the cemetery.....
.....
- I would like to be buried in an existing grave which has grave number.....
and is located in the cemetery.....
in.....
- I am the burial rights holder of the grave.
- The burial rights for the grave are held by another person/other people, who must all give their permission.

The name(s) of the burial rights holder(s), their address(es) and other contact details:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- If there is no room for my coffin in that grave – only for an urn or ashes – I would instead like to be cremated and have my ashes buried there.
- If burial in the existing grave is not possible, I would like to be buried in a new grave in the cemetery.....
in.....

I would like to be cremated

and my ashes to be laid to rest in the cemetery.....
.....

I would like my final resting place to be in

- a new urn grave (*urngrav*) a new cremated remains grave (*askgravplats*)
- a new niche in an outdoor columbarium (*urnmur*)
- a new indoor columbarium (*kolumbarium*)
- an *askgravlund* (a collective burial ground for ashes and it is similar to a garden of remembrance. It has a collective area for the names of the deceased and decoration)
- a *minneslund* (a garden of remembrance. It is a burial ground for collective use, without burial rights, in which ashes are buried or scattered)

- I would like my ashes to have their final resting place in an existing grave which has grave number
(a coffin grave/urn grave/cremated remains grave/outdoor or indoor columbarium)
that is located in the cemetery
in

- I am the burial rights holder of the grave.

- The burial rights for the grave are held by another person/other people, who must all give their permission.

The name(s) of the burial rights holder(s), their address(es) and other contact details:

.....
.....
.....
.....

If final resting place in the existing grave is not possible, I would like my final resting place to be in a new grave in the cemetery.....
in

I would like my ashes to be scattered over water in.....
.....

I would like my ashes to be scattered over land in
.....

If the scattering of ashes is not permitted in the place I have chosen, I would like my final resting place to be as follows:.....

Coffin

I would like the simplest possible kind of coffin.

I would like the coffin to look like this (material, colour, etc.):

.....
.....

I would like my relatives to choose a coffin.

I have had a coffin made that I would like to be used.

It is stored at:.....
.....

If it is not possible to use the coffin that I have had made, I would like the coffin that is chosen instead to look like this:
.....

Preparing/dressing the body before placing it in the coffin

Natural materials are recommended.

- I would like to be placed in the coffin with my own linen, pillow and throw/blanket/quilt.

I would like to wear my own clothes:

.....

.....

- I would like my relatives to choose a gown or clothes for me.

- I would like the materials that are included with the coffin to be used.

- I do *not* want my relatives to take part in dressing and preparing my body for it to be placed into the coffin.

OTHER WISHES CONCERNING THE COFFIN AND PREPARATION/DRESSING OF MY BODY

.....

.....

.....

.....

Urn

No urn is required if the ashes will be scattered directly into a grave, in a garden of remembrance called a minneslund, over water or over land. In such cases, the ashes are transported in a special bag or cardboard box from the crematorium.

I do not wish to have an urn.

I would like the urn to look like this (material, colour, etc.):

.....
.....
.....

I would like my relatives to choose an urn.

I have had an urn made that I would like to be used.

It is stored at:

.....

If it is not possible to use the urn that I have had made, I would like the urn that is chosen instead to look like this:.....

.....

OTHER WISHES CONCERNING THE URN

.....
.....
.....
.....

Funeral ceremony

The funeral ceremony is a private matter and can be structured according to your wishes – or can be omitted.

- I am a member of the Church of Sweden and would like a funeral service to be held according to the order of service of the Church of Sweden.

The funeral service is to be held

- in my parish church
- in the chapel
- in the church/chapel in a different location.....

- I am a member of faith community
and would like the funeral ceremony to take place according to the order of service that applies for that faith community
in their premises
in different premises

- I would like a civil funeral service to be held
 - in the venue without religious symbols that is offered by the burial authority.
 - in different premises.....

- I do *not* wish to have a funeral ceremony.

OTHER WISHES CONCERNING THE FUNERAL CEREMONY

(decoration, pall or mortcloth to drape over the coffin, music, poems, etc.)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Funeral reception/gathering

The funeral reception is a private matter and can be structured according to your wishes – or can be omitted.

Special wishes (guests, venue, refreshments, entertainment, etc.)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- I would like my relatives and friends to decide on how to hold the funeral reception.
- I do *not* want a funeral reception to be held.

Grave memorial (gravestone or similar)

Special wishes (gravestone, planting, etc.)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- I would like the person organising my funeral to choose a grave memorial.
- I do *not* want a grave memorial with my name on it.

To avoid disagreement among relatives it is important to write down your wishes about your own funeral and to make them known to one or more of the people closest to you. Filling in the details in this brochure is a way of making your wishes known.

Questions about funerals, cremations or burials?

In the first instance, contact the burial authority in the location in which the matter applies.

Contact details are available at

www.svenskakyrkan.se/kontakt (search for a parish)

regarding matters in locations where the Church of Sweden's parishes and groups of parishes are the burial authorities.

www.stockholm.se (click on stöd & omsorg, then on begravning & kyrkogårdar)

regarding matters in the City of Stockholm.

www.tranas.se (click on familj & omsorg, then begravning & griftegårdar)

regarding matters in Tranås Municipality.