

I. ESSAY

RITUALS FOR ALL

Funeral rituals should not be a privilege; at San Vicente Funeral Home we consider every human being worthy of a ritual.

The road we travelled so far during our first 47 years of service to the community, allows us today to show the world, in the framework of respect and solidarity for this noble cause, our funeral services for homeless people, for elderly people at risk of becoming homeless, for the victims of the armed conflict in our country and for families with limited financial resources, who due to their social and economic conditions never would be able to have access to funeral rituals.

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the participation of family members and the promotion of religious rites as an essential part of safe and dignified burials, but at the same time recognizes that some infections can occur when members of the family and members of the community carry out work that clearly should be realized by a funeral home. The WHO expresses this idea clearly in this statement: *'We accompany deceased human beings in a safe, respectful and dignified way and prepare them, according to their cultural differences, for their last resting place. This is the kind of feeling with which our volunteers perform this difficult work.'* (WHO)

*Ever since Mr. LUIS FERNANDO ARANGO MADRID founded SAN VICENTE FUNERAL HOME S.A. in 1971, he set out to do everything in his power to dignify what government institutions considered to be a **simple disposal of human remains**. Because of him this practice is now being carried out decorously and become an integral part of the social policy of SAN VICENTE FUNERAL HOME S.A., in addition to guaranteeing the continuation of this work.*

'Funeral rituals are human activities that are carried out to express the complexity of existing symbols on the concept of life and death.' Delci Torres – UPEL (Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador). Profound thoughts such as the ones quoted above, underline phrases in the discourse of Mr. LUIS FERNANDO ARANGO MADRID, such as: *'Anyone who passes the threshold of the entrance to this Company with such a great sorrow as the loss of a loved one, should not leave again with another (sorrow), in case you do not have the resources to pay for your funeral.'*



Government authorities for many years regarded these kinds of deaths as a social problem and their work consisted of disappearing, as soon as possible, the deceased persons from people's social lives, considering it to be a risk for the community, from the environmental point of view, but at the same time ignoring the status of the deceased as a human being and the life story that existed behind the deceased person.

During all this time we have changed history, we have carried out an average of one daily funeral service with these characteristics in the last 40 years, which is an expression of our belief that these people, as citizens, also are *our* deaths and that therefore they should be treated as citizens.

If we take as reference the year 2018, when SAN VICENTE FUNERAL HOME S.A. provided 77 Services for Homeless People, 101 services for Elderly Persons who are at risk of becoming homeless, 25 services for Victims of the armed conflict, who have no financial resources, 174 services for members of families who did not have enough economic resources for a funeral and finally 48 services for foreigners without financial resources, at this moment mostly Venezuelan citizens, in total 425 funeral services. For the last ten years all these services together amount to 3.911.

The humanized care and the logistics used for these funerals do not differ from the services that are paid for or that are to be found in funeral provision programs, because at SAN VICENTE FUNERAL HOME S.A. we strongly believe that every human being and his or her family and social environment is entitled to a farewell ritual, regardless of his or her religion, nationality, race or social class.

In cases where homeless people pass away, either in the streets or in some institution of hospital care, they are taken to SAN VICENTE FUNERAL HOME S.A., while the relevant procedures for its burial are carried out. In cases when these people do not have any documents on them, the purpose always is to try to find out their full identification. Many people die while living in the streets due to psychoactive drug use and perhaps their families at that time may not have any idea that a family member has died. Nevertheless, it is logical that they want to know where this unfortunate family member is buried and also need to have access to all the documents that prove this death, because if they haven't, the legal difficulties they face, would be enormous.



Elderly people at risk of becoming homeless or with insufficient financial resources are taken to their final disposal after a service with all funeral rituals, allowing their families to say goodbye to them. Also, they obtain tools that will constitute the initial input for the process of dealing with their grief.

The victims of the armed conflict in our country, because of the circumstances they had to live in, generate a great social impact, and if they are peasants or people with rural origins who have been displaced by the violence of the war, the chances of having access to farewell rituals, under normal conditions, are very few. In these cases we work hard to be able to move the deceased to the place where his relatives live, which is where they truly await him or her, and that is: in the countryside.

Our actions have motivated the creation of government programs aimed at carrying out these funeral rituals with solemnity and respect, although these funerals may have little attendance. But if we can achieve that for only one single person the life's history of a deceased and buried person is dignified, then with this result we would feel satisfied.

We consider this to be a truly compassionate practice towards the community, because we are aware of the role we play in society and the contribution we make to the mental health of the population by promoting farewells, worthy of every deceased human being. But because of our investiture and vocation of Funeral Directors, we feel constrained to speak of the subject, for all the implications the word 'give' may have. Nevertheless, anyone who understands what we are feeling when we have the chance to perform rituals that previously never were carried out, will understand that for us this argument, of human dignity, has more value than any other. The financial or economic consideration are really unimportant in these cases.

Reasons why we consider San Vicente Funeral Company S.A. to be worthy of a distinction.

In our effort to promote people's healthy dealing with grief, we know that there is an initial stage, composed of funeral rituals, which should not be the privilege of only some people. We have done this work from a long time ago and consider that we now have the maturity to value the importance that these rituals have, as a first step to the therapy in the Grief Unit. This has been recognized by the NFDA (National Funeral Directors Association) on two occasions, but even if a person takes the decision to not attend the Grief Unit, we guarantee that he or she, having experienced the funeral rituals, will have a better start on the path of recovery he or she will undertake.





This noble and supportive practice is directly linked to our work, that is, to serve and carry out what we know best to do and, as is proven by the testimonies that confirm this, and with the same standards of quality compared to services that are paid for.

The community as a whole has been the most benefited from this work and we know that thousands of people have been helped by us in their path of grief, with appropriate rituals, leaving aside the difficulty they otherwise might have had to gain access to them.

This is not a temporary practice, it is part of the Company's DNA and has been so since its beginnings.

It has also been beneficial for San Vicente Funeral Company S.A., because throughout the years we have strengthened a brand in the community that is associated with words like supportive and solidary.

With these actions we also want to motivate our colleagues, so that they also might incorporate these kind of compassionate practices for the community into their companies and let their funeral activity become a shoulder of support for many people who need it.

CATEGORY 2: LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERSONNEL

A. On December 20th, 2018, Paula Andrea Uribe Galeano, who works as an embalmer, obtained a title in Cosmetology, granted by the **Colombian Collegiate of Cosmetology and Cosmiatry**, a training she received during 2 years.

B. On February 21, 2019 the communicator of San Vicente Funeral Home, Monica Marcela Osorno Duque with identity document number 1034868379 attended the conference “Voices training: Chapecoense experience see by a journalist” this conference was held in the city of Santa Marta in the annual convention of Remanso.

E. On Wednesday, April 3rd, 2019, Pedro Rozo Contreras and Jorge Escobar Urrego, executives of the Company, participated in the training for sales leaders, given by Fenalco, the National Federation of Traders. During this course, entitled **‘Effective closing of sales’**, important tools were given for an appropriate closing of sales and for the most efficient way to distribute time in the commercial area.

