

TRENDS

Cremation becoming American way, with West still leading

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You'll likely be cremated after you pass away, and that choice for your final act on Earth is yet another societal trend that's created a big gap between the West and the rest of the nation.

A new forecast from National Funeral Directors Association says cremation will be the preferred funeral arrangement nationwide by 2018.

The association's statistics reveal another case of a major bicoastal cultural split within the nation.

Of the 15 states where

cremation is preferred only four — Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Florida — are east of the Rocky Mountains. Conversely, the 15 states with the lowest share of cremations include just one that borders an ocean — Virginia — while the other 14, curiously, all went for Donald Trump in the presidential election.

Growth in cremation can be tied to several factors: For starters, they're cheaper and this is an era of thriftiness.

Also, the nation's growing cultural melting pot means more of us hail from places where crema-

tion is commonplace. For example, the U.S. is essentially 50-50 on cremation vs. burial while more than 90 percent of populations in Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong choose cremation.

Plus, Americans are becoming a less traditional in their religion, and it shows up in these stats. According to an association survey, 39.5 percent of those polled nationwide this year felt a funeral's religious component for a loved one was very important vs. 49.5 percent five years ago.

Let's peek the numbers ...

National trend: Cremation is projected in 2018 to be the most-popular alter-

native to burials, used after 53.3 percent of U.S. deaths. In 2015, the latest figures available, 47.9 percent of 2015 funerals were cremations vs. 40.4 percent in 2010. By 2030? 71.3 percent.

California trend: The funeral group's stats show 63.4 percent of 2015 funerals in California were cremations vs. 58.5 percent in 2010. In 2018, cremation's share of funerals is estimated to grow to 66.7 percent and 79.8 percent by 2030.

Cremation tops: Progressive California's cremation pace, however, is relatively modest, ranking 14th highest. Just look elsewhere in

the West, where cremation is most popular nationwide in Washington with 76.4 percent of 2015 funerals being cremations vs. 70.9 percent in 2010. Then comes Nevada (75.6 percent in 2015) and Oregon (74.3 percent).

Cremation lows: Where do burials remain the preferred funeral? Mississippi had the lowest share of cremations in 2015 at 20.9 percent, followed by Alabama, 25.7 percent; Kentucky 27.3 percent; Louisiana 29.7 percent. By 2030, projections show only Mississippi and Alabama will not top a 50 percent preference for cremations.

Cremation's growth creates a tough business climate for funeral directors. Lower consumer costs put the typical funeral homes in a bit of a financial bind because the industry claims cremation is almost as labor-intensive as traditional burials. But the funeral directors' trade group, as its usual from any industry association, found a silver lining.

For funeral home owners, that is.

"However, increasing death rates and the aging population will keep demand steady and the industry stable," the report stated.