



HOPE IN EVERY GOODBYE

–

Dale A. Knouse

Incoming Presidents Speech

Dear Friends, Colleagues, and Fellow Servants,

Let me begin by expressing some deeply deserved words of gratitude. To Tonya, my beautiful wife of thirty-six years: thank you for your enduring love and support. I also want to recognize the incredible group of servants I am blessed to work alongside back home in La Porte — Rob, Lisa, Dora, my brother Andrew, Ken, Tony, Tiffany, Thomas, Michael, Brandon, Ryan, Theo, and Mason. Thank you all. It is entirely because of their dedication and support that I am fortunate enough to serve our Association."

It is with deep gratitude and sincere humility that I serve you as your next President of the Indiana Funeral Directors Association. Before I look ahead to the work of this coming year, I must offer some sincere thanks. This Association doesn't run on good intentions alone; it is sustained by faithful people who serve behind the scenes — often without recognition, but never without impact.

To Andy Clayton, thank you. And to our dedicated IFDA staff — Connie, Martha, Bailey, Judi, and Jon — thank you. You are truly the quiet engine of this association, and your steady dedication makes our collective mission possible. To our Executive Board, District Directors, my first love—the Hightower Board, and the Indiana Funeral Education Foundation: thank you. What you do matters, and our IFDA family is stronger because of you.

We are so much more than business owners, funeral directors, embalmers, and arrangers. We are a brotherhood and a sisterhood bound together not just by a profession, but by a distinct calling. It is a calling to walk beside the brokenhearted, to

step into moments others step away from, and to help create a sacred space — a space where a family can breathe, where silence is allowed, where stories are remembered, and where, even in grief, healing begins to happen.

Over the past year, I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on the deeper meaning of our work, and I keep coming back to a central truth: **our work is worship**.

I say this with the utmost clarity and respect for the many different faith traditions represented within the IFDA, as well as for those who may still be searching. Please know that you are valued here, you belong here, and you are an essential part of this fellowship.

As for me, my personal faith is rooted in Jesus Christ; He is my Lord, my Savior, and my hope. But regardless of our individual backgrounds, we all share a profound responsibility. The world may see us merely as businesspeople, but we know better. We are stewards of life's final chapter, entrusted with moments of holy vulnerability.

What we offer is more than logistics or ceremony. We offer presence. We offer dignity. And we offer **Hope in Every Goodbye**. That is more than just a theme for the IFDA this year - it is our collective calling. We don't erase pain, but we stand in the gap and walk with people through it when others cannot.

Yet, I know that standing in that gap takes a heavy toll. Many in our ranks right now are dealing with burnout, running on empty, and wondering how much more they can give. Some are facing personal health challenges while still showing up for others, or quietly battling depression, anxiety, and exhaustion. Others are carrying the heavy weight of a struggling business, navigating cash flow issues, and managing staffing shortages.

Most people will never see that side of your life. But we do. And more importantly, God does.

Please hear me when I say this: you are not alone. You are not alone in your struggle, you are not alone in your calling, and you are not alone in the IFDA. Now more than ever, we need to circle the wagons. The IFDA is not just a place where we gather; it is a community where we lean on each other. It is where a phone call gets answered, a problem gets solved, and a heavy burden gets shared.

My prayer for the IFDA this year is simple:

- That we never lose sight of the sacredness of our calling.
- That we pursue excellence, because every family deserves our best.

- That we remain rooted in compassion, because every heart needs to be seen and held.
- That through it all, we continue to create sacred space and offer hope in every single goodbye.

Friends, the best days of funeral service are not behind us — they are ahead. In a world of confusion, we offer clarity. In a culture of chaos, we bring calm. In the face of despair, we offer hope.

Let us move forward together as the Indiana Funeral Directors Association — united, committed, and faithful. Our work is worship, our calling is sacred, and the space we create is holy. And because of Him, we know that even death has lost its sting.

Thank you for your trust, your dedication, and your continued service.

With shared commitment,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dale A. Knouse". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Dale A. Knouse
President, 2026 – 2027
Indiana Funeral Directors Association