



LITURGICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FUNERALS

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The following guidelines provide a summary of the ecclesial documentation concerning the Church's funeral liturgies. They are also intended to serve as an aid to families in the planning of funeral liturgies at St. Paul the Apostle Church.

INTRODUCTION

The Church confidently proclaims that God created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity... principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead and glorious ascension. Order of Christian Funerals, 1.

First and foremost, please know that you have our deepest condolences for the loss of your loved one. We at St. Paul the Apostle Church want you to know that we are here for you, not only in the planning stages but afterward. In each of the Church's liturgies, Christ's Paschal Mystery is made present by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, men and women are initiated into this Mystery and become members of Christ's Mystical Body. In a Christian's life, the Paschal Mystery's presence is ever renewed and sustained through the celebration of the Church's liturgies.

At the death of a Christian, the Church gathers to offer praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of the life now returned to Him. The Church also intercedes on behalf of the deceased in the belief that death is not the end of human existence, nor does it break the bonds forged in life. Recognizing the power of the Paschal Mystery, the Church asks that the deceased and all the faithful will have their sins forgiven and be raised in Christ.

In these same rites, the Church ministers to those who mourn the loss of a loved one. Through the proclamation of Jesus Christ's saving works and the celebration of the Eucharist, the gathered community finds hope in Christ's triumph over death and calls upon the Father of mercy to receive the deceased into the kingdom of light and peace.

Many people who attend a Catholic funeral for the first time will often remark how beautiful it is. Steeped in centuries-old custom and ritual as Catholic funeral rites are, that's understandable.

But the most important aspect of Catholic funerals is that they express the Christian hope in eternal life and the resurrection of the body on the last day. Every component of the Catholic funeral rites should express these fundamental beliefs and hopes. Our funeral rites are not "a celebration of life," as they are referred to sometimes, but a privileged opportunity to return to God the gift of the deceased, hoping to usher them into paradise with the aid of our prayers. Our love for the departed is expressed after death, above all else, in our prayer for them.

When a loved one dies, those left here to ensure their proper and dignified burial can often get bogged down by all the decisions needing to be made. In that case, we often miss the opportunity to focus on the faith and hope the Catholic funeral rites express. Bereaved family and friends often will have to make many decisions about their loved one's funeral but may not be fully prepared to do so. Whenever possible, the Church recommends that the family should be involved in planning the funeral rites — from choices of texts and readings to music and liturgical ministers. They may wish to make decisions on some of these components and not on others. They may leave some or all the decisions up to the parish staff as well.

This guide explains Catholic funeral rites and provides some guidance on the decisions that must be made—in light of Church teachings—at the time of a loved one's death. It might also be helpful in preparing notes on our own funeral.

PART I: GENERAL

The *Order of Christian Funerals* recommends that family members be involved in the planning of the liturgical rites.¹ In coordination with the parish priest or delegate, the family of the deceased and the funeral director should arrange the places and times for the Vigil, the funeral Mass, and the Committal.

It is the policy of the diocese that the pastor or his delegate meet with the family of the deceased to plan the rituals that will take place.² The delegate may consist of another priest, a deacon, or a layperson trained to assist with such planning. Planning the liturgy should occur as soon as possible following the death. The pastor, or delegate, should explain to the family the meaning and significance of the liturgy. The set schedule for all funeral Masses in the Church is 10:30 am Monday-Friday and 10:00 am on Saturday.

“Eulogies” or “words of remembrance” are prohibited at funeral Masses celebrated at St. Paul the Apostle Church. Families are encouraged to use the Vigil the night before a funeral or luncheon to personally share about a loved one. The priests preparing for a funeral here are committed to making the funeral homily as personal as possible. They will work with families to ensure their loved one is properly remembered. Please know that the policy is meant to ensure the best possible funeral experience for the family and assist them in their journey through grief.

It is the preference of St. Paul’s that visitations or viewings of the deceased take place at the funeral home, typically the day before the funeral Mass during calling hours, which may be followed by a Vigil for the deceased.

If arriving in procession to St. Paul’s from the funeral home the day of the Mass, please advise the priest or delegate ahead of time. A designated space in our parking area will be prepared so as not to block the fire lane in front of the Church during the funeral Mass.

Family and friends may be invited to participate in various ministries during the celebration of the liturgy as readers, gift bearers and pallbearers, unless they find these activities too burdensome at a time of grief and loss.³ Please note that only clergy or a St. Paul Eucharistic Minister will be permitted to distribute holy Communion.

It is the policy of St. Paul the Apostle Church that the pastor, parochial vicar, or any other priest at the parish will be the individual celebrating the Mass. With permission of the Pastor or his delegate, families are welcome to invite priests to concelebrate and deacons to assist. A Letter of Good Standing is needed for any clergy visiting outside the Diocese of Columbus.

PART II: PREPARATION

It is advisable to schedule the funeral liturgy as soon as possible following a death. Normally, this scheduling is coordinated between the family, parish, and funeral home. The parish should inform the family that a funeral Mass may not be celebrated on certain days in the Church’s calendar.

In preparing for the funeral liturgy, the family will choose readings that speak to them and the deceased's life. The diocese's policy is that the family is consulted in the selection of readings for both the Vigil and

¹ Ibid, 17

² Cf. Prot. 10/97, 2

³ Ibid, 15

the funeral liturgy.⁴ The deceased's family is offered the privilege of naming one or two people to read the Scriptures at the Vigil and the funeral liturgy. Please note that only one reader per reading is permitted. For your convenience, a Funeral Planning Worksheet is provided on the website under funerals, which will be helpful to complete prior to your planning meeting with the priest and/or delegate.

PART III: THE VIGIL

The Vigil is a brief service consisting of one or more Scripture readings and prayers for the deceased and the mourners. This liturgy usually occurs during the calling hours at a funeral home during the days before the funeral Mass. This service's purpose is to commend the deceased to God and support the mourners in their hope of eternal life. The death of a friend or family member is, in fact, a social event, often affecting far more people in a community than the deceased's immediate relatives. Wakes, or viewings, are an opportunity for family and friends to come together, console each other, and recall the deceased's impact on them. This usually occurs, in American culture, at the funeral home.

Wakes originate in the Christian celebration of vigils, which are often associated with major events or feasts. The vigil for the dead is intended to be dedicated to prayer for the deceased. The Church supplies a liturgical rite for wakes, which is celebrated by a sacred minister or a lay minister in some cases. This rite combines readings, a brief homily or reflection, prayers, and possibly music.

The wake is also a time to celebrate any popular devotions that might have been particularly significant in the deceased's faith life, such as the Rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

Another option for the wake is to celebrate the Office of the Dead. This comes from the Liturgy of the Hours – the Church's daily prayer, composed of psalms, readings, and prayers. This will likely require more preparation and other ministers to celebrate it appropriately, so it is good to discuss any deviations from normative practice with a parish staff member.

PART IV: FUNERAL MASS

The funeral Mass is the central celebration of the Christian community on behalf of the deceased. In this liturgy:

The community gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery.⁵

The diocese's policy is that the funeral Mass is to be celebrated in a Church, preferably in the parish to which the deceased belonged.⁶ However, the funeral Mass may also be celebrated at another church with the pastor's consent and when the deceased's pastor has been notified.⁷ Funeral Masses are not to be celebrated on solemnities of obligation, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, or the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season.⁸ On these days or other occasions when the Funeral Mass may not take place, a funeral Liturgy outside Mass may be celebrated.

IMPORTANCE OF A FUNERAL MASS

⁴ Cf. Prot. 10/97, 6

⁵ Ibid, 129

⁶ Cf. Prot. 10/93

⁷ CIC, 1177

⁸ OCF, 178

In the Church today, a sad trend is occurring and getting notably worse. This trend is families choosing not to have a Catholic funeral Mass even though their loved one was a devout Catholic and/or had requested one upon their death. For Catholics, a funeral Mass is the most beautiful expression of faith and the truest statement of God's love for one of his children. We offer the Mass because it is the most perfect prayer – the renewal of Christ's offering of himself to the Father for the salvation of all men and women. In that moment, we offer it for this person – this man, this woman – who has left this world in the hope, great or small, of everlasting happiness.

Family, friends, and the Church (through the priest) lift up the person's entire life to God, asking him to have mercy, heal, strengthen, purify, and reward the one whom we have loved. For a last time, this person's body is brought before the altar, veiled in a white cloth, reminding us of the beginning of their life in Christ.

In a safe and sacred place, unlike any church or funeral home, we can say goodbye, thank you, forgive me, and perhaps, "I forgive you." Nothing can replace what a funeral Mass offers the dead or the living.

More often than ever before, practicing Catholics are not having funeral Masses. This is a significant loss and mistake. Sometimes, it is because the family is no longer practicing the faith and does not understand why they should "sit through" something they do not understand or value. Sometimes, people are afraid that a funeral will be too sad as if unexpressed grief were somehow healthier. In some cases, final wishes may have been left unclear or unexpressed. This is tragic. The Church wants to reach out to all her children, and practicing Catholics should understand their funeral Mass is a final witness to their faith, the final seal on their life and dying, and perhaps an opportunity of grace and healing for family members.

FUNERAL LITURGY OUTSIDE OF MASS

There are times when a funeral Mass might not be chosen. Perhaps your loved one had been separated from the Church for a long time, and a funeral Mass wouldn't seem the most appropriate. Or maybe the burial must take place on a day when no priest is available or when the Church prohibits the celebration of a funeral Mass.

There could also be other pastoral reasons for this, which should be considered when meeting with parish staff during the planning stages. These would include the life of the deceased and the circumstances of death. To express our love for the deceased, it is recommended that, if a funeral Mass is not chosen, a memorial Mass should be scheduled for the deceased's intention at a later date. Depending on circumstances, a funeral outside of Mass may be officiated by a deacon, priest— or, in some cases, even a lay minister.

If Mass is not chosen, a funeral Liturgy of the Word and final commendation of the deceased is celebrated. This doesn't need to be celebrated in the church itself, and the church is perhaps not the most appropriate setting at times. A funeral outside of Mass may be conducted at the funeral home, in a chapel at the cemetery, or even at the graveside.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Readings

Depending on pastoral circumstances, there may be one or two readings before the reading of the Gospel.⁹ Family members should visit the links to choose the [First Reading](#), [Second Reading](#), and [Gospel](#) before

⁹ OCF, 165

the meeting with the priest or layperson. During the liturgical season of Easter, the First Reading is chosen from specific Easter Readings from the New Testament. Family members or friends of the deceased may be invited to proclaim these readings. Readers should ordinarily have prior experience as lectors and be able to proclaim the Word of God with clarity and dignity. In this way, their ministry can effectively aid in bringing the wisdom and hope of God's Word to those who mourn. It is not acceptable to have more than one reader for each reading or "split" the reading between readers. If there are no qualified lectors among family or friends, the readings may be proclaimed by a parish lector, a deacon, a concelebrant, or, if necessary, the celebrant. The directions for the readers are as follows. A funeral coordinator will also be present to assist in orienting the readers and gift bearers:

When the priest prays the opening prayer at the altar and then sits down, the congregation will sit down for the first time in the Mass. That is the cue for the first reader to come forward. It is better if the readers are seated near the end of the pew, somewhere on the left side of the main section of the Church, toward the front. The reader walks around to the side of the altar where the readings are read (as you face the altar, the left side). The reader bows slightly to the altar at the base of the steps and then walks up the steps along the handrail. When the reader reaches the top of the steps, the reader turns and walks toward the ambo. When the reader has walked up the steps of the ambo, the reader adjusts the microphone by pointing it to his or her mouth by pinching the microphone stand at the "neck" (just underneath the microphone) and adjusting it. They may also need to turn the microphone on by pressing the button at the base of the microphone, which will illuminate a green light. The readings will be on the ambo. However, if the reader comes early, double-checking is always good. The reader should read more slowly than one usually speaks and should project their voice loud enough that the reader can hear the reading. When the reading ends, the reader reverses the steps they had used to come forward. The reader bows again to the altar at the base of the steps and returns to the pews. Then, the Psalm is sung. When the Psalm is completed, the second reader follows the same instructions as the first reader.

Responsorial Psalm

The Responsorial Psalm should ordinarily be sung, with a cantor leading the congregation in the sung response. Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm.¹⁰

Universal Prayer

The petitions of the Universal Prayer may be recited by a family member or friend of the deceased at the celebrant's discretion. As with the readings, only one person may recite the petitions. The Universal Prayer should be recited from a prepared text that the priest or delegate will draft. The formulas provided in the *Order of Christian Funerals* may be adapted to the circumstances of a particular funeral or other petitions may be composed.¹¹ Deceased members of the family may be added to the Universal Prayer. Please have names ready when you meet with the priest or delegate.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Gifts

During the Preparation of the Gifts, family members and friends may be invited to present the bread and wine. It is customary to incense the gifts and the altar during the Preparation of the Gifts and at the Final Commendation within the funeral Mass. However, if there are sensitivities to this, the incense may be omitted.

¹⁰ *GIRM*, 61

¹¹ *OCF*, 142.

RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

During the distribution of Holy Communion, only practicing Catholics in good standing (in valid marriages, not knowledgeable of any mortal sins, etc.) should present themselves to receive. All others not receiving Holy Communion should remain in their pew and pray for the repose of the soul of your deceased loved one. If desired, they may also present themselves for a blessing by the priest by walking up with the Communion line to the priest with their arms crossed. Please note that only the priest can provide a blessing in this circumstance, and not a layperson serving as a Eucharistic Minister.

MUSIC SELECTIONS

Please refer to the Funeral Music Selections sheet on the website under funerals to make your hymn selections for the funeral Mass. Any questions regarding the funeral music can be directed to Stephen Smith, the Director of Sacred Music. These selections will also be discussed during your planning meeting with the priest and/or delegate prior to the funeral Mass. *Please note that each funeral is staffed with an organist and professional cantor/vocalist from St. Paul's. Guest musicians may not be used unless special permission is granted by the Director of Sacred Music.*

FLOWERS

Flower arrangements in the church should reflect the current liturgical season and are not appropriate during Lent. If altar arrangements are being used during the funeral, it is requested that these arrangements remain in the church afterward, representing a “gift to God.” Any other smaller arrangements or standing arrangements can be placed in the vestibule area and are to be removed after the funeral.

STIPENDS

It is customary for the funeral home to make arrangements with the family of the deceased to issue stipends for those actively involved in the funeral Mass, such as the priest, organist, cantor, altar servers and live streamer. In some cases, a funeral home is not involved with the funeral arrangements, in which case the family will be responsible for this. Please discuss any questions about this with the priest or delegate meeting with you prior to the funeral Mass.

PART V: RITE OF COMMITTAL

The Rite of Committal, the conclusion of the funeral rites, is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. It should usually be celebrated at the place of committal, beside the open grave or place of interment. However, it may also occur at a cemetery chapel if necessary.¹² In committing the body to its resting place, the community expresses the hope that, with all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection. The Rite of Committal is an expression of the communion between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven: the deceased passes with the farewell prayers of the community of believers into the welcoming company of those who need faith no longer but see God face-to-face.

PART VI: CREMATION

One of the first decisions that needs to be made is whether the deceased will be buried or cremated. Cremation is allowed so long as this option isn't chosen to express anything contrary to Christian hope — particularly the hope in the resurrection of the body. Nonetheless, the Church's tradition recommends burial over cremation. More and more families are opting for cremation today to decrease funeral

¹² OCF, 204.

expenses. However, the decision should be based on all the facts, so compare the costs when discussing options with the funeral director.

In either case, a place of burial needs to be chosen. The Church prefers that Catholics be buried in the consecrated ground of a Catholic cemetery, but other cemeteries may be chosen. The point is that bodies need to be disposed of in a fitting and dignified way, consonant with the human dignity that should be afforded to everyone, made in the image of God as we are.

Cremains must also be buried — they are not to be placed in the home, spread on land or at sea, etc. This need not be only in a cemetery grave. One popular method to afford cremains their proper respect is to use a columbarium — or niches akin to mausoleums — which cemeteries and parishes in more frequency are constructing to contain cremains.

The choice of burial or cremation also will indicate how much of the remainder of the funeral events take place. If burial of the body is chosen, the funeral is often held within a few days. If cremation is chosen, that time could be extended a bit — although it is preferable to celebrate the funeral as soon as possible and not delay it for too long. Also, if cremation is chosen, will there still be a viewing of the body, and will the body be brought to church for the funeral Mass, or will the body be cremated shortly after death? If a funeral Mass for the deceased is chosen with cremated remains, the Mass is intended only for that specific person's cremains. If the family wishes to have a second set of cremains present at the Mass and/or interment (such as a spouse of the deceased whose cremains were not yet buried), this needs prior approval from the pastor at St. Paul's.

Please refer to the 2016 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith instruction [*Ad resurgendum cum Christo*](#) regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation. Please also read the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops document regarding the [proper disposition of bodily remains](#).

PART VII: LIVESTREAMING

Family and friends may not be able to attend the funeral rites for their loved one, so St. Paul the Apostle Church offers live streaming for a small stipend. Please feel free to pass the links to anyone who cannot attend. Live streaming can be found on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

PLEASE NOTE THAT PHOTOS OF THE DECEASED ARE NOT PERMITTED INSIDE THE CHURCH BEFORE, DURING, OR AFTER THE FUNERAL MASS.

We understand that planning a funeral liturgy for your loved one is a very difficult process. While you are going through this process, please know that we are here for you. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us. We also have several [Grief Support Resources](#) on the funeral page of our website.

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