



Funeral Guidelines

Diocese of Peterborough

Promulgated: November 2, 2016

The Christian community since the earliest times has accompanied people through providing a ritual framework within which a funeral takes place. These rites are acts of public worship at which a number of elements are involved: God is praised; the Resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed conveying the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom; prayers are offered for the soul of the deceased person their body is honoured and the bereaved are consoled. Principles apply to these rites which can enrich the experience for the bereaved family and the wider community. Through these rituals, which express our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, space is offered to the bereaved family to express grief and sorrow. They also provide an opportunity to celebrate the life and memory of the deceased person.

Over a period of time members of a Diocesan Committee on Funeral Liturgies, which included those engaged in the funeral ministry from pastoral and professional perspectives, have been engaged in discussion and consultation on how funerals are organised and celebrated in this Diocese. Parishes and members of the Council of Priests formed part of this consultative process.

The principal aim of this process of reflection is to improve, where possible, the ministry of accompaniment and consolation to the bereaved, and the dignified and worthy celebration of funeral rites. This document is the fruit of a wide consultation and lays out Diocesan Policy in this important area of pastoral ministry.

The Diocesan Funeral Guidelines are promulgated on the Second day of November, Two Thousand and Sixteen, on the Commemoration of All Souls.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'William T. McGrattan' with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William T. McGrattan
Bishop of Peterborough

Vitae Aeternae Verba Habes - You have the words of eternal life.

Introduction:

"In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has 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;" *Order of Christian Funerals* ©1989. This booklet provides general information to the Catholic community and to those who provide services when death occurs.

When we suffer the passing of a loved one or face the certainty of our own death, the Church's funeral rites provide a place where we can pray for the deceased, grieve, remember, face our fears, give thanks, celebrate, and, above all, connect our personal human experience to that of the believing community and to the life of Jesus.

The events which surround death call for a community response. Although the immediate family bears a heavy burden of sorrow, relatives, friends, clergy and parishioners provide prayerful support.

Death in the Christian Context:

The events which surround death call for a community response. Catholic belief in death as the entrance into eternity, is reflected in the Church's care for the deceased and the family and community that survives them. Private and liturgical prayer, meditation, reflection and the liturgical rites connected with the funeral unites us to the Lord's paschal mystery and our hope of eternal union with Almighty God.

Church Law:

"The funeral of any deceased member of the faithful should normally be celebrated in the church of that person's proper parish" (canon 1177, §1).

"However, any member of the faithful, or those in charge of the deceased person's funeral, may choose another church; this requires the consent of whoever is in charge of that church ..." (canon 1177, §2).

"When death has occurred outside the person's proper parish, and the body is not returned there, and another church has not been chosen, the funeral rites are to be celebrated in the church of the parish where the death occurred..." (canon 1177, §3).

Scheduling of Liturgies:

No times or dates shall be scheduled before consultation with the pastor of the parish where the funeral is to take place.

The Order of Christian Funerals is divided into three rites:

The Christian funeral consists of three main rites or "stations". All three of these rites should be celebrated whenever possible.

1. Vigil and related rites and prayers:

In her funeral rites, the Church commends the dead to God and offers Christian hope to those who mourn. For this reason, it is customary to have a gathering of family and friends of the deceased following death and before the funeral liturgy.

The vigil (sometimes referred to as ‘the wake’) may be held in the home of the deceased, in the funeral home, senior’s residence or, in extraordinary cases in the church with due regard to the dignity of the sacred space. The vigil may take the form of one of the vigil services contained in the funeral ritual. Additional prayers and devotions (such as praying the Rosary, Knights of Columbus or Catholic Women’s League prayers) may also be included.

2. Funeral Liturgy:

The Mass, the memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral. While following the directives of the Church’s ritual in planning the liturgical celebration, the choice of music and biblical readings should reflect the family’s wishes, while emphasizing as well the community aspect of faith which remains unbroken in death. Because the funeral liturgy is the central celebration for the deceased it should be scheduled for a time that permits as many of the Christian community as possible to be present.

Since the proper setting for Mass is a sacred place, Mass is not to be celebrated in a funeral home or similar facility.

The funeral Mass may be scheduled on any day **except on Sundays and during the Easter Triduum.**

Whenever possible, the body of the deceased should be present in the church for the Funeral Mass or “Mass of Christian Burial”. The terms “Mass of the Resurrection” or “Celebration of Life” is incorrect for the Funeral Mass. Keeping in mind that liturgical roles are to be fulfilled only by Catholics, members of the family who are Catholic are encouraged to assume the role of readers and assist in the offertory procession. They may receive Holy Communion. Non-Catholics may serve as pallbearers.

3. Rite of committal:

The rite of committal is celebrated at the cemetery, in which the Christian community honours one of its members before the body is buried or entombed. With priest and mourners accompanying the body to the cemetery, the rite is celebrated at the grave or tomb.

Planning the Rites:

Whenever possible the family should be involved in the planning of the funeral liturgy.

Placing of the Pall:

A funeral pall, reminding us of the garment given at baptism and symbolizing our life in Christ, is draped over the casket at the beginning of the liturgy. Family members, friends or the clergy may do this. **Nothing shall be placed on the pall.**

Readings:

Ordinarily, the family may select the following: the Old Testament Reading, Responsorial Psalm, New Testament Reading, and Gospel Reading. The pastor or his delegate will guide the family through the process of selecting appropriate scriptural readings.

Non-biblical texts shall not replace scriptural readings at Mass.

(Note: During the Easter season both readings should be taken from the New Testament.)

Readers:

If family members or friends are parish readers or are capable of public speaking, you may want to invite them to proclaim the readings, which are always taken from the lectionary.

Universal Prayer of the Church: (Prayers of the Faithful)

If a deacon is not present, the family is encouraged to assist in leading these. The pastor or his delegate must approve the petitions and prayers.

Music:

It is the pastoral responsibility of parishes to provide liturgical music at all Funeral Masses. The same liturgical norms applied to music at any Mass apply to the Funeral Mass.

Music is preeminent among the signs expressed by the participants in any liturgy. Therefore, recorded music is not to be used within the liturgy to replace the congregation, the choir, the organist, cantor, or other musicians.

Requests for secular music cannot be accommodated during the Mass since the very nature of the Mass requires that the lyrics of the songs “express the mystery of the Lord’s suffering, death and triumph over death.” (OCF #30) The pastor or his delegate shall approve music and hymn selections.

Presentation of Gifts:

The Church encourages family members or friends at the Funeral Mass to bring to the altar the bread and wine to be used during the Eucharistic celebration.

Holy Communion: Guidelines for the Reception of Communion:**For Catholics:**

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Holy Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Holy Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour before receiving Holy Communion. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental Confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For our fellow Christians:

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those ecclesial communities with whom we are not yet fully united should not come forward to receive Holy Communion.

For those not receiving Holy Communion:

All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

For non-Christians:

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

Eulogy:

The Order of Christian Funerals states, "a brief homily based on the readings is always given after the Gospel reading ... but there is never to be a eulogy." (OCF #27) The homily relates Christian death to the Paschal Mystery of our Lord's death and resurrection. Attentive to the grief of those present, the homily properly includes an expression of praise and gratitude to God for the gift of a Christian life and such virtues or strengths apparent in the deceased's life.

While a eulogy is never permitted within the funeral Mass; however, brief Words of Remembrance may take place in this order of preference:

- At the conclusion of the vigil service,
- At the reception following the Funeral Mass,
- Following the prayers of committal at the cemetery.

In the Diocese of Peterborough, the Pastor may permit Words of Remembrance in the Church before the Funeral Mass begins - prior to the reception of the body. When words of remembrance are presented in the church building, the Pastor must approve the speaker and the written text beforehand. This short tribute is given by one person, and shall be no more than three minutes.

Funeral Liturgy outside Mass:

Following careful consideration of the deceased's relationship with the Church, the needs and wishes of the bereaved family, and the attitude of the community, the pastor may offer a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass. The body of the deceased should be present for the service.

The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church. However, the service may be celebrated in a funeral home, senior's residence or cemetery chapel.

Generally speaking, Mass shall not be offered as part of the funeral rites for those not entitled to a Catholic funeral according to Church Law (canon 1184 §1)¹. Those who have willingly cut themselves off from the life of the Church.

Even though Mass may not be celebrated as part of the funeral rite in these situations, it may be offered at another time for the repose of the soul of the deceased and for the spiritual well-being of the relatives and friends.

Ecumenical Considerations:

When requested by the Catholic relatives of a deceased baptized non-Catholic, a priest may conduct a prayer service for the non-Catholic in a funeral home.

In particular circumstances where the deceased non-Catholic was well disposed to the Church, and the family requests Mass, it may be celebrated with the body present in church.

Burial:

Out of reverence for the body, the Church still prefers the traditional burial practice in a grave or tomb in memory of Jesus' body being placed in a tomb.

In addition, a specific place for a person's remains helps focus the remembrance and prayer for the deceased person by family and friends, and by the Church in general. Also, such a place will make it easier to memorialize the deceased, for example, with plaques which record names and dates. **Funeral Offerings**

An offering to the parish for funeral services is customary and may be suggested according to the approved diocesan schedule for such offerings. However, a funeral service, including Mass in the church with the body present and a committal service, is never withheld for inability to give the offering.

Pastoral Elements

¹ Can. 1184 §1 Church funeral rites are to be denied to the following, unless they gave some signs of repentance before death:
1° notorious apostates, heretics and schismatics;

2° those who for anti-Christian motives chose that their bodies be cremated;

3° other manifest sinners to whom a Church funeral could not be granted without public scandal to the faithful.

§2 If any doubt occurs, the local Ordinary is to be consulted and his judgement followed.

Arrangements for cremation, funeral or burial should never be finalized until the family has discussed them with the pastor or his delegate. This contact with the bereaved family affords the minister an opportunity to offer his condolences and encouragement. At the same time, the minister can conveniently counsel the family about the liturgical rites.

Mass and prayers offered for the deceased are important practices of Catholic life. The paschal sacrifice offered for the dead assures that the deceased obtains spiritual help and the living receive the consolation of hope. Also commendable are gifts offered to the parish, worthwhile charities, especially those which carry out the mission of the Church, in memory of the deceased.

CREMATION:

INTRODUCTION:

The human body is inextricably associated with the human person, which acts and is experienced by others through that body. It is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing.

The body of a deceased Christian is also the body once washed in baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the Bread of Life. Thus, the Church's reverence for the sacredness of the human body grows out of a reverence and concern both natural and supernatural for the human person.

Sometimes it is not possible for the body to be present for the Funeral Liturgy. When extraordinary circumstances make the cremation of a body the only feasible choice, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by priests, deacons, and others who minister to the family of the deceased.

PRESENCE OF THE BODY AT THE FUNERAL LITURGY:

Although permitted, cremation does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites since the presence of the human body better expresses the values, which the Church affirms in those rites. The funeral rites will not be celebrated if there is evidence that cremation was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian belief.

Cremation and the Liturgy:

If cremation has been chosen there are three options:

1. Cremation after the funeral liturgy:

The Church prefers the option of having the cremation take place **after** the funeral liturgy in order to celebrate its principal funeral rite in the presence of the body; it can then show to the body the reverence it always has through the signs that have long been part of the Church's tradition.

The vigil for the deceased and the funeral liturgy are celebrated as usual, with a slight change in the final commendation after the funeral liturgy to indicate that the procession with the body will proceed to the crematorium and not to the cemetery.

2. Cremation before the funeral liturgy:

Sometimes cremation cannot be delayed until the funeral rites have been celebrated. Occasionally the remains will be interred before the funeral liturgy. If it is possible, the vigil for the deceased is celebrated before the cremation. A rite of committal of the cremated remains, with the final commendation that usually concludes the funeral liturgy, accompanies the interment.

3. Funeral liturgy with the cremated remains present:

The cremated remains should be contained in an appropriate vessel and treated with the respect and dignity accorded to the body, including the respectful transportation and handling of the cremated remains to and from the church. A small table or stand is to be prepared for the container near the altar. The liturgy will conclude with the final commendation. Water and incense are not used.

The cremated remains shall be brought into the church prior to the liturgy. The remains are not greeted at the doors of the church. Instead, the Penitential Act follows the sign of the Cross and the greeting. The celebrant begins Mass as normal. At the end of the liturgy the ashes will remain in the church until the congregation has dispersed.

Disposal of cremated remains:

The Church asks that, in keeping with a spirit of reverence, the cremated remains be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or a columbarium (a place for the entombment of cremated remains), that is, in a place especially designated for this purpose and reserved as such.

Scattering or dividing cremated remains or keeping them in homes does not display appropriate reverence and the Church does not offer a prayer service when that kind of disposal has been chosen.

Scattering the remains in a location that was once the place where the individual spent time may seem emotionally satisfying at the height of mourners' grief, but one should ask this question: Does the desire to scatter the remains on a favourite spot display a tendency to look backward at a life that has passed rather than to look forward to a new dimension to our life with God and to the resurrection of the body? Our belief in the resurrection of Jesus and in life after death suggests a more permanent resting place for a Christian's remains.

Additionally, the integrity of the cremated remains is always to be respected. The cremated remains of one deceased person may not be mixed with the cremated remains of another person. It is not permitted to divide the cremated remains and retain, inter or entomb them in more than one place.

It is also not permitted to divide the cremated remains in such a way that they are contained in lockets or jewelry. Any other practice which violates the integrity of the cremated remains and impedes reverent and proper burial/disposition is prohibited.

If burial takes place at sea, the cremated remains are to be in a solid and durable container, and not scattered.