

PARISH POLICIES FOR THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

1. At St. Joseph we try to involve the family in planning the funeral rites.
2. All Christ's faithful who have died are to be given a church funeral, including catechumens, unbaptized children of Christian parents, non-Catholic spouses of Catholics, and non-Catholics whose ministers are not available.
3. Deacons or laypersons may also preside at the rites of the Order of Christian Funerals according to diocesan norms for celebration in the absence of a priest.
4. The funeral Mass is ordinarily celebrated in the deceased's parish church. It is not to be celebrated in the funeral home or at cemetery chapels.
5. The funeral Mass may be celebrated on any day except Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, holydays of obligation, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter season.
6. The preferred terminology in the Order of Christian Funerals is either a Funeral Mass or a Funeral Service. Funeral directors and others who make public notice about the celebration of Funerals are asked to use the correct terminology.
7. Only Christian symbols may be placed on or near the coffin during the Funeral Liturgy in the church. Any other symbols, for example, national flags or flags or insignia of associations, have no place in the Funeral Liturgy in the church.
8. Whenever possible, the Rite of Committal is to be celebrated at the graveside or crematorium, not the cemetery chapel.

POLICY ON THE PLACE OF FUNERAL MASSES

The celebration of the Eucharist is the heart of our Catholic faith. In the long tradition of the Church the funeral rites for a Christian include the celebration of the Funeral Mass. The ritual states it this way: "The Church therefore celebrates the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ's Passover for the dead, and offers prayers and petitions for them. In communion of all Christ's members, the prayers which bring spiritual help to some may bring to others a consoling hope."

The ordinary place for the celebration of the worship of the people of God is in the physical setting of a Church. This is even more appropriate at the time of the death of a Christian. It is in the Church that we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ; in the Church, we are confirmed in faith; in the Church, we are nourished with the Eucharist; at the end of our journey of faith, it is in the midst of God's family at a Church that we celebrate the mystery of Christian death.

Therefore, it is prohibited to celebrate the Mass of Christian Burial (The Funeral Mass) at funeral parlors or at cemeteries.

THE FUNERAL MASS

The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral. The Funeral Mass includes the Reception of the Body, if this has not already occurred, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Final Commendation and Farewell.

Place: The Funeral Mass is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church (canon 1177, 1). The church is the place where the Christian life is begotten in Baptism, nourished in the Eucharist, and where the community gathers to commend one of its deceased members to the Father.

Timing: Because the Funeral Mass is the central celebration, it should be scheduled for a time that permits as many of the Christian community as possible to be present. The Funeral Mass may be celebrated on all days except Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, solemnities of obligation, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter season. On these days, the body may be brought to the church for a Liturgy of the Word at a convenient time separate from the liturgy of the day. The Funeral Mass should then be offered as soon as possible, at the convenience of the family and parish personnel. (See below, "Memorial Mass/Service.")

Participation: Whenever possible, ministers should involve the family in planning the funeral Mass, recommending readings, prayers, music, and liturgical ministers. Ministers should make every effort to encourage full and active participation of the family and the entire assembly in the celebration. It is not recommended, however, that close family members should proclaim the Word. Wherever possible, the Word should be proclaimed by those specifically trained and mandated for this ministry.

Music: Parishes are pastorally responsible to provide liturgical music at all Funeral Masses (Liturgical Music Today, 31). A few elements, sung well, should be given priority. Preference should be given to congregational singing of the acclamations, the responsorial psalm, the song of farewell at the Final Commendation, and appropriate entrance and communion songs. An organist or other instrumentalist, a cantor, and whenever possible, a choir should be present to assist the congregation in singing the songs, responses, and acclamations of the Funeral Mass. Recorded music should not replace "live" music, nor should favorite songs of the deceased replace liturgically appropriate music. Music should reflect the themes of the selected readings or Christians' hope in the Risen Christ.

Homily: A homily based on the readings should always be given at the Funeral Mass, but never any kind of eulogy (OCF, 141). A member or friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the Funeral Mass begins.

Christian Symbols: Through the use of various Baptismal symbols the community shows the reverence due to the body, the temple of the Spirit.

Easter candle: The paschal candle reminds the faithful of Christ's undying presence among them, of his victory over sin and death, and of their share in that victory by virtue of their initiation. The Easter candle may be carried before the body in procession and/or be placed near the coffin during the funeral Mass. (OCF, 35)

Holy Water: Blessed or holy water reminds the assembly of the saving waters of Baptism. Holy water is normally used as part of the Rites of Reception. If it is not used at the entrance, it may be used during the final commendation; it is not used in both.

Incense: Incense is used during the funeral rites as a sign of honor to the body of the deceased, which through baptism became the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is also a sign

of the community's prayers rising to the throne of God. The priest may incense the gifts and the altar, then the body of the deceased, and finally the congregation. If incense is not used during the preparation of the gifts, it may be used during the Final Commendation; it is not used in both.

The pall: This reminder of the Baptismal garment of the deceased may be placed over the coffin by the family members, friends, or the minister during the Rite of Reception.

Other symbols: A symbol of the Christian life, such as the Book of the Gospels, the Bible, or a cross may be placed on or near the coffin. If one of these symbols is used it is carried in the procession and is placed on or near the coffin by a family member, friend, or the minister at the conclusion of the procession. Only one such symbol should be used.

Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the Funeral Mass. Any other symbols, for example, national flags or flags or insignia of associations, have no place in the funeral liturgy (OCF, 38, 132). Fresh flowers, as symbols of the resurrection, can enhance the setting of the funeral rites. They should be used in moderation and not detract from the proper Christian symbols.

Liturgical Color: White vestments are usually worn at the funeral Mass to express Christian hope.

Choice of Texts: The Church attaches great importance to the reading of the Word of God. In the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word at the Funeral Mass, the Biblical readings may not be replaced by non-Biblical readings. There may be either one or two readings before the Gospel reading. It is preferable to have a different lector for each reading. The presiding minister proclaims the readings only when there are no assisting ministers present.

Final Commendation: The Order of Christian Funerals gives a short but effective Rite for the Final Commendation at the end of the Funeral Mass or Funeral Service. An ample time of silence follows the invitation to prayer (OCF 172). The coffin may then be sprinkled with holy water and incensed before, during, or after the song of farewell, if not previously done. The song of farewell (OCF, 174) is the most important prayer of the congregation during the Final Commendation. Every effort should be made to facilitate the congregation's full and active participation during the song of farewell. The formula in Order of Christian Funerals, 174, other responsorial given in the ritual (OCF 403), or some other song may be used. This prayer, done well, will give the rite of Final Commendation its substance or fullness.

Procession to the Place of Committal: The presiding minister or deacon invites the congregation to participate in the procession. If a symbol of the Christian life has been placed on the coffin, it is removed at this time. The procession then begins: the ministers precede the coffin, the family and mourners follow. One or more of the texts given in the ritual (OCF 176) or other suitable songs may be sung as the procession leaves the church.

FUNERAL SERVICE (WITHOUT MASS)

In the Funeral Liturgy without Mass the community gathers to hear the message of Easter hope proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word and to commend the deceased to God. As mentioned before, this liturgy may appropriately be called "The Funeral Service." The Funeral Service shares the following elements with the Funeral Mass: Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, the Final Commendation, and the Procession to the Place of Committal. The readings are those of the Lectionary for Mass, "Masses for the Dead." The policy and guidelines given above apply here.

This liturgy may be used for various reasons: (1) when the Funeral Mass is not permitted (on solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter season); (2) when in some places or circumstances it is not possible to celebrate the Funeral Mass before the committal (e.g., if a priest is not available); (3) when for pastoral reasons the presiding minister and the family judge that the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass is a more suitable form of celebration.

The Funeral Service is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church, but it may also be celebrated in the home of the deceased, a funeral home, chapel of rest, or cemetery chapel.

In the choice of music for the Funeral Service, preference should be given to congregational singing of the acclamations, the responsorial psalm, the song of farewell at the Final Commendation, and appropriate entrance and communion songs. As at Mass, recorded music should not replace "live" music, nor should favorite songs of the deceased replace liturgically appropriate music.

The minister who is a priest or deacon wears an alb with stole or a cassock, surplice and stole. A cope may be used.

THE RITE OF COMMITTAL

This Rite is the final act of the faith community in caring for the body of its deceased member. By their presence at this rite the community members help the mourners face the end of one relationship with the deceased and the beginning of a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude, and the hope of resurrection and reunion. The celebration, whenever possible, takes place not in a cemetery chapel but at the open grave, the place of interment, or in the crematorium (OCF, 204). The act of committal takes place either during the Rite or at its conclusion to express the full meaning of the rite: that the grave, once a sign of despair, is now, through Christ's own death and resurrection, a sign of hope and promise (OCF, 209).

This Rite has two forms, the Rite of Committal or the Rite of Committal with the Final Commendation. The minister follows this latter form when the Final Commendation does not take place during the Funeral Liturgy or when no Funeral Liturgy precedes the committal rite. (OCF, 205). (See above, on the Final Commendation.) A hymn or liturgical song may be used at the conclusion of the Rite to affirm our hope in God's mercy and in the resurrection of the dead (OCF, 214). The Rite allows for some gesture of final leave-taking; e.g., placing flowers or soil on the coffin (OCF, 210).

The minister may expand the rite for pastoral reasons; e.g., if the Funeral Liturgy has taken place either on a previous day or in a different community (OCF, 211). Should the final disposition of the body be delayed for some time, then there may be two celebrations of the Rite of Committal, one on the day of the Funeral Liturgy, the second on the day of the actual burial or interment. Reasons for such a delay could be weather, cremation, or a body donated to science.

In the absence of a priest or deacon, a layperson should lead those present in the Rite of Committal.

The Rite has special forms for the committal of ashes and for burial at sea (OCF, 406).

CHILDREN

The second part of the Order of Christian Funerals provides rites for funerals of infants (including unbaptized infants whose parents intended to have them baptized) and young children. The Order of Christian Funerals stresses how overwhelming the death of any infant or child can be for the family and points out that the compassionate presence of the community reflects the compassionate presence of Christ. It goes on to suggest that parents who have lost children of their own may have a special ministry to the newly bereaved family (OCF, 239-240).

If children attend the Funeral Rites, those planning the liturgy should plan with these children in mind, allowing the children when possible to exercise some of the liturgical roles. Depending on the age and number of the children attending, those planning the liturgy should use the recommended adaptations in the Directory for Masses with Children. Such adaptations include having one reading, the Gospel, and taking care that the homilist is a person who can talk with children.

If the child died before being Baptized, the minister does not sprinkle the body with holy water and does not use the pall. In place of these, the Order of Christian Funerals has a brief address by the minister (OCF, 249). The Funeral Liturgy continues in the usual manner.

CREMATION

Though the Church prefers the custom of burying the dead, she celebrates her Funeral Rites for those who have chosen cremation, unless there is evidence that their choice arose out of an anti-Christian motive. There is presently no Rite for a Funeral Mass celebrated with the ashes present; the Order of Christian Funerals presumes that cremation will take place after the Funeral Mass. (The Archbishop permits the Funeral Mass in the Church - not in the funeral home or funeral chapel - with the ashes present and notes that various texts will need to be adapted). The rites usually held in the cemetery chapel or at the grave may take place in the crematorium. The rite of committal has a special prayer for burying, entombing, or scattering the ashes.

“MEMORIAL MASS/SERVICE”

The Funeral Ritual requires a tangible, visual focus. The presence of the body at the Funeral Mass or service provides such a focus. Under normal circumstances the body should always be present at a Funeral Service or Funeral Mass. “Memorial Services” or “Memorial Masses” are not the normal practice within the Archdiocese.

THE PLACE OF BURIAL

The Christian ideal, flowing from the Gospel, calls for a simple and reverential burial rite and a simple and reverential burial place. Because the bodies of the deceased were temples of the Holy Spirit, they must be treated with reverence and respect. Cemeteries should be visible signs of that reverence and not be ostentatious.

In the spirit of ecumenism, Christians of other denominations, who request it, should be allowed burial in Catholic cemeteries as a testament to common belief in Christ and the resurrection.