

Order of Christian Funerals

Directives of the

Diocese of Columbus

POLICIES

Policies of the Diocese are expected to be followed without exception by all parishes and clergy in the diocese.

1. The Rite

On 15 August 1989, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops promulgated that from 2 November 1989, the Order of Christian Funerals is the ritual which is to be used in all dioceses of the United States of America. Therefore, in the Diocese of Columbus no other English version of these rites may be used.

All material cited in this document can be found in the Order of Christian Funerals, 1989 edition and the 1997 Appendix: Cremation and in Order of Christian Funerals including Appendix 2: Cremation, 1998.

2. Funeral Planning

It is the policy of the diocese to consult with family members of the deceased as much as is possible and prudent in the planning of a funeral liturgy.

When scheduling a funeral, staff people need to remember that a funeral mass may not be celebrated on solemnities that are days of obligation (Immaculate Conception, Christmas, Mary - Mother of God, Holy Trinity, Assumption, All Saints, and Christ the King), Holy Thursday, the Easter Triduum, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter season. In effect, this means that if a funeral must take place on one of these days, it must follow the ritual for a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass (Nos. 177-202).

“Whenever possible, ministers should involve the family in planning the funeral rites: in the choice of texts and rites provided in the ritual, in the selection of music for the rites, and in the designation of liturgical ministers” (No. 17).

“Planning the funeral before death should be approached with sensitivity and care. It can have the effect of helping the one who is dying and the family face the reality of death with Christian hope. It can also help relieve the family of numerous details after death and may allow them to benefit more fully from the celebration of the funeral rites” (No. 17).

3. Vigil for the Deceased

It is the policy of the diocese that “the vigil for the deceased is the principal rite celebrated by the Christian

community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy, or if there is no funeral liturgy, before the rite of committal. It may take the form of either a liturgy of the word (Nos. 69-81, 82-97) or of some part of the office for the dead (see Part IV, p. 296).”¹

Therefore, the wake service before the funeral liturgy should be from the vigil for the deceased and not a form of popular devotion. It is strongly discouraged to pray the rosary in place of the vigil. Instead, the family should be encouraged to pray this together after or before the vigil takes place.

4. Eulogy/Remembrance

It is the policy of the diocese that the preferred time for a eulogy be during the vigil service; however, if the family does not gather prior to the celebration of the funeral liturgy, a remembrance may be given after the Prayer After Communion. It should be brief and delivered by only one individual who is adept at public speaking.² If it is decided that a lay family member is to speak after communion, the text should be submitted to the presider prior to the funeral.

Whether during the vigil or the funeral liturgy, the remembrance does not take the place of the homily.

5. Christian Symbols

It is the policy of the diocese that only Christian symbols are used in funeral liturgies. Other non-biblical symbols, such as national flags, or flags or insignia of associations have no place in the funeral liturgy and “are to be removed from the coffin at the entrance of the church” (No. 132).³

Liturgical signs and symbols affirming Christian belief and hope in the paschal mystery are abundant in the celebration of the funeral rites, but their undue multiplication or repetition should be avoided. Care must be taken that the choice and use of signs and symbols are in accord with the culture of the people (No. 21).

The following are symbols used in every funeral liturgy when the body is present: Easter candle, holy water, and pall.

Easter Candle

The Easter 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. It recalls the Easter Vigil, the night when the Church awaits the Lord’s resurrection and when new light for the living and the dead is kindled (No. 35).

During the funeral liturgy and also during the vigil service, when celebrated in the church, the Easter candle is placed beforehand near the position the coffin will occupy at the conclusion of the procession (No. 35).

Holy Water

Blessed or holy water reminds the assembly of the saving waters of baptism. In the rite of reception of the body at the church, its use calls to mind the deceased's baptism and initiation into the community of faith (No. 36).

During the funeral liturgy, the presider sprinkles the coffin with holy water during the introductory rites.⁴ There is no need to duplicate the rite of sprinkling at any other part of the mass or when the body is placed in the hearse. One only sprinkles the body during the signs of farewell, if the presider hasn't already sprinkled it at the rite of reception.⁵

Pall

In the Diocese of Columbus the coffin is always draped in the pall since the pall is “a reminder of the baptismal garment of the deceased” (No. 38), and also, “is a sign of the Christian dignity of the person” (No. 38).

The pall should be “placed on the coffin by family members, friends, or the priest” (No. 161). It is placed on the coffin and removed from the coffin at the entrance of the church.

6. Readings

It is diocesan policy that the family is consulted in the selection of readings for the Funeral Liturgy and that non-biblical readings are not permitted to be used within the context of the Liturgy of the Word.

In every celebration for the dead, the Church attaches great importance to the reading of the word of God. The readings proclaim to the assembly the paschal mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. Above all, the readings tell of God's designs for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own. A careful selection and use of readings from Scripture for the funeral rites will provide the family and the community with an opportunity to hear God speak to them in their needs, sorrows, fears, and hopes (No. 22).

7. Homily

It is the policy of the diocese that a brief homily is to follow the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy. A homily may also follow the readings at the vigil service, but the homily is never to be a eulogy (No. 27).

Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well (No. 27).

8. Offertory Procession

It is the policy of the diocese that if a procession is to be included in the preparation of the gifts, it is to be kept within the guidelines of the offertory rite. Appropriate gifts are bread and wine for the Eucharist, other gifts for the needs of the church and the poor.⁶

9. Music

Since music should reflect the strength which comes from our Christian belief, it is the policy of the diocese that it should reflect the common repertoire of the parish, and should not conflict with the flow of the liturgy.

Music is integral to the funeral rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourner and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love (No. 30). The music at funerals should support, console, and uplift the participants and should help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christian's share in that victory (No. 31).

10. Cremation

A. Presence of the Body at the Funeral Liturgy

It is the diocesan policy to encourage the custom of burying the body of the deceased since the presence of the body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in the funeral rites. Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body (No. 413).

B. Cremation and Committal Following the Funeral Liturgy

The diocese encourages the celebration of the funeral mass within a reasonable time after death, prior to cremation.

It is the policy of the diocese that cremated remains be interred in the same manner as the human body from which they come. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave, mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping them in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (No. 417).

The practice of cremation burial niches in churches (Prot. No. 2/96 of the Clergy File) is not to be established here in the Diocese of Columbus.

C. Cremation and Committal Before the Funeral Liturgy

The Order of Christian Funerals makes provision for the presider, in consultation with the family, to choose those rites and texts that are most suitable to the situation (No. 43). Prayers which do not make reference

to the honoring or burying of the body of the deceased should be selected (No. 423).

Whereas only Christian symbols are used in funeral liturgies, all non-biblical symbols, insignias, memorabilia, and photographs of the deceased are to be left in the foyer or at the entrance of the church.

D. Funeral Liturgy in the Presence of the Cremated Remains

Permission is granted to all priests of the Diocese of Columbus to celebrate, without recourse to the Bishop, ecclesiastical funeral rites, including Mass, in the presence of the cremated remains of the body of the deceased person. (Prot. 04/99)

The cremated remains of the body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body. This includes the use of a worthy vessel, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition (No. 417). Portraits, insignias, or other remembrances are not to be placed next to the cremated remains during the funeral liturgy.

When the cremated remains are present for the funeral liturgy, **the pall is not used**. A small table or stand is to be prepared for them at the place normally occupied by the coffin (No. 427). If an entrance procession will take place, it is appropriate that a small table or stand is also prepared at the door of the church, where the cremated remains are initially placed. After the "Sprinkling with Holy Water", the presider and assisting ministers precede the bearer of the remains and the mourners into the Church.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations of the diocese are procedures that are encouraged but not mandatory.

1. Funeral Planning

Planning of the funeral rites may take place during the visit of the pastor or other minister at some appropriate time after the death and before the vigil service. Ministers should explain to the family the meaning and significance of each of the funeral rites, especially the vigil, the funeral liturgy, and the rite of committal.

If pastoral and personal considerations allow, the period before death may be an appropriate time to plan the funeral rites with the family and even with the family member who is dying.

2. Vigil for the Deceased

The time immediately following death is often one of bewilderment and may involve shock or heartrending grief for the family and close friends. The ministry of the Church at this time is one of gently accompanying the mourners in their initial adjustment to the fact of death and to the sorrow this entails . . . The minister helps the mourners to express their sorrow and to find strength and

consolation through faith in Christ and his resurrection to eternal life. The members of the Christian community offer support to the mourners, especially by praying that the one they have lost may have eternal life (No. 52).

At the vigil the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ's presence. It is the first occasion among the funeral rites for the solemn reading of the word of God. In this time of loss the family and community turn to God's word as the source of faith and hope, as light and life in the face of darkness and death. Consoled by the redeeming word of God and by the abiding presence of Christ and his Spirit, the assembly at the vigil calls upon the Father of mercy to receive the deceased into the kingdom of light and peace (No. 56).

3. Other Christian Symbols

The following are symbols which should be used in a funeral liturgy: incense, fresh flowers, Book of Gospels or Bible, and cross.

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” (No. 37).

The use of incense is important in the liturgy because it is “used as a sign of the community's prayers for the deceased rising to the throne of God and as a sign of farewell” (No. 37). Therefore, incense should be used in the funeral rite at the proper times in which we use incense during the mass.⁷

If incense is used, the ritual indicates that the coffin is incensed only once during the funeral liturgy. It is recommended that the incensation of the coffin take place at the song of farewell rather than as part of the presentation of the gifts.

Fresh Flowers

Fresh flowers may be used to enhance the setting of the funeral rites, however, they should be used in moderation.

Placing of Christian Symbols

If the Book of Gospels, a Bible or a cross is used they may be carried in procession, then placed on the coffin, by a family member, friend or minister, either in silence or as a text is said from No. 400.⁸

Book of the Gospels or a Bible

“The Book of the Gospels or a Bible may be placed on the coffin as a sign that Christians live by the word

of God and that fidelity to that word leads to eternal life” (No. 38).

Cross

“A cross may be placed on the coffin as a reminder that the Christian is marked by the cross in baptism and through Jesus’ suffering on the cross is brought to the victory of his resurrection” (No. 38).

4. Readings

If there is a certain non-biblical reading that the family feels strongly about including, encourage its use during the vigil if appropriate.

“In the celebration of the liturgy of the word at the funeral liturgy, the biblical readings may not be replaced by non-biblical readings. But during prayer services with the family non-biblical readings may be used in addition to readings from scripture” (No. 23). Therefore, in the Diocese of Columbus only biblical readings are to be used “in the celebration of the liturgy of the word at the funeral liturgy.” If the family wishes non-biblical readings, the priest should exercise his option of using them at prayer services with the family.

It is further advised that the readers at the funeral liturgy are trained in the proclamation of the word.

5. Procession of Gifts

It is recommended that family members or friends bring forward the appropriate gifts (see No. 8 above in policies).

6. Music

When possible, a parish cantor or choir is recommended to provide leadership for the participating assembly.⁹

Non-liturgical music, even if it reflects the life of the deceased (e.g. sports themes) is not appropriate for the liturgy. Musical requests from the family should be honored when possible, but should reflect the particular liturgy (e.g. a Christmas hymn is not appropriate during Advent).

End Notes:

1. See paragraphs 45 & 54.
2. See paragraphs 62, 80, 96 & 170.
3. See paragraphs 38 & 132.
4. See paragraphs 160 & 185.
5. See paragraph 173.
6. See paragraph 144.
7. See General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Nos. 235 & 236.
8. See paragraphs 163 & 134.
9. See paragraph 33.