

*Funeral Liturgies
in the
Diocese of Cork and Ross*



*A Prayerful
Farewell*

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- The members of the Cork and Ross Diocesan Liturgy Commission are: Julia Herlihy, Eamonn Nash, Anne Francis, Susan Ormond, Mary Goggin, Patrick Killeen, Fr. Declan Mansfield and Fr. Christopher Fitzgerald.



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A PRAYERFUL FAREWELL

This document seeks to explore the riches and diversity available to us as we celebrate Christian funerals; pastoral concerns are at its heart. It is hoped that by reflecting and acting upon the ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS, our liturgy will be enriched and the pastoral services available in parishes enhanced. In this way, as we accompany families at the time of a death, they will receive the full benefit of the consolation and hope of Christ, ministered by the Church.

Pastoral Context: When someone dies

The death of someone close to us can affect us deeply. In the days following death, preparing for the final farewell in the midst of grief and all our emotions can be very bewildering. The funeral rites of the Church, celebrated with family and the Christian community, seek to provide an environment of consolation, healing and support, based on Christian faith and hope.

The Funeral Rites

In the Funeral Rites, the Church helps us to respect and acknowledge the dignity, preciousness and the unique and sacred nature of every human being. Through the rites, the Church acknowledges with compassion the deep sorrow and loss experienced by the family and friends of the deceased.

The rites also remind us that we come together to mark the death of a Christian, not only in sorrow, but also in thanksgiving. The funeral rite is a celebration of God's merciful love and forgiveness, and of the life of the risen Christ, shared by the person who has died. It is in this context that the Church promotes the active involvement of all the faithful, especially the family.

The Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus: Our Faith and Hope

I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting (APOSTLES CREED).

For Christians, the celebration of a funeral reminds us that we are not alone: we all belong to God. God's love for us gave us his Son, Jesus Christ. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, death has been overcome and transformed into eternal life.

Through our baptism, confirmation and eucharist we become part of this mystery and receive the promise of eternal life. In this context we celebrate the sacred funeral rites and particularly the Requiem Mass.

The Family of God

Since we belong to God and one another as members of God's family, we all share in the loss of a member of the Christian family and seek to support the grieving family in their loss. When a member of Christ's body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love.

This support is expressed in assistance with practical tasks; with preparation for and celebration of the funeral, and in ongoing ministry to those who are bereaved.

SYMBOLS THE CHURCH USES

The Easter (paschal) candle: The paschal candle is lit for the reception of the deceased into the church and at the Funeral Mass. Placed at the head of the coffin, the candle reminds us that Christ is the light of the world; it is a sign of the Risen Christ present among us.

Holy water: Blessed water is used in each of the rites in the funeral liturgy. Every time it is used, holy water reminds us of the saving waters of baptism, in which the deceased Christian was immersed at the start of life.

The pall: This white sheet is placed on the coffin as it is brought into the church on the night of the reception. This speaks of the special dignity of every Christian. We are all equal in God's eyes.

In baptism a white shawl is wrapped around the newly-baptised child as a sign of its new dignity as a Christian. When the pall is placed, that moment in baptism is recalled and all are reminded that God who promises new life in baptism is faithful to his promises.

According to the *Order of Christian Funerals* (OCF), '*only Christian symbols may rest or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy*' (OCF #38). Other symbols, flags or insignia should be removed as the coffin enters the church. These are unfolded and replaced on the coffin as it leaves the church after the Mass.

The bible: The bible may be placed on the coffin on the night of the reception of the deceased into the church — a vivid reminder that Christians live by the word of God, and that fidelity to God's Word leads to eternal life.

Cross: The cross may also be placed on the coffin on the night of the reception into the church to remind us that the Christian is marked with the sign of the cross in baptism and through Jesus' suffering on the cross is brought to the victory of his resurrection.

Incense: Incense is used as a sign of honour and respect for the sacredness of the human body, which became the temple of the Holy Spirit in baptism. The body of the deceased is incensed during the final prayers at the end of the Funeral Mass.

Let my prayer rise before you like incense, O Lord. (Psalm 141:2).

MUSIC

Music can touch our hearts and reach our very soul. Because of this, music is integral to the funeral rites. The music used can express words in a profoundly deeper way than we are capable of expressing through text alone. Music consoles, heals, gives courage and expresses our faith.

Music should always reflect the sacred nature of the liturgy. Music chosen for the funeral rites needs to reflect the themes of Christ's death and resurrection, Christian hope, the love and support of God especially at times of loss. There is an extensive repertoire of suitable music available. Music that is familiar to people, or songs that people have the words for, facilitates the full participation of the gathered assembly.

Our Church buildings are consecrated for the glory of God. Music at funerals should be appropriate for a liturgical service. All sung music should have a text that is clearly centered on God or the Sacred Scriptures.

Where music other than liturgical is requested, it is suggested that this could be incorporated at the home, funeral home or graveside. Ideally, every parish would aspire to have trained music ministers to assist the family and the assembly in the participation of all sung parts of the funeral liturgy.

‘An organist or other instrumentalist, a cantor, and, whenever possible, even a choir should assist the assembly’s full participation in singing the songs, responses, and acclamations of these rites’ (OCF #33).

THE FUNERAL LITURGIES

The ‘Gathering in the Presence of the Body’:

When a family first gathers in the funeral home or in the home of the deceased, it can be a tremendously difficult experience. The rite for the ‘Gathering in the Presence of the Body’ offers a model of prayer for this occasion, *‘providing an atmosphere of sensitive concern and confident faith’* (OCF #61). It is a time of great emotion and requires sensitivity. At an appropriate time it is good to gather in prayer, to pause, reflect, have a moment of silence. This rite may be led by a layperson.

Vigil for the Deceased

‘The Vigil for the deceased is the principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy ... It is particularly suitable for celebration during the wake and may be led by a lay minister’ (OCF #70).

This liturgy is a rich celebration of the Word of God, which provides ample opportunity for the further participation of the mourners. At the Vigil, the Christian community keeps watch with the family, in prayer to the God of mercy. It finds strength in God’s presence in and through the other members of the community.

Historically, when the wake service was held in the deceased’s home, family members themselves led the rosary. When the funeral home was introduced to Ireland, the traditional wake service became the night of the rosary. What was originally a private time for the family became a public celebration.

The focus of the ‘Vigil for the Deceased’ is the Word of God, the source of faith and hope, light and life. This service may be led by a layperson.

Its conclusion, the rite of sprinkling with holy water, may be an opportunity for the family to make the sign of the cross with holy water on the forehead of the deceased. The option of concluding with a decade of the rosary is recommended.

Transfer to the church (Removal):

This is the shortest of the rites. While short, it should not be rushed and should include moments of silence. As at the Vigil, family members may be invited to make sign of the cross with Holy Water at end of prayers on the forehead of the deceased. *“This rite of removal will frequently be led by a layperson, either a member of the family or a minister designated by the local community”* (OCF #103).

Reception of the body at the church:

The church is significant as the place where Baptism and Eucharist take place and where the community gathers and worships.

'In the act of receiving the body the members of the community acknowledge the deceased as one of their own, as one who was welcomed in baptism and who held a place in the assembly' (OCF #116).

Quiet music, sensitively played while people arrive, creates a peaceful and reflective atmosphere. A prelude and processional organ music could be played or a hymn sung while the coffin is brought to the altar. The psalm, which accompanies the reading, may be sung, as can the 'Lord have mercy' response to the litany.

Personal mementos may form part of the entrance procession and be placed near the coffin. This may also be an opportune time for a eulogy, to give context to the personal mementos.

The Reception Service provides an opportunity for the involvement of family members: placing the pall, bible and cross, reading a scripture reading and leading the decade of the Rosary at the end.

Funeral Mass:

'The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral' (OCF #5)

A Catholic funeral is centred on the Word of God and the prayers, but especially on the Funeral Mass, in which the deceased is commended to God and interceded for, through the celebration of the sacrifice of Christ. The one who has died, and the mourners who have gathered, are united in a special way with the death and resurrection of Jesus, the paschal mystery, as it is called, which is at the core of our faith and hope.

In the eucharistic sacrifice, the Church's celebration of Christ's passover from death to life, the faith of the baptised is renewed and nourished. Their union with Christ and with each other is strengthened: *'Because there is one bread, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread'* (1 Cor. 10:17).

Belief in the communion of saints is one of the tenets of our faith. As we celebrate the Eucharist, heaven and earth are joined at the altar. Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all the living and deceased form one communion, one body around the table of the Lord.

As well as the rich and beautiful prayers of the funeral ritual and the Roman Missal, attention is drawn to Part III of the OCF, 'Additional Texts', p178 ff. These prayers may be used at the various rites or funeral Mass and include special prayers: for one who died after a long illness, a young person, a parent, a wife, husband, married couple, elderly person, suicide, a child who dies before baptism, a person who died suddenly or as a result of an accident — as well as many others. These prayers speak to the particular circumstance and their use is encouraged.

Music for the Funeral Mass is of a sacred or liturgical nature, giving due consideration to the active inclusion of the congregation in the singing of the various acclamations, (i.e. the alleluia, Holy Holy, memorial acclamation and Great Amen), responsorial psalm, the gathering song, and songs to accompany the procession of the gifts, Communion and recessional. The Song of Farewell during the prayers of commendation can prove particularly

uplifting when sung.

The Word of God is central and because of this all the readings used need to be from sacred scripture. The readings, prayers of the faithful, and the presentation of the bread and wine at the 'offertory' are further moments for the inclusion of family members.

If a eulogy has not taken place and the family wishes it, a family member may speak before or after the opening hymn, and may comment on the personal mementos, which are then brought up and placed on a side table if this has not occurred at the transfer to the church the previous evening.

Funeral Liturgy outside Mass

The central focus of the Catholic funeral is usually the celebration of the funeral Mass. However, allowance is made for a funeral liturgy when the Eucharist is not celebrated. This is the case on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday as well as the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season.

The OCF notes that for pastoral reasons the family and priest may decide that the funeral liturgy outside Mass is a more suitable form of celebration (see OCF #199).

The elements of the Rite are centered on the Liturgy of the Word.

'In the funeral liturgy outside 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' (OCF #198).

Rite of Committal:

This Rite is celebrated at the place of rest. It is the final entrusting of the deceased person to God and includes prayer for the family and friends. Appropriate music should be provided where possible, and there may be an opportunity here for a eulogy or address where desired.

Prayers at the Crematorium

In recent times cremation has become more popular. The Rite that takes place is prayerful and reflects the respect and dignity of this liturgy for the human being and their relationship with God. It is appropriate that the ashes be interred in consecrated ground.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that a team of people be trained in parishes to assist with preparation of the rites, including choice of readings, music and symbols, and organisation of ministers for the various liturgies and to assist in leading prayer.
- Music chosen should reflect the sacred nature of the liturgy and reflect the themes of Christ's death and resurrection, Christian hope, the love and support of God especially at times of loss.
- Emphasis should be placed on congregational singing, with the acclamations of the people having priority especially the gospel acclamation (alleluia), Holy Holy, memorial acclamation and the Great Amen. Where possible the responsorial psalm and the Song of Farewell should also be sung.
- Each parish should aspire to having trained music ministers to assist the family and people to sing.
- Singing or instrumental music is encouraged on the night of the removal, especially at the Reception of the Body in the church.
- Parishes should use the rich symbols of the rites, particularly the pall, bible and cross, as well as holy water, incense and the paschal candle.
- Flags or other insignia are removed as the coffin enters the church and replaced on the coffin as it leaves the church.
- People should be facilitated to be as actively involved in the funeral rites as possible, as follows:
 1. Family members are encouraged to sprinkle with Holy Water and make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the deceased.
 2. Family members are encouraged to place the pall, bible and cross on the night of the reception of the remains (and may remove them at the end of the funeral Mass).
 3. Family members are encouraged to read a scripture reading and lead the decade at the end of the prayers of reception (Removal).
 4. Where the family wishes to bring mementos, these are brought up and placed on a table near the coffin, either on the night of the reception of the remains into the church or at the beginning of the funeral Mass.
 5. Scripture readings, prayer of the faithful and bringing of bread and wine at the preparation of the gifts are ways of involving family members in the celebration of the Funeral Mass.
 6. Where a family member wishes to speak during the funeral, consideration should be given to the various options: at the graveside, at the removal from the funeral home or the reception of the remains into the church, or at the beginning of the Funeral Mass.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is the Church opposed to cremation?

No, but it was in the past. One of the tenets of the Christian Creed since the earliest times has been ‘I believe...in the resurrection of the body’, i.e. that the resurrected Christian would at the end of time be reunited body and soul in the happiness of heaven. For this reason, respect for the integrity of the body has always been shown in Christian burial rites, whereas many non-Christian faiths cremated the bodies of the dead. So, cremation was regarded as being something non-Christian, and respect for the body was regarded as being shown best by the traditional burial in the ground.

Until recent times cremation was specifically forbidden by the Church. In more modern times, this attitude has changed.

It is appropriate that the ashes be interred in consecrated ground.

What is the difference between the Catholic funeral rites and a ‘memorial service?’

A Catholic funeral is centred on the Word of God, especially the Funeral Mass, in which the deceased is commended to God and interceded for through the celebration of the sacrifice of Christ. The one who has died, and the mourners who have gathered, are united in a special way with the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is at the core of our faith and of our hope.

A memorial service is a service of remembrance of the deceased. It mainly consists of tributes and eulogies centred on the dead person, sometimes accompanied by prayers and readings. It does not necessarily take place in a church.

While the person is remembered in the Catholic funeral rites and their life is commemorated, there is a stronger emphasis on the presence of Christ in word, sacrament, in the mourners, minister and congregation. The church is the main place for celebrating the Catholic funeral rite.

Is it possible to celebrate Catholic funeral rites for members of other Christian traditions?

The Catholic Church has a profound respect for the non-Catholic traditions of worship. For this reason, it does not offer or recommend a Catholic funeral for one who was not a Catholic, except in the absence of a minister of the faith of the deceased.

But in certain circumstances, for example the death of the spouse of a Catholic, some of the liturgies may be adapted and used if requested, but perhaps without the celebration of the Funeral Mass. A minister from the deceased person’s tradition may be invited to share in the prayers.

Why can’t I use the favourite song of the deceased person?

The funeral Mass is an invitation to the congregation and immediate family to deepen their awareness of the presence of the risen Jesus with them in their sorrow. Only music reflecting Christian beliefs can deepen and celebrate Christian faith. There are other times more appropriate for playing or singing the favourite music of the deceased – it can be done in the funeral home or at the graveside, or in the home of the deceased when their memory is being celebrated.

Which is more important in arranging a funeral – to honour the wishes of the deceased, or the wishes of the bereaved?

This is a difficult question. The answer lies somewhere within a due respect for both. It would be clearly inappropriate to celebrate a full Catholic funeral for someone who had left the Church, and who had specifically ruled this out. But the family, relatives and friends, as Catholics, have a duty to pray for the deceased in the way they believe best. They could have Mass offered on a later occasion rather than on the day of burial. A simple Ceremony of Committal (at the graveside) may be all that is required on the day.

To take another example, an older person who has lived a quiet and simple life may not have wished to have a series of eulogies, or soloists at their Funeral Mass.

Are we free to celebrate a funeral in a church outside the parish of the deceased?

Yes, but there may be difficulties involved. Sometimes, people wish to return to the church of their home place, or to a church nearer to the graveyard. But the usual rule is that where this is done, the priest of the parish of residence is still responsible for leading the funeral rites. This can be difficult, especially where there is a shortage of clergy. Where a church other than the parish of residence of the deceased is chosen, care should be taken by the family and undertakers to request and inform the priests of both parishes before any arrangements are made regarding times, etc.

Why can't I have a flag or photograph on the coffin?

Christian symbols such as the pall, bible and cross are among the most important items we use at a funeral and are given pride of place. However, flags and mementos such as photographs may be placed on a table near the coffin.

Does a family member have to speak?

In recent times some people have felt they had to have a family member speak at the funeral Mass. This is not so. Some families write out a few notes for the priest and he incorporates them into what he will say.