

MINISTRY TO THE BEREAVED:  
A MISSION FOR US ALL



Diocese of Cork and Ross



## MESSAGE FROM BISHOP FINTAN GAVIN BISHOP OF CORK AND ROSS

**I** warmly welcome these new pastoral guidelines which will allow us to further develop this important ministry. This document has emerged from discussions across our diocese about how best to support, care for and pray with bereaved families.

Our reaching out to those who are bereaved is an important expression of our Christian Community, a ministry inspired by the Gospel and a ministry of all the faithful.

It is a significant part of the Irish culture which was highlighted for us during the pandemic when so many of the elements were not possible. Funeral teams were trained and introduced in many parishes a number of years ago. The experience has been positive and warmly received. The decision has been made that this Funeral Team Ministry should be part of every parish and that a number of other guidelines should be introduced to provide a consistent practice around how we honour our dead and the funeral rites.

As we increase cooperation between parish communities in 'Families of Parishes', this is also an opportunity for parishes to support one another in the development of this renewed ministry in each community.

I am especially grateful to our priests, deacons and the lay people who have been active in this ministry already in our diocese and I encourage more of our people to accept an invitation to this ministry.

I warmly welcome these new pastoral guidelines which also allow us to reach out in a consistent way to those bereaved.

✠ Fintan Gavin  
Bishop of Cork and Ross

# A MINISTRY INSPIRED BY THE GOSPEL

The death of a loved one can be one of the most difficult and traumatic experiences of our lives. Our world is turned upside down and we are plunged into sadness and grief. The gospels bear witness to Jesus' deep concern for us in times of loss. He came to be with Martha and Mary as they grieved the death of their brother Lazarus and wept at the tomb of his dear friend. He was moved with compassion by the plight of the widow of Nain when he saw her accompanying the funeral cortège of her only Son.

The funeral rites of the Church, which we as a Christian community celebrate with the family and the wider community, are an expression of this same love and compassion. In our prayer we honour the deceased and express our affection for them, we seek to ease the sadness of those who mourn and to comfort them in their loss – and we strive to strengthen our Christian hope that is rooted in the resurrection of Christ.

In the days immediately following the death of a loved one, there are so many arrangements to be made and so many things to be done that it can be bewildering for families. The funeral rites of the Church, set out in the *'Order of Christian Funerals'*, offer rich and diverse ways of prayerfully honouring the dignity, uniqueness and sacredness of the life of the deceased, as well as acknowledging the deep sorrow and loss being experienced by their family and friends.

These rites also remind us that when we come together to mark the death of a loved one, we do so not only in sorrow but also in a spirit of thanksgiving and firm hope.

The Funeral Mass is a celebration of God's merciful love and forgiveness, of Christ's victory over death and his invitation to us to share in the life he has won for us through his passion, death and resurrection. In the midst of the darkness of our grief and sorrow, our funeral rites proclaim a powerful message of light and hope:

Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.

Matthew 25:34

# A MINISTRY OF ALL THE FAITHFUL

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) calls on the Church to share in the joys and hopes, the grief and the anguish of the people of our time (*Gaudium et Spes* #1). In Ireland we have a rich tradition of coming together as a community to prayerfully honour the dead and to comfort those who mourn. Such support from the community is experienced as a great comfort and source of strength by families.

The *Order of Christian Funerals* reminds us that when a member of the community dies “the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. ... The Church calls each member of Christ’s Body – priest, deacon, layperson – to participate in the ministry of consolation: to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn.” [#8].

It goes on to state that this responsibility lies with the entire believing community “who should console the mourners with words of faith and support and with acts of kindness” [10] and goes on to specify that “the community’s principal involvement in the ministry of consolation is expressed in its active participation in the celebration of the funeral rites” [#11].

Parish Funeral Ministry Teams made up of lay ministers, deacons and priests play a particular role in ministering to the bereaved on behalf of the believing community. They show concern for the bereaved by visiting them to express the sympathy of the community, by supporting them in planning the funeral rites for their loved one and by participating in the various funeral rites.



# ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

1. A parish's ministry to the bereaved and its prayers for the deceased draw on a whole-parish response that involves many members of the community. These include the Parish Funeral Ministry Team (which includes the priest), the sacristan, those who provide music ministry and the parish liturgy group – among others.
2. One of the scripture readings often read at funeral liturgies reminds us that there is "a season for everything" (Qo 3:1). Funeral rituals may have several different elements among which the time at the church is a central one. The primary focus of this time at the church is intercession for the deceased and prayerful support of the bereaved. Other elements should not undermine this sacredness.
3. The most appropriate location for the Funeral Mass or other funeral liturgy is the place where the faith community gathers for worship, i.e. the local church.



The *Order of Christian Funerals* provides for prayers to be offered at other locations, e.g. the person's home or the crematorium. However, these complement rather than replace the liturgy at the church.

4. Because a church is a place consecrated for the worship of God, it is not to be used as an alternative to a funeral

home. A coffin is not to be open in a church. (*A brief private viewing may take place in particular circumstances only*).

5. As our church communities evolve and change across our diocese, a spirit of collaboration and sharing of resources is emerging. For this reason it is important that parishes adhere to the same principles and develop similar pastoral practices.
6. Given the primacy and importance of the Sunday celebration funeral

masses are not to be celebrated in the diocese on a Sunday.

- i. As per the universal norms of the Church, funeral masses may not be celebrated during the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday).

## **NORMS FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY IN THE DIOCESE**

7. Each parish of the Diocese of Cork and Ross is to prioritise the establishment of a Parish Funeral Ministry Team.

- i. Members are selected following prayerful and careful discernment and are invited by the priest(s) of the parish.
- ii. Each parish team will have at least one priest and four other members – women and men.
- iii. Where a parish doesn't yet have its own Parish Funeral Ministry Team the parish may invite and be supported by ministry teams from neighbouring parishes.

8. If at all possible, the bereaved family will be met soon after the death of their loved one by the priest and/or other members of the Parish Funeral Ministry Team. This meeting may be in a family home or in a parish setting. This visit expresses the prayerful concern and support of the parish community.



9. Consultation between the bereaved, the Parish Funeral Ministry Team (including the priest) and the funeral director is required to help plan the most appropriate format of the funeral rites in each situation.

10. The Church's funeral rites and the traditions of families and communities provide for a number of opportunities for prayer:-

i. *Prayer in the home of the deceased or at a funeral home.*

Relatives or lay members of the Parish Funeral Ministry Team will lead the prayers for the deceased in the home of the deceased or at a funeral home. These prayers are normally said on the evening before the Funeral Mass.

The prayers used will be the Vigil for the Deceased (p. 35 *Order of Christian Funerals*).

ii. *Removal to the Church.*

The *Order for Christian Funerals* provides for prayers to be said in the place where the deceased person has been reposing (home, funeral home) immediately before the removal to the church.

These prayers are led by one or more members of the Parish Team for Funerals (including priest, deacon and lay members)

*Reception at the church, Funeral Mass or other liturgy.*

The reception into the church immediately before the Funeral Mass has become the norm. The reception liturgy may include involvement by members of the Parish Funeral Ministry Team and relatives of the deceased. The format in the *Order for Christian Funerals* (page 83) would be followed (where the Reception of the Body replaces the 'Penitential Act' of the Mass).

- Greeting at the door.
- Placing of the Pall.
- Placing of the Bible and Crucifix.
- A commentary/ 5-minute eulogy by one family member. This may include the placing of mementos on a table next to the coffin or in the sanctuary.
- Opening Prayer of the Mass (the Collect) read by the priest.
- The Liturgy of the Word.

### iii. *Prayers at internment/cremation*

The *Order of Christian Funerals* provides a wealth of prayers from which the prayers at the grave or at the crematorium are chosen. These prayers are led by members of the Parish Team for Funerals which includes the priest.

The choice of music and hymns should also remind us that the primary focus of this time at the church is intercession for the deceased and prayerful support of the bereaved. Hymns and music contribute to creating a prayerful and dignified atmosphere. The people in our faith communities who lead singing of hymns for the parish's liturgies are



best placed to serve in this ministry at the time of a funeral liturgy. The choice of hymns/music should form part of the consultation and planning with the Parish Team for Funerals.

i. Use of recordings of songs should not be part of a funeral liturgy: *it is a breach of copyright*. Extra care should be taken during a live-stream of a liturgy to ensure that copyrighted material is not used.

ii. When the bereaved wish to include a song which has a connection with the deceased person but which was not composed for liturgical use, this needs to be discussed in advance with the Parish Team for Funerals.

---

A resource booklet which is prepared by the diocese is available to all parishes. This will contains texts for use in planning the funeral rites with the Parish Funeral Ministry Team.