



Diocese of Rockford Catholic Funeral Guidelines

March 2002

*Eternal rest grant unto them,
O Lord,
and let Perpetual Light
shine upon them.
May their souls
and the souls
of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God,
rest in peace.
Amen.*

Norms for Catholic Burial Diocese of Rockford

The Catholic Understanding of Death

“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. Christ ‘achieved his task of redeeming humanity and giving perfect glory to God, principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension.’” (*Order of Christian Funerals* [OCF, 1])

“At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of her confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting Word of God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist.” (OCF, 4)

Through the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal the Church calls for the active participation of all.

I. General Principles and Norms

1. In the Diocese of Rockford the *Order of Christian Funerals* is to be used as the normative liturgical ritual for the celebration of the funeral rites.
2. The three principal ritual moments in the funeral rites are: the *Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers*, the *Funeral Liturgy* and the *Rite of Committal*. While there are distinct ritual moments, the funeral rites as a whole are a single movement of prayer which need to be celebrated integrally. The General Introduction, and the Introduction to each rite or group of rites, set forth guiding principles for the proper liturgical celebration of these various rites.
3. It is the responsibility of the Pastor to ensure that these liturgical principles are respected, understood, and used with pastoral sensitivity by all those, namely, priests, deacons, and lay persons, who participate in the ministry of consolation: to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn.

4. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the Pastor to both inform the secular funeral service providers of the proper order and liturgical expression of the funeral rites as set forth in the *Order of Christian Funerals* and to ensure that they are followed according to the desire of the Church.

5. The Church encourages the full celebration of the funeral rites, especially the Funeral Mass, for her faithful deceased members. No one should be denied the Church's funeral rites because of the neglect of the practice of the faith of their family members. It is the responsibility of the Pastor to ensure that the funeral rites are available for these persons.

6. Every Catholic, unless specifically excluded according to the norms of Church law, is entitled to the Church's ministry at the time of death.

II. Special Pastoral Concerns

1. Cremation

Respect for the human body is envisioned in the funeral rites of the Church:

“The body of the deceased Catholic 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 of the sacredness of the human body grows out of a reverence and concern both natural and supernatural for the human person. The body of the deceased brings forcefully to mind the Church's conviction that the human body is in Christ a temple of the Holy Spirit and is destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead.” (OCF, 412)

“Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it 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 funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites.” (OCF, 413)

“When extraordinary circumstances make the cremation of the body the only feasible choice, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by priests, deacons, and others who minister to the family of the deceased.” (OCF, 415)

“The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and

attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. Whenever possible, appropriate means for recording with dignity the memory of the deceased should be adopted, such as a plaque or stone which records the name of the deceased.” (OCF, 417)

Therefore, in the Diocese of Rockford the following norms are to be observed:

1. When the choice has been made to cremate a body, it is recommended that the cremation take place after the Funeral Liturgy followed by the proper disposition of the remains according to the norms of the Church, that is, burial in a grave, or entombment in a mausoleum or columbarium.

2. If cremation takes place before the Funeral Liturgy, a burial place in a grave, or entombment in a mausoleum or columbarium for the cremated remains must be established in order to celebrate the Funeral Liturgy in the Church.

2. The Homily and the *Remembrance of the Deceased*

“A brief homily based on the readings should always be given at the funeral liturgy, but never any kind of eulogy. The homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the Paschal Mystery of the Lord as proclaimed in the Scripture readings.” (OCF, 141)

“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. Through the homily members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God.” (OCF, 27)

The fact that a eulogy is not permitted does not mean that there is to be no reference to the deceased person during the homily. The homilist helps the bereaved to understand the mystery of God's love and the Paschal Mystery in the life of the deceased person and in their own lives. References to the person's life of faith and love are obviously appropriate.

The *Order of Christian Funerals* recognizes the need to reflect on the life of the loved one who has just died by providing an invitation in the *Vigil for the Deceased* to a member or friend of the family to speak in remembrance of the deceased person just before the concluding rite. The same invitation is offered after the Prayer after Communion of the Funeral Mass.

Therefore, in the Diocese of Rockford the following norms are to be observed:

1. In the Diocese of Rockford, it is recommended that the Vigil (Wake) is the most appropriate time for members of the family and friends to share memories of the deceased or to pay tribute to the deceased through vocal remembrances, photographs, favorite songs, etc.

2. The reception after the burial is another appropriate time for the remembrances because there is less of an emotional burden and the context is looking toward the future in a more positive manner.

3. If a family member wishes to express appreciation or say something in remembrance at Mass, the following are to be observed:

- ✦ Only one family member or friend is to speak.
- ✦ The words to be shared must be in writing and approved in advance by the priest celebrant.
- ✦ Because of the intensity of emotions at the time of a funeral, the person who will speak is to be brief, that is, no more than five minutes.
- ✦ This faith-remembrance is to take place *after* the Prayer after Communion.
- ✦ Because this is not part of the Liturgy of the Word, this remembrance is not to take place at the ambo, but at another appropriate place of the priest celebrant's choosing.

3. Keeping the Memory of the Deceased

In keeping with our Catholic tradition, all are encouraged to ensure that the memory of our dead is observed in the following ways:

- ✦ Offering of Masses for the deceased, especially on the anniversary of death.
- ✦ Parish Remembrance on All Souls Day.

- ✦ A Parish Celebration of Mass for the recently deceased of the last year during the month of November.
- ✦ The encouragement of cemetery visitation.
- ✦ Praying for the Living and the Dead

4. Music for the Funeral Liturgy

1. "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 mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love." (OCF, 30)

2. In some pastoral settings, there has been an increasing confusion about the appropriate types of music for funerals. An almost "anything goes" mentality has crept into the full funeral rites, that is, the Vigil (Wake), the Funeral Mass, and the Committal.

3. Non-liturgical or secular music is forbidden before or during the funeral rites, particularly in the Church. Thus, such music as "Wind Beneath My Wings," "From a Distance," "Danny Boy," "The Notre Dame Victory March," etc., may not be used during the rites, neither before nor after the funeral rites in Church.

4. The priest celebrant is to approve and authorize the use of proper liturgical music for all the funeral rites.

*Office for Divine Worship
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