

FUNERAL GUIDELINES

*Saint Mary Parish
Ridgefield, Connecticut*

Revised October 2025

We at Saint Mary Parish extend our sympathy and prayers to you and your family. In this time of Faith and Sorrow, this booklet is intended to help you in the planning of the Funeral. The Church's funeral liturgies, filled with the saving grace of the Crucified and Risen Jesus, are intended to bring comfort and peace to families as we commend our beloved dead to God's merciful embrace, through the offering of the Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood.

There are three parts to the *Catholic Rite of Christian Burial*:

- I. ***Vigil for the Deceased (Wake)*** takes place the afternoon or evening before the Funeral Mass and is within the context of the visitation at the funeral home. The Vigil consists of Scripture readings and prayers pertaining to the mystery of death and resurrection in Christ.
- II. ***Mass of Christian Burial (Funeral Mass)***.
- III. ***Rite of Burial*** takes place at the cemetery after Mass.

Again, know that our parish family is praying for you and your loved one at this time of loss.

Sincerely yours in Christ.



Msgr. Kevin T. Royal
Pastor

Understanding Death in Christ. Death and passing to eternal life are mysteries at the center of the Church's belief. Our American culture generally shies away from facing the reality of death, but we believe that *"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."* (Order of Christian Funerals, #1)

Solemn Celebration of the Church. Given the hope of heaven and resurrection in Christ *"Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just."* (Order of Christian Funerals, #5) Therefore these rites are celebrated with appropriate choices of music, readings, and decorations that are consistent with a Catholic understanding of death and of right worship.

PLANNING FOR THE FUNERAL:

We at St. Mary's want to support your family in your time of loss and grief, and so, we will celebrate the Funeral Mass with dignity, reverence, and beauty. That said, you are welcome and encouraged to participate in planning the Funeral Rites. Parish staff, together with the priest, will assist you in choosing appropriate Scripture readings, gift-bearers, readers, and music, so that the Mass will be a truly prayerful and beautiful opportunity to pray for the deceased, as the Church commends him or her to the love and mercy of God.

If death occurs unexpectedly, the shock and confusion of the time can sometimes obscure the fact that everything which takes place within these Funeral Rites must be of a sacred nature, since the Funeral Liturgy is principally an act of divine worship.

By its very nature, the Church's Liturgy is sacred, and set apart in a sacred place, specifically for the worship of God. Thus, only sacred readings and music are to be used during the Funeral Liturgy. Any "secular" readings or music which may have particular meaning to the family is better suited to be shared with family and friends at either the wake, cemetery, or reception following the Mass and Burial. Our priests and Pastoral associate for Music will guide you in the planning of a prayerful, and reverent Liturgy.

MUSIC:

Music is vital to the Funeral Mass. Many beautiful chants and hymns come to us from the centuries of the Church's life of prayer and worship

In General

- Only sacred music (music composed specifically for the worship of God and approved by the Catholic Church) may be played or sung. There are no exceptions to this.
- Recorded music is never permitted.
- The Pastoral Associate for Music is the principal musician at all liturgical services.
- One of our professional Cantors will serve as the soloist.
- Outside musicians are only allowed after consultation with the Pastoral Associate for Music.

At the Funeral

- Music is an essential part of the funeral liturgy, and all are encouraged to participate and to offer to the Lord their prayer in song.
- Most of the music is determined by the Funeral Rite, however there are opportunities for the family to choose music in the form of liturgically appropriate hymns. All musical selections must be made in consultation with the Pastoral Associate for Music to ensure the beauty and sacredness of the liturgy.

All music for the Funeral Mass must be chosen from the approved selections listed in *Appendix I: Approved Funeral Music*.

READERS and GIFT BEARERS:

Family members or friends of the deceased may participate in the Liturgy by proclaiming the Readings and/or bringing up the gifts of bread and wine to be used during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Family members or friends who read at Mass must be practicing Catholics.

The Church has pre-selected a number of passages from Sacred Scripture which are appropriate for the occasion of a funeral. These may not be substituted for any non-biblical readings. The priest will provide you with the options that you may choose from.

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE:

The Catholic Funeral Mass is the Church's prayer for the soul of the deceased and for the comfort of the grieving. Its focus is on Christ's victory

over death and the hope of eternal life. For this reason, the practice of giving “Words of Remembrance” (sometimes called a eulogy) is not part of the Funeral Mass.

Families sometimes feel obliged to designate someone to speak, but no such obligation exists. In fact, words of remembrance can unintentionally shift the focus of the liturgy, or place a heavy emotional burden on the person asked to speak.

Therefore, Words of Remembrance are not permitted at the Funeral Mass. They are most fitting at the Vigil (wake), at the cemetery, or at the luncheon following the burial—times when family and friends can share freely and at greater length.

At the Funeral Mass itself, the priest or deacon will offer a homily that is both personal and faith-filled, honoring the life of your loved one while proclaiming our Christian hope in eternal life.

FUNERAL STIPENDS:

The Funeral Director will inform you of the parish fees (Church, Organist, Cantor, and Deacon). No stipend is expected for the priest. Families may choose to make a gift as a sign of their appreciation for his pastoral service.

APPENDIX I: Approved Funeral Music

All Funeral Masses begin with the sung Entrance Antiphon:

Entrance

- *Eternal Rest...*

You may choose (1) song from each section:

Offertory Hymn

- Abide With Me*
- O God Our Help In Ages Past*
- Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*
- I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*

Communion Hymn

- Jesus, My Lord, My God, My All*
- Draw near and take the Body of the Lord*
- I receive the living God*
- The King of Love my Shepherd is*
- My Song is Love Unknown*

Post-Communion Meditation (optional)

- Ave Maria, J.S. Bach/Gounod*
- Pie Iesu*

Recessional Hymn

- The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended*
- Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer*
- Be Thou My Vision*
- I Know That My Redeemer Lives*
- The Strife is O'er¹*

¹ Not permitted during Lent