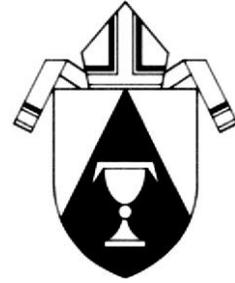


# Policies and Guidelines Regarding the Celebration of Catholic Funeral Rites

*Diocese of Sacramento*



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Order of Christian Funerals, 1989 edition*, is the Catholic Church's official document regarding the funeral rites. All previous editions of the *Order of Christian Funerals* should be retired. The *Order of Christian Funerals* describes the church's ministry to the deceased and their family in these words:

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 its 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. (*Order of Christian Funerals, #4*)

"Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just. The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral." (*OCF 5*)

## II. MINISTRY AND PARTICIPATION

The ministry of consolation is a preeminent part of the ministry of the church. Caring for the dying, praying for the dead and comforting those who mourn are *major* elements of a ministry of consolation. The church calls each member of Christ's Body – priest, deacon, religious, lay person – to this ministry. (*OCF #8*)

**a. The Parish Community**

*Policy: Priests, deacons and trained lay ministers of consolation are encouraged to pray and visit with the family and friends of the deceased during the time between death and the transfer of the body to the church for the Funeral Rites.*

Members of the community should minister to grieving families and participate in the funeral rites.

**b. Liturgical Ministers**

Priests preside at the funeral rites, especially the Mass. When no priest is available, deacons preside at rites within their faculties. When no priest or deacon is available for the vigil and related rites or the rite of committal, a layperson presides. (OCF #14)

Lay persons should participate as lectors, musicians, ushers, pallbearers, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, as required. These ministries serve a vital role in sharing the compassion of the Lord with the friends and family of the deceased. They also offer a sense of welcome to non-Catholics in attendance.

**III. MINISTRY FOR THE MOURNERS AND THE DECEASED**

**a. Family and Friends**

“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.” Funeral planning may take place during the visit of the pastor or other minister with the family, or sometimes before the death, if it is imminent and would provide relief to the family. (OCF #17)

## b. Deceased

**Policy:** *Every Catholic, unless specifically excluded according to the norms of law, is entitled to the church's ministry at the time of death. (canon 1176.1)*

### **Guidelines:**

1. At the time of death, families who are active members and also families who may not have been active members of the church need to be welcomed in a Christian spirit and helped to feel at home with the church. This can be a fruitful time of evangelization. Through sensitive pastoral care the faith of bereaved family and friends may be strengthened, reaffirmed or rekindled.

2. In the funeral rites we pray for God's mercy for the deceased and solace for the living. The rites do not presume a life of exemplary faith or virtue. Under certain circumstances Christian burial is inappropriate, but before denying Christian funeral rites to anyone or granting funeral rites to someone with a "notorious" reputation, the parish priest is to consult the Office of the Bishop. The decision of the bishop or his delegate in these matters is determinative. (canon 1184.2)

3. Catechumens are entitled to the full rite of Christian burial. Even though they are unbaptized, they are members of the household of the church. (canon 1183.1)

4. A child who dies before Baptism may be given Christian funeral rites if the parents intended to have the child baptized. (OCF 237,318 and canon 1183.2)

5. The funeral rites may be celebrated when the deceased committed suicide. (OCF 398- #s 44 & 45)

6. Funeral rites may be celebrated for baptized non-Catholics at the discretion of the local bishop. (OCF 18) Such a decision would be appropriate where the non-Catholic had expressed a desire to become part of the Catholic church, had worshipped regularly at the Catholic church or identified with the Catholic church more than any other. It would not be appropriate if the deceased were an active member of a non-Catholic Christian church, except in cases where the minister of the deceased was unavailable. (canon 1183.3) The rites may be celebrated in an adapted form for the non-Christian spouse of a Catholic. There is a new prayer for such services. (OCF 398-36)

7. The church encourages the burial of Catholics in Catholic cemeteries. (*canon 1180.1*) The ground in Catholic cemeteries is consecrated to receive sacred remains. Burial in a Catholic cemetery recognizes baptismal commitment and gives witness, even in death, to our belief in the resurrection.

8. Burial in a Catholic cemetery is available to every Catholic who, at the time of death, is entitled to receive such burial. It is intended that inability to meet the cemetery costs not be a deterrent to Christian burial in a Catholic cemetery. To avoid breaking close family ties, non-Catholic members of Catholic families may be interred in a Catholic cemetery. Clergy of other communions may conduct the cemetery rites according to their own tradition, if the family so desires or if it was the expressed wish of the deceased.

9. Effort on the part of parish staffs needs to be made for people with disabilities who live apart from their families in various residential facilities so that their bodies are claimed for Christian burial.

10. There is no objection to Catholics making prior arrangements to donate their bodies or parts of them to advance medical science. The only limitation is that, upon eventual disposition of the body or its parts, there be some reasonable assurance that the remains will be disposed of in a proper, reverential manner. (*the Rite of Committal with Final Commendation OCF 224-233*) The family of the donor should be encouraged to celebrate the funeral rites with a Memorial Mass as soon as possible after the person's death. With continual respect for the human body, the amputated extremities of Catholic individuals are to be given reverent Christian burial. These remains may be placed either in specific individual graves or in a common burial area.

11. The remains of fetuses or stillborns of Catholic parents should receive reverent burial.

### c. Cremation

**Policy:** *By virtues of an indult granted by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy, including Mass, in the presence of the cremated remains of the body of a deceased person, may be permitted by the Diocesan Bishop on a case by case basis. (OCF 426 and Diocese of Sacramento Directory 2006, Guidelines for Christian Burial) It is the desire of Bishop Jaime Soto that pastors catechize their community about the care of the body after death and the Church's recommendation for the body to be present at the Funeral Mass. In the presence of this understanding, pastors have the Bishop's delegation to determine when it is appropriate to celebrate the Funeral Mass in the presence of the cremated remains.*

#### **Guidelines:**

1. The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed; nevertheless the church does not prohibit cremation unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine. (canon 1176.3)

2. When the choice has been made to cremate a body, it is urged that the cremation take place **after** the Funeral Liturgy. 'The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the church affirms in those rites.' (OCF 413, US Bishops Committee on the Liturgy) Continuing effort should be made on the part of pastors and associate pastors to catechize the faithful on this point. (OCF 414)

3. In cases when cremation has already taken place prior to the Funeral Rites, with permission of the Diocesan Bishop, it is appropriate that the cremated remains be present for the full course of the funeral rites, including the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy and the Rite of Committal. The Bishops Committee on the Liturgy has had additional rites and texts for the "Order of Christian Funerals" prepared to provide for the presence of the cremated remains of a body, including adaptations of the rites for the Final Commendation and the Committal. (OCF Appendix NCCB Reflections)

4. 'The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they came. 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.' (OCF 417)

5. '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 memorializing the deceased should be utilized, such as a plaque or stone that records the name of the deceased.' (OCF #417)

#### **IV. LITURGICAL ELEMENTS**

"The funeral rites should be celebrated in an atmosphere of simple beauty, in a setting that encourages participation. 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." (OCF #21)

##### **a. The Word of God**

"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." (OCF #22)

1. **Biblical readings may not be replaced by nonbiblical readings.** (OCF #23)

2. **Lectors should be well prepared.** (OCF #24)

3. "A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service; but there is never to be a eulogy" [*at the time of the homily*]. (OCF #27)

**b. Prayers and Intercessions**

The prayers of intercession are a response to the word of God. "Several models of intercessions are provided within the rites for adaptation to the circumstances." (OCF #29)

**c. Music**

"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. The texts of the songs chosen for a particular celebration should express the paschal mystery of the Lord's suffering, death, and triumph over death and should be related to the readings from Scripture." (OCF #30)

1. Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy and, whenever possible, for the funeral processions and the rite of committal. The specific notes that precede each of these rites suggest places in the rites where music is appropriate. (OCF #32)

2. Secular music (live or recorded) is not appropriate during funeral liturgies.

3. "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)

**d. Silence**

"Prayerful silence is an element important to the celebration of the funeral rites. Intervals of silence should be observed, for example, after each reading and during the final commendation and farewell, to permit the assembly to reflect upon the word of God and the meaning of the celebration." (OCF #34)

**e. Symbols**

The Easter candle serves as a reminder of Christ's undying presence, of his victory over sin and death, and of our share in that victory by virtue of our initiation. (OCF #35) Holy water reminds us of the saving waters of baptism. (OCF #36) Incense is used as a sign of honor to the body of the deceased, which through baptism became the temple of the Holy Spirit. (OCF #37) Additional

symbols (pall, book of Gospels or Bible, cross, and flowers) can serve as signs of faith and hope. "Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy. Any other symbols, for example, national flags, or flags or insignia of associations, have no place in the funeral liturgy (see no. 132)." (OCF #38)

**f. Liturgical Color**

"The liturgical color chosen for funerals should express Christian hope but should not be offensive to human grief or sorrow. In the United States, white, violet, or black vestments may be worn at the funeral rites and at other offices and Masses for the dead." (OCF #39)

**g. Ritual Gestures and Movement**

"The presiding minister or an assisting minister may quietly direct the assembly in the movements, gestures, and posture appropriate to the particular ritual movement or action." (OCF #40) This is especially necessary during the preparation for communion. Members of the assembly who are not Catholic or who may have been away from the Church for some time should receive kind instruction regarding their participation in the communion rite. It is recommended that such instruction be provided before the commencement of the Mass for Christian Burial.

## **V. SELECTION OF RITES FROM THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS**

"The Order of Christian Funerals makes provision for the minister, in consultation with the family, to choose those rites and texts that are most suitable to the situation: those that most closely apply to the needs of the mourners, the circumstances of the death, and the customs of the local Christian community. The minister and family may be assisted in the choice of a rite or rites by the reflections preceding each rite or group of rites." (OCF #43)

There are three principal ritual moments in Christian funerals:

- Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers
- Funeral Liturgy
- Rite of Committal

## a. Implementing the Rites

*Policy:* In keeping with the norms found in the Order of Christian Funerals, priests and deacons are to share the responsibility for planning and implementing the Order of Christian Funerals with qualified lay ministers.

*Policy:* Every effort is to be made to implement the full range of ministries and promote active participation in all the liturgies which compose the Order of Christian Funerals.

### **Guidelines:**

1. In coordination with the parish priest and the funeral director chosen by the family, the family of the deceased arranges the place and sets the time for the visitation and funeral rites.

2. Ministers of consolation (includes priests, deacons and trained lay ministers) should visit with and consult the family in the planning and celebration of the funeral liturgy, sharing with them the available options and praying together with them. The preparation of the liturgy can be part of the ministry of consolation.

- During these visits with the family, communication can be a challenge due to the effects that grief and exhaustion can have on family members' ability to listen, to focus and to learn. It is necessary for the ministers of consolation to accurately present the family with the Church's rites as presented in the Order of Christian Funerals and also the pertinent Diocesan and parish policies and guidelines regarding funeral rites. Once these foundations are established, the ministers of consolation can gently guide the family in planning celebrations that are truly prayerful, dignified and respectful.

3. Music selected for the *Order of Christian Funerals* should be appropriate for Christian prayer and complement the rite being celebrated. The texts of the music should express the paschal mystery of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection and be related to the Word of God. (OCF #30) The use of Sacred Liturgical Music that is familiar to the parish assemblies is especially helpful for encouraging full, active participation in sung prayer.

- Popular non-religious songs should not be used in the Mass or the Vigil Service, but may be considered helpful during times of visitation, throughout the Wake period, and at family gatherings.
- In order to insure appropriate music selections that are in keeping with OCF# 30, it is recommended that the pastoral musicians be included in the liturgical rites planning with the families whenever possible.

### The Vigil Service

*Policy: When priests or deacons are unavailable to preside at the vigil, lay ministers or any fully-initiated Catholic who has been properly prepared may appropriately preside. (OCF 14)*

#### **Guidelines:**

1. During the time between death and the funeral liturgy (a time also commonly referred to as 'the wake') the **Vigil Service is the public norm** and should not be replaced by other forms of prayer. 'It may take the form either of a Liturgy of the Word (nos. 69-81, 82-97 OCF ) or of some part of the Office for the Dead ( see Part IV, p. 296 OCF). Two vigil services are provided: "Vigil for the Deceased" and "Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church". The second is used when the vigil is celebrated in the church and begins with the reception of the body. (OCF 54)

- The vigil may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, in the church, in the funeral home, parlor or chapel of rest, or in some other suitable place. (OCF 55)
- The Vigil Service is focused on the Word of God and common prayer. During the Vigil Service family member(s) or friend(s) may speak in memory of the deceased. (OCF 62)

2. Appropriate Sacred Music should be part of the Vigil Service. Preference should be given to the singing of the opening song and responsorial psalm. The litany, the Lords Prayer and a closing song may also be sung. (OCF 68)

- When the vigil service is held in a location where there is no musical instrument available, pre-recorded music can be used to support the singing of the assembly, or 'a cappella' singing is also appropriate.

3. Customs associated with fraternal or military or ethnic traditions may be considered within the context of the 'wake period' as effective preludes to the Vigil Service itself. Other additional forms of Catholic devotional prayer, such as the Rosary, are permitted at another time during the wake. However, if the Rosary is still a popular devotion, there could be a place for reciting a "Hail Mary" in the prayers of intercession at the Vigil Service.

### **The Funeral Liturgy**

*Policy: When one of its members dies, the church especially encourages the celebration of the Mass (OCF 46).*

#### **Guidelines:**

1. Only an ordained priest or deacon is allowed to preach the homily at the funeral liturgy. 'The homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the Paschal Mystery of the Lord.' (OCF 141). A eulogy is never appropriate where a homily is prescribed (OCF 27), but examples from the person's life may be used in the homily.

2. One other person, a family member or friend of the deceased, may speak briefly before the Final Commendation begins. (OCF 170) Anyone who speaks at the Funeral Liturgy needs to be instructed beforehand by the presider or minister of consolation regarding the local Diocesan and Parish Policies on Eulogies. Video retrospectives on the life of the deceased have become a more common way to share memories. This is not permitted during the liturgy in the church. These presentations are more suitable for the reception or other occasions.

3. Music should be part of the Funeral Liturgy. A parish cantor and other parish musicians can be most helpful in leading the assembly in sacred song. A parish funeral choir can also assist at the liturgy.

4. The funeral liturgy should always be celebrated in a church. During the Funeral Liturgy symbols of Christian faith are used as tangible reminders of Christ's saving presence in the faith journey of the deceased and the entire faith community.

5. **The Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass** (OCF #177-203) is celebrated when a Mass is not possible or not deemed appropriate. It is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church, but it may also be celebrated in a funeral home or cemetery chapel. (OCF #179) The pastoral judgment of the parish priest is essential in determining what is appropriate.

### **The Committal Service**

***Policy:** Priests, deacons, trained lay ministers, and any fully-initiated Catholics who have been properly prepared are appropriate ministers at committal services when the presider of the funeral Mass is unable to be present at the committal. (OCF 14)*

#### **Guidelines:**

1. **The Rite of Committal should follow the Funeral Liturgy as soon as possible.** Variations of the order of final prayers and Rite of Committal are explained in the *Order of Christian Funerals Appendix on Cremation*, #s 418 thru 425.

2. Whenever possible, the rite of committal is to be celebrated beside the open grave or place of interment, rather than at a cemetery chapel. (OCF 204) As at the funeral mass, all appropriate effort is to be made to assist the assembly in taking a full and active part in the committal by making the appropriate responses and singing the appropriate hymns or acclamations.

3. **The wishes of the family should be carefully considered in arranging for the presider at the committal service. The committal service may reflect the language and customs of the family of the deceased. Military services and certain fraternal rites are also permissible at the cemetery and should be arranged in advance with the presiding minister so that they do not disrupt or detract from the integrity of the liturgical committal service.**

4. The movement to the cemetery is a ritual procession to the final resting place of the deceased. Individuals are encouraged to maintain a spirit of prayer from the church to the cemetery.

5. Every parish is to keep a book listing those who have died and who have been buried from that parish. (*canon 1182*)

### **Funeral Liturgies for Children**

*Policy: The Order of Christian Funerals provides a complete funeral liturgy for children which shall be used whenever a child is brought for Christian burial (OCF 234- 342).*

#### **Guidelines:**

1. The Order of Christian Funerals provides a complete Vigil Service, Funeral Mass with Final Commendation and Rite of Committal for the funeral of a child. Various texts for a baptized child or for a child who died before baptism make the rites fully adaptable to a given situation.

2. There is a Rite of Final Commendation for an Infant for use “in the case of a stillborn or a newborn infant who dies shortly after birth.” (*OCF 318*)

3. A complete Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass for Children (*OCF #295 315*) and a Rite of Final Commendation for an Infant (*OCF #337 – 342*) also are provided for those circumstances when it is appropriate.

### **Establishing Funeral Liturgy Schedules**

In order to promote community participation in the ministry of consolation, the Vigil Service and the Funeral Mass ought to be celebrated at times when many of the community are available to participate. Funeral masses are customarily celebrated in the morning. A funeral mass may be celebrated at one of the regularly scheduled daily masses in the parish.

Although the funeral liturgy will normally be celebrated in the parish church to which the deceased belonged, it is possible to choose any Catholic church for the funeral liturgy, provided the pastor of that church agrees and the pastor of the deceased has been informed. (*canon 1177*)

The funeral rites of religious or members of societies of apostolic life are celebrated in their own church or oratory. (*canon 1179*)

The funeral Mass may also be celebrated in approved chapels of long-term care institutions and in other approved chapels. (*canon 1225*)

### **Restricting the Number of Funeral Services**

*Policy: Parishes with many funerals may limit the number of funeral Masses or funerals outside of Mass on any given day. A family might not always be able to have a funeral Mass on the day of preference.*

#### **Guidelines:**

1. Each parish needs to carefully review their daily Mass schedule, the available times for burials at the cemetery and the availability of priests, deacons and lay ministers when determining a policy for the number of funeral masses on one day and the times of these services.

2. If two or more families desire it, a funeral Mass may be celebrated for more than one deceased person.

3. The funeral Mass has first place among the masses for the dead and may be celebrated on any day except solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and on the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter Season. In the United States, the Holy Days of Obligation are the feasts of Mary, the Mother of God (January 1), Ascension Thursday, the Assumption of Mary (August 15), All Saints (November 1), the Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas (December 25). Funeral rites on these days make use of a liturgy of the Word, closing with the Rite of Farewell, as found in the OCF #177-20. (*Ordo*)

### **Funeral Outside of Mass Followed by a Memorial Mass**

*Policy: The family may choose to celebrate the funeral outside of Mass and schedule a memorial Mass at a later date, as is the practice during the Triduum (OCF #178).*

1. On days when a funeral Mass may not be celebrated, the funeral liturgy Outside Mass is celebrated. A memorial Mass may be offered on another day.

2. The ritual for a funeral celebrated outside of Mass may be used for various reasons: when the funeral Mass is not permitted; when in some circumstances it is not possible to celebrate the funeral mass before the committal, for example, if a priest is not present; when for pastoral reasons the funeral liturgy outside Mass is a more suitable form of celebration. (OCF #178)

### **Sources and Citations:**

*Order of Christian Funerals* – approved for use by Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops © 1989.

*Order of Christian Funerals – Appendix*, USCCB © 1997.

*Making Parish Policy* – Archdiocese of Chicago, LTP © 1996.

*Code of Canon Law*.

*Diocese of Sacramento Directory 2011*.

“Life is Changed, Not Ended” by Michael Marchal, FDLC © 1990.

“Facing Death Together” by Margaret Smith, LTP © 1998.

## **Diocese of Sacramento Guidelines for Eulogies**

The person who gives a eulogy at a Vigil Service or Funeral Mass needs to be someone who can speak for the family of the deceased without being overcome by grief and who states a willingness to cooperate with the local diocesan and/or parish guidelines.

### **Content of Eulogies**

Statements about the deceased should speak to the deceased person's relationship to God/family/community; tell of the Christian legacy left behind for others to learn from; help others put this person's life into the broader context of our Christian faith. Statements and memories about the deceased should be sensitive to and helpful to the family and friends in their time of loss, by giving them comfort in their grief. Video retrospectives on the life of the deceased have become a more common way to share memories. Such media retrospectives are not permitted during the liturgy in the church. These presentations are more suited to the reception or other occasions.

### **Number and Length of Eulogies**

*During the Vigil Service-* The number of people giving eulogies or telling stories about the deceased at the vigil service is not prescribed, but can be left to the discretion of those planning the rites. OCF recommends this take place following the Concluding Prayer and before the Concluding Rite, on page 43. An "open mic" format is not appropriate during any of the funeral rites.

*During the Funeral Liturgy* – Normally, the number of eulogies to be given before the Final Commendation at the Funeral Liturgy should be limited to one person. (OCF #170 says..."A member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the Final Commendation begins.")

Eulogies should last between 3-5 minutes and it is best if the speaker has notes prepared in writing ahead of time and has timed their remarks ahead of time. Sharing of additional stories about the deceased may continue in an "open mic" style during the reception following the liturgy.