

# Music for Catholic Funerals: Reflections



## *Prepared for the Office of Worship Diocese of Crookston 2018*

The Office of Worship offers the following suggestions in the hope that pastors, bereavement teams, liturgy preparation teams, and the faithful will find them helpful for preparing and celebrating the three principal funeral rites of the Church.

It is with hope that all those responsible for liturgical leadership will be encouraged to make every effort to provide music that expresses the paschal mystery and empowers the full participation of the assembly at each of these three rites.

The following quotations have been compiled to support the material in this pamphlet.

They can be found in the following resources:

OCF    *Order of Christian Funerals*

STL    *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*

*“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*

*“The community’s principal involvement in the ministry of consolation is expressed in its active participation in the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the vigil for the deceased, the funeral liturgy, and the rite of committal...” OCF #11*

*“Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy and, whenever possible, for the funeral processions and the rite of committal...” OCF #32*

*“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*



## **Introduction**

In 1963, Vatican Council II directed that the Catholic funeral rites be revised in such a way that they more clearly express the paschal character of the Christian’s death. In the light of this directive the current funeral rites, known as the *Order of Christian Funerals*, were developed and, after approval of the NCCB and confirmation by the Apostolic See, became mandatory for use in the dioceses of the United States. These funeral rites, which have been in effect since 1989, have three main parts:

**The Vigil:** This is the principal celebration of the Christian community during the time before the Funeral Liturgy. It is a service of song, psalmody, Scripture reading, and prayer. Evening Prayer from the Office of the Dead may also be celebrated. It is usually held in the presence of the body at the family’s home, funeral home, or church, on the eve of the Funeral Liturgy.

**The Funeral Liturgy:** This is usually the Funeral Mass, but sometimes, for special reasons, is a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass (Liturgy of the Word without Liturgy of the Eucharist.)

**Rite of Committal:** This concludes the funeral rites. It is celebrated at the grave, tomb, or columbarium and is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of the deceased member.

Music is integral to the funeral rites. The Vigil includes an opening song, a responsorial psalm that should be sung (STL #156), and may conclude with a song. The Funeral Mass should include hymns, if possible, singing of the responsorial psalm, Gospel acclamation, service music, like at any other Mass, and the song of farewell. The Rite of Committal may conclude with a song.



### **Vigil for the Deceased**

*“Music is integral to any vigil, especially the vigil for the deceased. In the difficult circumstances following death, well- chosen music can touch the mourners and others present at levels of human need that words alone often fail to reach. Such music can enliven the faith of the community gathered to support the family and affirm hope in the resurrection.*

*Whenever possible, an instrumentalist and cantor or leader of song should assist the assembly’s full participation in the singing.*

*In the choice of music for the vigil, preference should be given the singing of the opening song, and the responsorial psalm. The litany, the Lord’s Prayer, and a closing song may also be sung.”* OCF #68

### **Funeral Liturgy**

*“The funeral liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased...”* OCF #128

*“At the funeral liturgy, the community gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ’s victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God’s tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery. Through the Holy Spirit the community is joined together in faith as one Body in Christ to reaffirm in sign and symbol, word and gesture that each believer through baptism shares in Christ’s death and resurrection and can look to the day when all the elect will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace.”* OCF #129

*“To draw the community together in prayer at the beginning of the funeral liturgy, the procession should be accompanied, whenever possible, by the singing of the entrance song. This song ought to be a profound expression of belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the dead as well as a prayer of intercession for the deceased.”* OCF #135

*“In the choice of music for the funeral mass, preference should be given to the singing of the acclamations, the responsorial psalm, the entrance and communion songs, and especially the song of farewell at the final commendation.” OCF #157*

*“The psalms are given pride of place in the funeral rites because ‘they powerfully express the suffering and pain, the hope and trust of people of every age and culture. Above all, the psalms sing of faith in God, of revelation and redemption’ (OCF #25). Effective catechesis will allow communities to understand the significance of the psalms used in the funeral rites.” STL #245.*

*“Sacred music has an integral role in the funeral rites, since it can console and uplift mourners while, at the same time, uniting the assembly in faith and love. Funeral music should express the paschal mystery and the Christian’s share in it. Since music can evoke strong feelings, it should be chosen with care. It should console the participants and ‘help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ’s victory over death and in the Christian’s share in that victory’ (OCF #31). Secular music, even though it may reflect on the background, character, interests, or personal preferences of the deceased or mourners, is not appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy.” STL #246.*

*“Music should never be used to memorialize the deceased, but rather to give praise to the Lord, whose Paschal Sacrifice has freed us from the bonds of death.” STL #248*

*“The practice of developing funeral choirs within parish communities should be encouraged. The funeral choir is commonly made up of individuals who tend to be available on weekday mornings and who gather to lend their collective voice in support of the assembly song at the funeral Mass.” STL #257*

### **Rite of Committal**

*“The singing of well-chosen music at the rite of committal can help the mourners as they face the reality of the separation...a hymn or liturgical and in the resurrection of the dead is*  
OCF #214

*song that affirms hope in God’s mercy desirable at the conclusion of the rite.”*



1.

*What music is appropriate for the three principal rites for Catholic Funerals?*

A good place to begin choosing appropriate music is the regular parish Sunday repertoire, especially music used during November and the Easter season. Music for Catholic funeral rites should express the paschal mystery and encourage full participation by the assembly. It should also meet the standards of the three judgments explained in *Sing to the Lord* #126. The three judgments - liturgical judgment pastoral judgment and musical judgment - help focus the music planning for the three funeral rites.

*"The role of music is to serve the needs of the Liturgy and not to dominate it, seek to entertain, or draw attention to itself or the musicians. However, there are instances when the praise and adoration of God leads to music taking on a far greater dimension. At other times, simplicity is the most appropriate response. The primary role of music in the Liturgy is to help the members of the gathered assembly to join themselves with the action of Christ and to give voice to the gift of faith."* STL #125.

2.

*What is meant by the term "paschal mystery" and why is it important that the Catholic funeral rites express this mystery?*

The term paschal mystery refers to the mystery of the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the essential aspects of Christian redemption. It is through Christ's dying that our death is destroyed, and through his rising that our life is restored. We are immersed into this paschal mystery through the sacraments, especially through baptism and Eucharist. Every Christian liturgy is a celebration of the paschal mystery and the Catholic funeral rites are part of the liturgy of the Church. It is through the paschal mystery that we are saved, and it is our salvation in Christ that we celebrate in the funeral liturgy.

3.

*Explain the "three musical judgments".*

As explained in *Sing to the Lord* 126 - 136, the threefold judgment (liturgical, pastoral, and musical) should be used to determine the value of a given musical element in a liturgical celebration.

The *liturgical judgment* is made by taking into consideration the nature of the liturgy itself. Consideration needs to be given to choosing music that is properly suited to the meaning and the structure of the ritual, that it is textually sound, and that it contributes to the overall rhythm of the liturgical action.

*Pastoral judgment* is also needed to choose music that will enable the people of a particular worshipping community to meaningfully express their faith in the concrete circumstances of the time and place. Planning the funeral rites with a grieving family takes great care and empathy. The liturgical minister must be pastoral in his or her approach. To be pastoral means to lead the family in choosing dignified liturgical music, while catechizing them about the liturgical rites of the funeral. Pastoral does not equal the use of secular music, poetry, etc. Reverent, dignified, well-planned, and well-executed liturgy is pastoral by its very nature.

*“The pastoral judgment takes into consideration the actual community gathered to celebrate in a particular place at a particular time. Does a musical composition promote the sanctification of the members of the liturgical assembly by drawing them closer to the holy mysteries being celebrated? Does it strengthen their formation in faith by opening their hearts to the mystery being celebrated on this occasion or in this season? Is it capable of expressing the faith that God has planted in their hearts and summoned them to celebrate?”*  
STL #130

To make the *musical judgment*, one needs to take into consideration the quality of the piece. Is it technically, aesthetically, and expressively good? Music chosen for each rite should be simple, beautiful, and accessible to the congregation. Music that is not artistically sound is not appropriate for use in the liturgy. Secular music is never allowed in liturgy.

#### 4.

*Who should plan the funeral music?*

Parishes usually have pastoral musicians and liturgy preparation teams in place that will work with the pastor and the family to provide appropriate music for the principal funeral rites. The diocesan Office of Liturgy is also available to help answer questions.

#### 5.

*Where can we find lists or suggestions for appropriate funeral music?*

Many publishing companies provide lists and suggestions for appropriate funeral music. Many hymnals and missals also have sections dedicated to funeral hymns. The diocesan list of suggested titles might also be helpful.

6.

*Since the Vigil is not a Mass may all kinds of music be used?*

The Vigil for the deceased is one of the principal rites of the church, and therefore the music should follow the same guidelines as in other liturgical celebrations. Since all liturgies are centered in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the music chosen for use in this and any other liturgical rite must be reflective of this central mystery of our faith. The ritual for the Vigil calls for an opening song and a responsorial psalm. It also states that a closing song is optional.

If celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours (Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer), the proper psalms (spoken or sung) should be used. The hymn at the beginning of each hour should reflect the time of day and compliment the particular hour that is prayed.

7.

*When "Ave Maria" is requested, what is the most fitting placement?*

A musical setting of the *Ave Maria* would best be placed before or after the Vigil, during the wake or viewing, as prelude music, or at some other time when meditative music is appropriate. *Ave Maria* is not appropriate music during the liturgical processions.

8.

*Is it appropriate to have the Lord's Prayer sung as a solo during the Funeral Liturgy?*

In the liturgical reforms called for by Vatican Council II, it is emphasized that full and active participation by all the people is the aim that is to be considered before all else. Therefore, all in the assembly are encouraged to join in the Lord's Prayer whenever it occurs in the liturgy.

9.

*Is it appropriate to sing favorite secular songs at Communion?*

The Communion song is meant to express the unity of the Body of Christ and be sung by the assembly. As stated in item #1, our liturgical music must always express the paschal mystery and draw us deeper into the heart of Christ (STL #246). Secular songs are not appropriate at this time. All liturgical music publishers list suggested Communion songs.



10.

*When may favorite secular music be used?*

There are many options for the appropriate placement of family favorites that are non-liturgical, such as:

1. Anytime during the wake or the viewing (not as part of the Vigil Service).
2. Before or after the Vigil Service.
3. At the gravesite after the conclusion of the Committal Rite.
4. During the funeral luncheon.

11.

*May recorded music be used during any of the funeral rites?*

In STL #93 the United States bishops remind us that “Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. While recorded music might be used advantageously outside the Liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy.”

The voices and instruments of the gathered assembly are never to be replaced by recorded music. Again, the aim of fostering full, active and conscious participation by all the people is to be considered before all else.



## 12.

### *Should there be music at the Committal Rite?*

The Committal is one of the principal rites of the Church and therefore, the music should follow the same liturgical guidelines as above.



Contact the Office of Worship for a list of suggested music or for information regarding the funeral rites.

The Office of Worship also provides training/formation for liturgical and bereavement ministers who aid families in planning liturgies. Visit [www.crookston.org](http://www.crookston.org) or contact Mary Dahl, the director of the office at [mdahl@crookston.org](mailto:mdahl@crookston.org)

## **Resources**

### **Ritual for Funeral Rites**

ICEL Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, *Order of Christian Funerals*, © 1989, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago.

### **Liturgy Documents**

Smith, Margaret. *Facing Death Together Parish Funerals*.  
Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Sing to the Lord:  
Music in Divine Worship*, 2007.

Vatican II *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum  
Concilium)*, 1963.

## *Liturgy Planning Sheet for the Order of Christian Funerals*

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### ***Vigil for the Deceased*** *(at the family's home or funeral home)<sup>1</sup>*

#### ***Introductory Rites***

Greeting

Opening Song

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Invitation to Prayer

Opening Prayer

#### ***Liturgy of the Word***

First Reading

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Responsorial Psalm

---

Gospel

---

Homily

#### ***Prayer of Intercession***

Litany

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The Lord's Prayer

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Concluding Prayer

[Words of Remembrance]

#### ***Concluding Rites***

Blessing

[Closing]\_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> See Order of Christian Funerals, §69.

***Vigil for the Deceased with Reception of the Body at the Church*** *(at the Church)*<sup>2</sup>

***Introductory Rites***

Greeting  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
[Placing of the Pall]  
Entrance Procession/Opening Song

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[Placing of Christian Symbols]  
Invitation to Prayer  
Opening Prayer

***Liturgy of the Word***

First Reading

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Responsorial Psalm

---

Gospel

---

Homily

***Prayer of Intercession***

Litany

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The Lord's Prayer

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Concluding Prayer

[Words of Remembrance]

***Concluding Rites***

Blessing  
[Closing Song]

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<sup>2</sup> See Order of Christian Funerals, §82.

## ***Vigil for the Deceased: Evening Prayer***

*(at the family's home or funeral home)*<sup>3</sup>

Introductory Verse

Hymn \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Psalmody***

Psalm 121 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 130 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 2:6-11 \_\_\_\_\_

Reading \_\_\_\_\_

[Homily]

### **Responsory**

\_\_\_\_\_

Canticle of Mary \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Intercessions***

\_\_\_\_\_

### **The Lord's Prayer**

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Concluding Prayer**

\_\_\_\_\_

[Words of Remembrance]

### ***Dismissal***

Greeting

Blessing

Dismissal

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<sup>3</sup> See Order of Christian Funerals, §385.

## *Vigil for the Deceased with Reception of the Body: Evening Prayer* (at the Church)

### ***Introductory Rites***

Greeting  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
[Placing of the Pall]  
Entrance Procession/Opening Song

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[Placing of Christian Symbols]

### ***Psalmody***

Psalm 121

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Psalm 130

---

Philippians 2:6-11

---

Reading

---

[Homily]

---

---

Responsory

---

Canticle of Mary

---

***Intercessions***

---

The Lord's Prayer

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Concluding Prayer

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[Words of Remembrance]

### ***Dismissal***

Greeting  
Blessing  
Dismissal

## *Funeral Mass with Reception of the Body*<sup>4</sup>

### *Introductory Rites*

Greeting  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
[Placing of the Pall]  
Entrance Procession

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[Placing of Christian Symbols]  
Opening Prayer

### *Liturgy of the Word*

First Reading

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Responsorial Psalm

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[Second Reading]

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Gospel Acclamation

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Gospel

---

Homily

General Intercessions

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### *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

Preparation of the Gifts

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#### **Service Music of the**

#### **Eucharistic Prayer:**

Holy, Holy

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Memorial Acclamation

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Great Amen

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Lamb of God

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<sup>4</sup> See Order of Christian Funerals, §158.

Communion Song

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***Final Commendation***

Invitation to Prayer

Silence

[Signs of Farewell]

Song of Farewell

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Prayer of Commendation

***Procession to the Place of Committal***

Music during the Procession

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## ***Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass<sup>5</sup>***

*(When there is no Funeral Mass)*

### ***Introductory Rites***

Greeting

Sprinkling with Holy Water

[Placing of the Pall]

Entrance Procession

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[Placing of Christian Symbols]

Opening Prayer

### ***Liturgy of the Word***

First Reading

---

Responsorial Psalm

---

[Second Reading]

---

Gospel Acclamation

---

Gospel

---

Homily

General Intercessions

---

### ***Final Commendation***

Invitation to Prayer

Silence

[Signs of Farewell]

Song of Farewell

Prayer of Commendation

### ***Procession to the Place of Committal***

Music during the Procession

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<sup>5</sup> See Order of Christian Funerals, §183.



## *Rite of Committal*<sup>6</sup>

[Music]

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Invitation

Scripture Verse

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Prayer over the Place of Committal

Committal

Intercessions

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The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

Prayer over the People

[Music]



## *Ministers for the Order of Christian Funerals*

### *Vigil*

Presider \_\_\_\_\_

*(priest, deacon, lay leader of prayer)*

Lector \_\_\_\_\_

Cantor \_\_\_\_\_

Accompanist \_\_\_\_\_

Greeter/Ushers \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>6</sup> See Order of Christian Funerals, §216.

### *Funeral Mass*

Presider \_\_\_\_\_

[Deacon] \_\_\_\_\_

Lector (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Cantor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Accompanist \_\_\_\_\_

Altar Server (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Pall Bearers** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### *Rite of Committal*

Presider \_\_\_\_\_

[Deacon] \_\_\_\_\_

[Lector] \_\_\_\_\_

[Cantor] \_\_\_\_\_

### *Christian Symbols Placed on Coffin*

Pall \_\_\_\_\_

Cross \_\_\_\_\_

Bible \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## **Special Considerations for Funerals of Priests in the** **Diocese of Crookston**

In the Diocese of Crookston, under the pastoral care of Bishop Michael J. Hoeppner, the following details are incorporated into a funeral celebration of a priest of the diocese.

The Vigil Service is conducted as is custom for the parish in which the priest's funeral celebrations will be celebrated. This will usually be presided over by the Pastor or Deacon of said parish and would be celebrated either at the funeral home or within the church.

The Funeral Mass would take place in that same church, presided over by the Bishop. All the priests of the Diocese of Crookston will be invited to concelebrate and sit as a group within the church itself, usually in a section opposite or off to the side of the main assembly of family and friends. If there is room in the sanctuary, a representative or two from this body could be seated there. Members of this body would be asked to fill the necessary stations for Holy Communion as ordinary ministers. Two deacons, either of the parish, or from the diocese at large, would serve as Deacons of the Word (proclaiming the Gospel and presenting the Intercessions) and the Altar.

As Concelebrants, the priests would take their places around the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer, and then returning to their seats at its conclusion.

The Final Commendation would take place as per usual noting these details and additions:

The Song of Farewell accompanies the Incensing of the casket.

*Salve Regina* is chanted by all after the Closing Song. If a program has been prepared containing the music for the congregation to follow, this would be included in the program.

*Ecce Quam Bonum* is chanted by the priests as the casket is placed in the hearse. This could also be included in the program.

Both chants are done *a cappella*. The words and music can be downloaded from the diocesan website under "Funeral & Burials" in the Worship section.

The Committal is followed as is per usual for the parish involved in the funeral process.

## **Notes**





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