



Diocese of St. Catharines
Where Faith Lives

GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC FUNERALS

The Catholic Church, through its funeral rites and prayers, offers consolation to those who grieve, gives thanks to God for the blessings received through and by the deceased, shows reverence for the body that remains, commends them to God, and asks God for mercy on all sinners.

The Church's funeral rites help us to confront death in the light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. "In the face of death the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity." (Order of Christian Funerals #1)

*Diocese of St. Catharines
P.O. Box 875
St. Catharines, ON L2R 6Z4
905-684-0154*

Catholic funeral rites are threefold and include the Vigil, Funeral Mass, and Rite of Committal.

The Vigil service includes Scripture readings and prayers for the deceased and those who grieve. It is the first time the community gathers to mourn the death of one of its members, and to provide prayerful support for the family which bears the burden of sorrow. The Vigil is conducted by a priest or deacon and usually takes place in the funeral home the day before the Funeral Mass.

The Funeral Mass is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral (OCF #5), and ought to be celebrated for every deceased Catholic. A Liturgy of the Word outside Mass may be celebrated instead of a Funeral Mass if it was the expressed wish of the deceased. The parish priest is to be consulted to arrange a Funeral Mass or Liturgy of the Word (OCF #350).

The Mass is celebrated in the church, never in a funeral home. A Liturgy of the Word, presided over by a priest or deacon, should be held in the church, but may take place in the funeral home.

The Rite of Committal is the last farewell of the community, and is an expression of the communion that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. In committing the body or cremated remains to their final resting place (grave, columbarium, mausoleum), the community expresses the hope that, with all those who have gone before, marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection. The rite of committal usually follows the Funeral Mass. If cremation is to take place after the Funeral Mass, then burial or committal is delayed. Cremated remains are to be buried, not scattered. If burial is in a non-Catholic cemetery, the grave is to be blessed.

When should the parish priest be called?

Parishioners are encouraged to contact the parish priest when faced with serious illness, and/or when death is near. People who are ill or facing death often appreciate the chance to pray and receive comfort. The priest can celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick, and bring Holy Communion.

When a death has occurred, it is vital that the parish priest, the funeral director, and the family be in communication.

The priest, a teacher of faith and minister of comfort, offers prayers for the deceased and for those who grieve, accompanying them as they face the spiritual questions and difficult decisions that often arise when a death occurs.

The parish priest assists the family with liturgical arrangements that are in accord with the tradition of the Church, in keeping with the life and wishes of the deceased, and the wishes of the bereaved family.

The priest may also offer guidance to families with their decisions about disposition of the remains, suggested wording of obituary notices, recommended memorial donations, and the availability of parish bereavement ministries and parish reception facilities.

Who can/cannot have a Funeral Mass?

A Funeral Mass ought to be celebrated for every deceased Catholic, and can be celebrated for catechumens, and for unbaptized infants if their parents intended baptism. It is possible to have a Funeral Mass for baptized members of other Christian churches, unless it is evidently contrary to their will, and provided their own minister is unavailable. In uncertain situations, the Chancery Office is to be consulted.

A Funeral Mass is not denied on the basis of a person's marital status, Mass attendance record, manner of death, or any financial consideration.

Funeral rites may be denied for notorious apostates, heretics, schismatics, and other manifest sinners. The denial of funeral rites is a decision left to the prudent judgment of the Diocesan Bishop who is to be consulted in cases where scandal might arise from permitting a funeral to take place in the Church.

Is cremation permitted for Catholics?

The Church has allowed cremation since 1963.¹

What if a body or organs are donated?

“Donation of organs after death is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as a manifestation of generous solidarity” (CCC, #2296). Respect for the body is an important consideration. If the body is donated, there should be reasonable assurance that the remains will be disposed of in a dignified manner, upon completion of the research. When organs are donated, funeral rites may take place. In the absence of a body or remains, a Memorial Mass is celebrated.

Are eulogies allowed?

Eulogies, understood as speeches of high praise of the deceased with no reference to Christian life, are out of place in an act of worship, and so are not permitted at a Funeral Mass. This does not mean that the Mass is impersonal or that there is no reference to the deceased. During the funeral liturgy there are invitations to pray for the deceased as well as for the family and for all those who mourn. It is most appropriate for the homilist to express gratitude to God for the gift of the deceased, with references to their life of faith and love. If the homilist did not know the person, it is helpful for family and friends to share stories with him beforehand. Prayers of the Faithful can be written to reflect aspects of the deceased’s life. Family and friends might also participate in other ways – Catholics may serve

as readers or in the offertory procession. Non-Catholics may be pallbearers.

Eulogies are permitted at the appropriate time, that is, after the Vigil prayers, at the reception following the Funeral Mass, or after the prayers of committal at the cemetery. It is recommended that there be only one eulogist; this person is to be of good reputation, and their written text should be approved beforehand by the presider.

Can a flag or other insignia replace the pall?

The white pall draped over the casket is a remembrance of the baptismal garment, and signifies the link between our Christian belief in baptism and resurrection of the body. It also reminds us of our equality before God, and its simplicity avoids any distinction between persons. With the funeral of a civil dignitary, if there is a tradition of draping the casket with a flag, the flag is to be replaced with the pall before the procession enters the church.

What is the proper terminology?

Funeral Mass is the appropriate term. Mass of Christian Burial, Mass of Resurrection, and Mass for the Dead are no longer used in liturgical texts. “Celebration of Life” is a misleading euphemism since it suggests that the focus is on praise for the deceased person rather than on an act of worship, the Funeral Mass, through which the Church asks spiritual assistance for the departed, honours their bodies, and brings the solace of hope to the living.

When can a Funeral Mass take place?

Funeral Masses are not to take place on Sundays or other Holy Days of Obligation. Funeral Masses are not to take place during the Triduum, that is, from Holy Thursday through to Easter Sunday. In exceptional cases, with the consent of the Diocesan Bishop, a Funeral Mass may be permitted on the morning of Holy Thursday.

Arrangements and pre-arrangements for Funeral Masses are to be made with the parish priest. Only one Funeral Mass is celebrated. There can be more than one Memorial Mass.

What is the cost for a Funeral Mass?

The Church does not charge a fee for funerals, including Funeral Masses. An offering is customary and may be given directly to the parish or made through the funeral home.

It is also commendable that gifts are offered to worthwhile charities in remembrance of the deceased, especially those that carry out the mission of the Church.

Why do we have Mass intentions for the dead?

Praying for the dead is one of the spiritual works of mercy. Prayers, especially the Mass, are offered for the dead to assure they obtain spiritual assistance, and at the same time bring the consolation of hope. Though separated from the living, the dead are still one with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayers and intercession.

Are there Catholic cemeteries in our Diocese?

There are eleven Catholic cemeteries in the Diocese of St. Catharines. For the complete list, go to www.saintcd.com. Other cemeteries within the Diocese include sections that are consecrated and specifically designated for Catholic burials. The Diocesan Bishop celebrates a special Mass annually at one or more Catholic cemeteries, for the repose of the souls of members of our community who died in the past year.

References: 1983 Code of Canon Law; Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992); Order of Christian Funerals, CCCB (1990); National Liturgy Office, CCCB (2006).

¹ See the *Diocesan Catholics and Cremation pamphlet* for more information.