

Guide for Preparing a Catholic Funeral

- The Funeral Liturgy, which may be a Mass or a Funeral Service.
- The Committal at the cemetery or crematorium.

When it is not practical to celebrate all three stages the funeral may comprise a single act of worship either in a cemetery chapel or crematorium.

The Church's ministers will help you consider what is best and practical for your particular circumstances. They will ensure the services are true to the tradition of the Church and appropriate to the one who has died and those who gather to pray for them. Please ensure that you contact the minister who will lead the funeral service before finalising any arrangements with the Funeral Director.

The Funeral Liturgy We hope you find what follows helpful at this difficult time.

The purpose of the Catholic Funeral Liturgy is to offer worship and thanksgiving to God, the author of all life; to pray for the deceased, and to offer support to the bereaved.

The Church encourages us to celebrate the funeral in three main stages:

The Vigil of Prayer

This Vigil is the first stage of the farewell journey. Its mood is one of quiet support which helps to prepare the bereaved for the final leave-taking. It may be held in the home of the deceased person, in a funeral home or in the church. The body of the deceased may be present or not. The Vigil may be led a priest but may also be led by others. It will include prayers and readings from scripture. It may include the Rosary, and appropriate liturgical songs and hymns.

The Funeral Liturgy

The Funeral Liturgy usually takes the form of the celebration of Mass, the highest form of prayer in which the Sacrifice of Christ himself is made present. In offering this Sacrifice, we commend to God the soul of the deceased in union with Christ himself. In some circumstances it is suitable for the Funeral Liturgy to take the form of a Liturgy of the Word only. The family and friends of the deceased, if they feel able, can assist during the Funeral Liturgy in a variety of ways, for example:

- Placing on the coffin symbols of Christian faith, such as the pall (a large white cloth which reminds us of Baptism), a crucifix and an open bible.
- Placing a photograph of the deceased or mass cards on a table near the coffin.
- Reading the scripture passages or the intercessions.
- A member of the family or a friend may also speak briefly about the deceased.

This best takes place outside the Liturgy. In this way, the family can speak in remembrance of the person for whom the prayer of the Liturgy is offered. A written text, seen by the

priest or deacon beforehand, must always be used. The Funeral Liturgy usually takes place in a parish church, but it may sometimes be appropriate to hold it in the chapel of a cemetery or crematorium.

The Committal

The final act of saying farewell takes place in a brief service at the graveside or at the crematorium. When a body is cremated, it is encouraged that there be a further brief service, sometime later, for the burial of the ashes.

Music at Funerals

The Church gives priority to the singing of the Order of Mass - the Alleluia, the Holy, and Great Amen, for example, and the songs proper to the Funeral Rite, for example the Song of Farewell. The priest will be able to discuss which version of these will be most fitting. Music at a Funeral Liturgy should always be drawn from the broad repertoire of Christian hymns and compositions. A piece of music from another source may be used after the formal Liturgy has finished provided there is nothing in it inconsistent with the sacred nature of the place and the occasion.

In considering what to sing, do consider the likely congregation and how they will respond to the invitation to sing. If the congregation is small, or unfamiliar with singing, it may be better to rely more on the organ or other instrumental music than song only.

[Funeral music \(link\)](#)

Preparing

In preparing for a funeral there are many things to prepare and consider. Preparing the Prayer, the Liturgy, the Funeral services, is only one of them. Also important is the reception afterwards. Often this will be the better place for the display of photos and the use of popular music that was particularly liked by the person who has died or is associated with them by others. These things can encourage conversation and the sharing of personal memories of the one who has died, in ways that are especially helpful to the bereaved, to family and friends.

In the funeral services we particularly focus on the things of faith, and how these give us hope for ourselves and for the person who has died even in the midst of the pain of bereavement. In other gatherings before and after the funeral services our attention is much more singly on the person themselves, and the place they have in our lives.

Who will help me plan the funeral services?

The priest, deacon, or other nominated members of the parish community will be happy to help.

Can I help choose the songs and readings?

Yes, and the priest will help you select from the range of approved readings from Scripture and of hymns and songs appropriate for use at Catholic worship. As already noted other music and readings can find their proper place elsewhere – for example in the social gathering following the funeral.

Funeral directors

If the deceased had a pre-paid funeral plan a number of features regarding the funeral will already have been agreed and paid for. Otherwise choosing a funeral director is a matter for the family.

Your parish priest may be able to provide you with contact details of a number of local companies that you can select from with confidence. It is common to invite estimates of costs from different firms before making your final choice. Your funeral director will advise you on the options and costs of the service they can provide. There is often a higher cost for a funeral which includes burial. Those choosing burial will also need to consider the upkeep of the grave.

A stipend or offering to the parish for the services of the priest/deacon leading the funeral service(s) is usual. This stipend is usually included automatically in the account prepared by the Funeral Director, although the family is free to make its own arrangements. There is usually an additional fee for an organist or other musician.

When will the funeral take place?

The funeral director will liaise with family, parish and cemetery/crematorium to arrange the day and time of the funeral service(s). Generally nothing can be done until a death has been registered. If the cause of death is clear, the doctor will issue a medical certificate and a notice with information on how to register the death so that funeral arrangements can then be made. If there is need to report the death to the coroner (for example when no doctor can issue a medical certificate of cause of death, if a death is judged unnatural or suspicious, or if a person dies during an operation), there may be a delay while a post mortem or inquest is carried out.

[Scripture Readings for Funerals](#) (link)