

Archdiocese of Dublin Funeral Ministry

*'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the
death of his faithful ones' Psalm 116:15*

Introduction

The Christian community since the earliest times has accompanied people through providing a ritual framework within which a funeral takes place. These rites are acts of public worship at which a number of elements are involved: God is praised; the Resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed conveying the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom; prayers are offered for the soul of the deceased person their body is honoured and the bereaved are consoled. Principles apply to these rites which can enrich the experience for the bereaved family and the wider community. Through these rituals, which express our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, space is offered to the bereaved family to express grief and sorrow. They also provide an opportunity to celebrate the life and memory of the deceased person.

Over a period of time members of a Diocesan Working Group, which included those engaged in the funeral ministry from pastoral and professional perspectives, have been engaged in discussion and consultation on how funerals are organised and celebrated in this Diocese. Parishes and funeral ministry teams formed part of this consultative process. We are very grateful to the Irish Association of Funeral Directors who made a significant contribution to the shaping of this document. The principal aim of this process of reflection is to improve, where possible, the ministry of accompaniment and consolation to the bereaved, and the dignified and worthy celebration of funeral rites. These discussions take into account the changing reality of Irish society today. This fresh look considers the ageing population which can be concentrated in certain parishes or groupings. It looks to the future when the lay faithful will be more centrally involved in carrying out this ministry in our parishes. It also acknowledges the relative distance of many people from parish life and religious practice in recent times. This document is the fruit of a wide consultation and lays out **Diocesan Policy**¹ in this important area of pastoral ministry².

¹ Diocesan Policy *ad experimentum* for three years beginning 1st September 2016.

² Visiting clergy should be made aware of the norms contained in the Diocesan Policy with particular reference to Music Choices and Words of Appreciation.

“ The Church through its funeral rites commends the dead to God’s merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of their sins. At the funeral rites, especially at the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the Christian community affirms and expresses the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of saints. Though separated from the living, the dead are still at one with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayers and intercession. At the rite of final commendation and farewell, the community acknowledges the reality of separation and commends the deceased to God. In this way it recognises the spiritual bond that still exists between the living and the dead and proclaims its belief that all the faithful will be raised up and reunited in the new heavens and a new earth, where death will be no more. ”

(Order of Christian Funerals - Introduction #6)

What Happens When a Member of the Christian Community Dies?

Initial Contact

When someone in the parish dies³ and a church funeral is requested, the Priest/Pastoral Team or Parish Office should be contacted as soon as possible, by a family member or, as is often the practice, by the Funeral Director. An appropriate pastoral response to the bereaved family requires that a good system of communication between the Funeral Director and the Parish is already in place. When the Parish Office is closed each parish or grouping of parishes should have an out of hours contact phone number that is known to Funeral Directors. It would seem appropriate for the Funeral Director to make initial contact in advance of meeting with the family so that the Parish can prepare for the funeral. In this way too the Funeral Director will have a clear idea from the Parish of available times for the funeral to help them when planning with the family.

Good Communication

Efficient communication can help the bereaved family feel very much part of the early preparation in planning the funeral. Once provisional times and dates are organised the family can meet the priest and/or the members of the funeral team to prepare the various rites. The Funeral Director may make the family aware that there is the possibility of the celebration of a funeral in the Roman Catholic Church within the Mass or a Funeral Liturgy when Mass is not celebrated.

It is **Diocesan Policy** that Funeral Masses and Services are not to be celebrated in Crematorium Chapels, Funeral Homes or similar locations as these celebrations properly belong in the parish church, the centre of the faith community.

³When a Church funeral of a person from outside the parish is requested, the courtesy of informing the parish where the deceased lived should be observed.

Prayer Resources

It is more appropriate for the priest/deacon/parish pastoral worker or funeral ministry team members to bring the relevant materials and resources directly to the family such as the Parish Funeral Rites Booklet, Choice of Readings, Music and Sample Intercessions.

Gathering in the Presence of the Body

There are also other opportunities for prayer which might be considered, such as, gathering in the presence of the body at home, in the funeral home, or mortuary chapel.

Removal of the Body to the Church

Often the body of the deceased is received into the Church on the morning of the Funeral Mass.

It is good practice that the celebration of the Eucharist begins at the designated time and that the funeral announcement indicates that the body will be received 15 minutes before the start of the Mass. This time provides an opportunity for a number of elements to happen.

The Bible and the Cross as important Christian symbols and funeral Pall can be placed on the coffin accompanied by designated prayers. A relatively new custom, which is not strictly part of the Funeral Rites, is the presentation of mementoes of the person who has died symbolising aspects of their life, work, interests, achievements etc. These can be placed on a 'table of remembrance' placed in the sanctuary or near the coffin. They are not gifts and so are unsuitable for the Offertory Procession. This time before the Eucharist begins affords an opportunity for some words of appreciation and welcome to be offered.

Support in Making Choices

It is important that those who have direct contact with the bereaved in the planning of a funeral make them aware of the liturgical possibilities – Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy (Prayer Service) without Mass. In drawing attention to the presence of Christ in Sacrament and Word the priest or member of the funeral ministry team will help the bereaved come to a decision that is most appropriate in the circumstances.

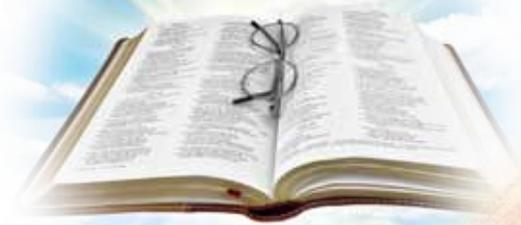
The Funeral Mass

The Second Vatican Council said that the Mass or Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ By this it meant that the Eucharist was the source or font from which the Christian faith is nourished and simultaneously the summit or highest point of worship of God. The integrity of the Eucharist is maintained by stressing the need for appropriate words, liturgical music and actions. At this difficult time music can be very helpful and consoling. There are times when particular musical preferences are discouraged as they are not in keeping with the celebration of the funeral rites or a place of Christian worship.

A wide range of helpful suggestions is available. See appendices on website.

Funeral Services when a Mass is not celebrated

The Order of Christian Funerals provides a Rite of a Funeral with a Liturgy of the Word when a Mass is not celebrated. This consists of the following: Entrance Procession, Introductory Prayers, readings from the Sacred Scriptures (Bible), Scripture Homily/ Reflection, Prayer of the Faithful and concluding with the final Prayers of Commendation. Family members may be involved through presentation of symbols related to the person, reading from the Scriptures and delivering an appreciation of the person. The Funeral Liturgy when Mass is not celebrated may be led by a priest, deacon, or parish pastoral worker or some other suitable trained and appointed lay person.



“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.”

(Order of Christian Funerals - Introduction # 17)

Funeral Ministry Team

Every parish in the Archdiocese of Dublin is encouraged to have a funeral ministry team. The team consists of religious and lay, men and women, who have been trained in providing support at a time of loss. The team will assist in helping to organise a Christian funeral with the help of the comforting rituals that the Church has to offer the bereaved.

On receiving word of the death of a person, one or two members of the Funeral Ministry Team may visit the bereaved family either on their own or with the priest, deacon or parish pastoral worker. The purpose of the visit is to sympathise with the family, to bring the peace and hope that the Gospel has to offer and to assure the bereaved family that the parish community is praying for them and their loved one.

They will also bring the Parish Funeral Rites Booklet which contains the Scripture Readings and sample intercessions for the Prayer of the Faithful which will be used during the funeral ceremony. They may discuss the liturgy and help the family make the decisions on choosing the appropriate readings and prayers for the deceased person.

Members of the Funeral Ministry Team may be involved in leading some of the prayers at the family home or the funeral home, in the church or at the graveside or crematorium.

The diocese is committed to providing ongoing training to funeral ministry teams both centrally and locally.

“ ‘If one member suffers in the body of Christ which is the Church, all the members suffer with that member’ (1 Corinthians 12:26). For this reason, those who are baptised into Christ and nourished at the same table of the Lord are responsible for one another. When Christians are sick, their brothers and sisters share a ministry of mutual charity and ‘do all that they can to help the sick return to health by showing love for the sick, and by celebrating the sacraments with them’. So too, when a member of Christ’s body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation of those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. ”

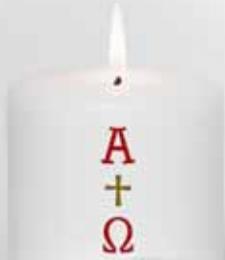
(Order of Christian Funerals - Introduction #8)

The Role of the Funeral Director

The Funeral Director plays a significant role in ensuring that so many elements connected with the funeral occur in an appropriate, timely and fitting manner. Funeral Directors, in the first instance, assist the bereaved after the moment of death until after the burial or cremation. The role of the Funeral Director is essentially twofold: the first is the care of the body of the deceased. The second consists in the care of the family of the deceased person by co-ordination of the funeral arrangements.

Traditionally in Ireland funerals have taken place very quickly, often less than forty-eight hours after death has occurred. Changes in society and in the Church require a review of this practice. Increase in the number and frequency of funerals, the desire by families and the Christian community to make funerals fitting celebrations; the availability of priests; cemetery staff, the travel needs of family members living abroad, all must be taken into consideration. It is suggested that the Funeral Director alert family members to the fact that these elements require co-ordination and that while every effort will be made to meet the wishes of the family all the above factors must be taken into account, and will influence the timing of the funeral.

The Funeral Director should advise the family to discuss with the priest and the Funeral Ministry Team the range of possibilities available with regard to the various funeral rites. This will help the family in making the choice that is most appropriate for the deceased person.



“ In the celebration of a funeral all the members of the people of God must remember that to each one a role and an office is entrusted: to relatives and friends, funeral directors, the Christian community as such, finally, the priest, who as the teacher of faith and the minister of comfort presides at the liturgical rites and celebrates the eucharist. ”

(Ordo Exsequiarum - Introduction #16)

Words of Appreciation

While it is not actually a part of the Christian Funeral Rite, a custom has begun at some funerals whereby a eulogy or an appreciation of the person is given by a relative or a friend of the deceased. Sensitivity has to be exercised around this as occasionally insensitive and indeed inappropriate things have been said at funerals. Saying something uplifting and charitable in a spirit of appreciation about the person who has died should be the main emphasis of these words.

Best practice suggests the following:

- A short tribute on behalf of the family is possible but not obligatory. People should feel totally free not to have one.
- It should be brief, no longer than five minutes, written down and delivered by one person. It should only contain words of tribute to the deceased and of thanks to those who have helped and supported the family during this time.
- An immediate family member may not always be the best person to offer the words of appreciation, particularly if they are not accustomed to public speaking or overcome with grief, someone close to the family could be more suitable.

The appropriate time for these Words of Appreciation is:

- At the Reception of the Body at the Church, if it takes place on the evening before the Funeral Mass.
- At the Reception of the Body if it takes place before the beginning of the Funeral Mass.
- At the conclusion of the Funeral Mass before the Prayers of Commendation and Farewell.
- At the Crematorium or Graveside.

“ 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. ”

(Order of Christian Funerals - Introduction #22)

Appendices

See **www.dublindiocese.ie** for

- Sacred Readings (Bible)
- Sample Funeral Services when a Mass is not celebrated
- Music suggestions and resources
- Sample of Funeral Participation Leaflet
- Do's and Don'ts for Words of Appreciation
- Resources for Funeral Ministry Teams
- A helpful checklist for the bereaved and Parish Team
- Diocesan Guidelines for planning, construction and maintenance of Columbaria
- Diocesan Guidelines in dealing with various media outlets and social media platforms
- Diocesan Policy on the placing of flags on a coffin
- Links to various websites and publications that will help in drawing up the Parish Funeral Rites Booklet

Diocesan Policy Prepared with the assistance of:

Parish Funeral Ministry Teams

Irish Association of Funeral Directors

Diocesan Council

Chancellery

Diocesan Council of Priests

Vicars Forane

Deaneries

Diocesan Liturgical Resource Centre

Office for Evangelisation and Ecumenism

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www.dublindiocese.ie