

**GUIDELINES:
CATHOLIC FUNERAL PRACTICES
in the Archdiocese of OTTAWA**

The death of a Christian is not an isolated event; death happens in the midst of a family and circle of friends. It also takes place within a community of believers, who surround the deceased in a spirit of love and support for the bereaved.

In the Church's funeral rites, we offer consolation for the family and the community, express our faith in God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and affirm the dignity of every human being, in death as in every stage of life.

A. Here are recommended steps to take when your loved one dies:

1. Contact the Parish.

It is helpful for a family member or friend to contact the parish when the person is gravely ill. This makes it possible to provide the comfort and consolation the dying person needs, through the Sacrament of the Sick, Holy Communion as Viaticum, and pastoral visits. It also enables the parish to provide companionship and support for the family on this very important stage of the journey.

A family member or friend should advise the parish soon after death has occurred. This makes it possible for the parish to provide pastoral care for the family and to develop the funeral plans with parish assistance from the very beginning.

2. Contact the Funeral Home

A family member or friend may contact the funeral home; in certain cases, on request and with authorization, this may also be done by a representative of the hospital staff. The parish and the funeral home cooperate to provide good care to the family throughout the time of the funeral.

3. *Choosing Burial or Cremation*

The Church prefers that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral, and burial of the mortal remains is highly recommended. However, cremation is now permissible for Roman Catholics. It is preferable that cremation take place after the vigil service and funeral Mass. If the body of the deceased is cremated before the funeral rites, the ashes may be brought into the church for the funeral Mass.

It is most important that the ashes be interred in a timely manner, and not left at the funeral home or kept in the home of a family member or a friend. The cremated remains are not to be divided, or mixed with the remains of another person, or scattered on land or water. If ashes are to be entombed at sea, they are to be placed in the water in the urn, not scattered on the water.

B. The Order of Christian Funerals

The following are important elements of a Catholic Christian's funeral drawn from *The Order of Christian Funerals*, the Church's book of funeral rites. These rites include three stages: the Vigil Service, the Funeral Mass and the Rite of Committal.

1. The *Vigil Service* for parishioners, family and friends in the presence of the remains of the deceased generally takes place in the funeral home. Here, the community joins in prayers, listens to Scriptures and has an opportunity to tell some of the important stories about this person's life.

2. *Remembering the Deceased in Word or Story*

The eulogy—words of remembrance and praise for the one who has died—does not have properly belong in the Funeral Mass. In the homily, the preacher reflects on the life of the one who has died, in relation to God's grace and action, opening up how the life of the deceased is gathered into Christ's paschal mystery.

The wake service at the funeral home is a very good place for a eulogy and other story telling, as is the reception after the Funeral Mass.

In order to comply with frequently-made requests, provision may at times be made for one person to speak of the deceased, in the church before the Funeral Mass, once the ministers have approached the sanctuary and before the Funeral Mass begins. A separate document explains how the parish and family may plan for this.

3. The Mass of Christian Burial

The *Funeral Mass* takes place in the church; it may not be celebrated in the funeral home. If good reasons exist for a funeral service to be held in the funeral home instead of in the church, a Liturgy of the Word is celebrated.

4. Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Music

Since the Funeral rites are expressions of the faith of the Church, the proclamation of Sacred Scripture and the use of hymns are fundamental to the funeral liturgy. It is not permitted to substitute other texts for the Sacred Scriptures. The parish ministers who assist in funeral preparation will provide guidance in the selection of suitable texts and music which fulfill the liturgical needs and respond to the hopes of the family.

5. The Rite of Committal

The Committal is the final farewell of the community of faith in caring for the remains of its deceased member. As far as possible, it is desirable that Roman Catholics be buried in Catholic cemeteries. Non-Catholics, too, may be buried in a Catholic cemetery.

6. Caring for the Bereaved

Members of the Christian community share a common responsibility for the ministry of consolation during the funeral period and in the time of mourning. The care for the body of the deceased is most often entrusted to the undertakers. Some members of the parish will assist the family in

preparing for the funeral, and planning for the times of hospitality. In the celebration of the vigil rites and the committal, the presiding minister may be a priest, a deacon, or a layperson. A priest, deacon or layperson may preside at a Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass.

C. Some Guidance for Funeral Directors

1. Use of the Funeral Home and the Church

The funeral rites are properly celebrated by the ministers of the Church. The vigil service takes place in the funeral home, and the Funeral Mass is celebrated at the church. It is not appropriate for funeral directors to encourage other practices.

2. Contact with the Parish

A healthy relationship between the parish and the funeral home will allow all to serve the needs of the bereaved most effectively. If the funeral home is contacted before the parish is, it is most fitting to provide the family with the contact information for the parish, or to make the first call to the parish as a courtesy to the family.

January 5, 2014

Solemnity of the Epiphany