

Order of Christian Funerals Guidelines

(Insert in Tab R of *Handbook for Parish Pastoral Leadership*)

In order to prepare each of the rites of the Order of Christian Funerals (OCF) worthily, it is necessary that presiders and planners read and become thoroughly familiar with the General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals found at the beginning of the OCF and each of its rites.

Funeral Rites

The Order of Christian Funerals (1987) is the current and normative rite. It is also important that presiders and planners obtain a copy of the NCCB 1997 Appendix on Cremation. No previous version of the rite may be used. Please check to make sure the parish is using the current version. According to the OCF, there are three rites that correspond to the three principal ritual moments in the funeral of Christians. They are: 1. Vigil for the Deceased, 2. Funeral Liturgy, 3. Rite of Committal.

1. Vigil for the Deceased

The Vigil for the Deceased is the normative rite in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy, or if there is no funeral liturgy, before the rite of committal. It should not be omitted or replaced by devotional prayers. Devotional prayers may be offered in addition to the celebration of the Vigil for the Deceased either at the time of the Vigil itself, or at another time.

2. Funeral Liturgy

The Funeral Liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. There are two forms of the Funeral Liturgy: the Funeral Mass and the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass. 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. Presiders are reminded to follow the guidelines for reception of Holy Communion by non-Catholics (USCC, 1996).

a) Eulogy

The OCF is very clear that "a brief homily should be given at the funeral liturgy, but never any kind of eulogy" to replace the homily (OCF, 141). This does not mean that the deceased cannot be spoken about in the homily, but that the Word of God must be primary. The homilist speaks the scriptural word that helps the assembly understand that the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus is operative in the life and death of the deceased.

Each parish should determine its own policy regarding whether speaking in remembrance of the deceased will be permitted at the

funeral liturgy. Visiting priests are expected to adhere to the parish policy. After the prayer after communion, a member of the family or friend may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the final commendation begins. This needs to be arranged with the presider a day or two ahead of time, not minutes before the funeral liturgy.

b) If a remembrance is permitted by the parish, the following guidelines should be observed: The person giving the remembrance should be Catholic.

1. Only one person may speak (unless the words must be translated into an additional language for the benefit of the assembly).
2. The remembrance should be brief; no more than 5 minutes.
3. The remembrance should be well prepared by the friend/family member ahead of time so that it is focused, and does not exceed 5 minutes. If possible, a copy of the remembrance is to be given to the presider in time to review it before the funeral liturgy.

The Order of Christian Funerals also permits speaking in remembrance of the deceased at the Vigil for the Deceased. In fact, this is a better time to offer remembrances for the deceased than in the funeral Mass. Encourage families to make use of this option.

3. Rite of Committal

The Rite of Committal is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased members. There are two forms to this rite:

1. **Rite of Committal** – used when the final commendation is celebrated as part of the conclusion of the funeral liturgy.
2. **Rite of Committal with Final Commendation** – used when the final commendation does not take place during the funeral liturgy or when no funeral liturgy precedes the committal rite.

Norms Governing When Funeral Masses May Be Celebrated

Funeral Masses are not normally celebrated on these days. Every effort should be made to avoid scheduling funeral Masses on these special days.

- **Triduum** - Funeral Masses are not permitted on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Funeral rites on these days make use of a liturgy of the Word, closing with the rite of farewell (OCF, 177-203) Readings should be chosen to reflect the nature of the day.

- **Sundays** – Funeral Masses may not be celebrated on the Sundays of Advent, Lent and Eastertide (IGRM, 336). Funeral rites on these days make use of a liturgy of the Word, closing with the rite of farewell (OCF, 177-203) Readings should be chosen to reflect the nature of the day.
- **Sundays** – Funeral Masses are permitted on Sundays of Ordinary Time and Sundays of the Christmas season (GIRM, 336).
- **Holy Days** - Funeral Masses may not be celebrated on holy days (GIRM, 336). Funeral rites on these days make use of a liturgy of the Word, closing with the rite of farewell (OCF, 177-203). Readings should be chosen to reflect the nature of the holy day.
- **Ash Wednesday** - Funeral Masses are permitted on Ash Wednesday (GIRM, 336)
- **Solemnities** – Funeral Masses are permitted on solemnities (GIRM, 336).