



Archdiocese of Los Angeles

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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How we care for the dead speaks about what we believe concerning both death and the afterlife. As Christians, our funeral practices are not merely rituals; they are profound expressions of our faith in the salvation that Jesus Christ has won for all people. The way we honor the deceased reflects the hope and confidence we place in the promises of Christ—promises that death is not the end but a transition to eternal life (John 11:25-26).

The funeral rites of the Church are meant to be a powerful manifestation of this faith. While it is natural to mourn the loss of a loved one, a Catholic funeral is ultimately focused not on the sadness of death, but on the hope of resurrection. While we gather to grieve, we also gather to celebrate the eternal life that awaits those who die in the Lord. As we mourn, we do so not with despair, but with the hope of reunion in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

A Catholic funeral is not just a moment for sorrow, but also for prayer, for thanksgiving, and for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a sacred time for family and friends to come together to pray for the soul of the deceased, to reflect on their life, and to trust in the mercy of God. As the *Order of Christian Funerals* states: "At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of Baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting Word of God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist" (*Order of Christian Funerals*, no. 4).

These guidelines, which follow the teachings of the Catholic Church and our Archdiocese, are designed to help parishes, mortuaries, families, and communities navigate the funeral process with dignity, reverence, and profound Christian faith. It is our prayer that these guidelines will guide you in celebrating the Christian hope of eternal life and bring comfort to all those who mourn.

In Christ,

Fr. Juan Ochoa

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Catholic Funeral Rites, as found in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, are celebrations that enable the Christian community to mourn, as well as to hope, by focusing on the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ.
2. The Catholic Funeral Rites are not a celebration of the life of the faithfully departed, nor a celebration in honor of the deceased. Rather, they are a celebration of Christ's Paschal Mystery (death and resurrection) in which the deceased takes part, by the virtue of their baptism.
3. The Order of Christian Funerals, 1989 edition (OCF), is the only canonically approved liturgical rite in English. In Spanish, *El Ritual de las Exequias Cristianas*, 2001 edition, is approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America. All previous editions of the Order of Christian Funerals should be retired. Ministers serving in communities with other diverse languages should use the current approved translation of the Latin, *Ordo Exsequiarum*.

THE CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

4. In each of the Church's liturgies, Christ's Paschal Mystery is made present by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, men and women are initiated into this Mystery and become members of Christ's Mystical Body. In the life of a Christian, the presence of the Paschal Mystery is ever renewed and sustained through the celebration of the Church's liturgies.
5. A funeral celebration should be a profound expression of Christian faith in the salvation Jesus Christ has won for all people. The funeral liturgy is not merely an expression of grief, but is, first and foremost, an act of worship to the Giver of Life. At the death of a Christian, the Church gathers to offer praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of the life now returned to Him. The Church also intercedes on behalf of the deceased in the belief that death is not the end of human existence, nor does it break the bonds forged in life. Recognizing the power of the Paschal Mystery, the Church asks that the deceased and all the faithful will have their sins forgiven and be raised in Christ.
6. In these same rites, the Church ministers to those who mourn the loss of a loved one. Through the proclamation of the saving works of Jesus Christ and the celebration of the Eucharist, the gathered community finds hope in Christ's triumph over death and calls upon the Father of mercy to receive the deceased into the kingdom of light and peace.
7. In sum, the Church's funeral rites offer prayers for the deceased and provide consolation to the living through the proclamation and celebration of God's saving works and abiding love. In other words, during the funeral rites we address God, the deceased, and the assembly.
8. During the celebration of the funeral rites, human and spiritual sensitivity are important: the way of welcoming, the way of celebrating, the words that are spoken, the rites that are performed; everything must be adapted to both the content of the Christian faith and the sensitivity of the community present.



The attitudes of compassion, sympathy, love, and affection must reflect the love and mercy of Christ and the charity of the Church, Herself.

RECIPIENTS OF THE CHURCH'S FUNERAL RITES

9. Every Catholic, unless specifically excluded according to the norms of law, is entitled to the church's ministry at the time of death (*CIC*, 1176 §1).
10. At the time of death, families who are active members and also families who may not have been active members of the church need to be welcomed in a Christian spirit and helped to feel at home with the church. This can be a fruitful time of evangelization. Through sensitive pastoral care the faith of bereaved family and friends may be strengthened, reaffirmed or rekindled.
11. Catechumens are entitled to the full rite of Christian burial. Even though they are unbaptized, they are members of the household of the church. (*CIC*, 1183 §1)
12. A child who dies before Baptism may be given Christian funeral rites if the parents intended to have the child baptized. (*OCF*, 237,318 and *CIC*, 1183 §2)
13. The remains of fetuses or stillborn children should always receive reverent Christian burial if this is at all possible. These remains may be placed either in specific individual graves or in a common burial area.
14. The funeral rites may be celebrated when the deceased committed suicide. (*OCF*, 398, nos. 44 & 45)
15. Catholic Funeral Rites, including the Funeral Mass, are permitted for a deceased baptized non-Catholic who might reasonably be presumed to desire or prefer the Catholic Rite. Such a decision is appropriate when non-Catholics worship regularly in the Catholic Church or identify with the Catholic Church more than any other.
16. To foster and respect family bonds, non-Catholic members of Catholic families may be interred in a Catholic cemetery. Clergy of other communions may conduct the cemetery rites according to their tradition, if the family so desires, or if it was the expressed wish of the deceased.
17. The Church encourages the burial of Catholics in Catholic cemeteries (*CIC*, 1180 §1). Burial in the blessed ground of a Catholic cemetery is a sign of baptismal commitment and gives witness, even in death, to faith in Christ's resurrection.
18. There is no objection to Catholics making prior arrangements to donate their bodies or parts of them to advance medical science. The only limitation is that, upon eventual disposition of the body or its parts, there be some reasonable assurance that the remains will be disposed of in a proper, reverential manner. (Rite of Committal with Final Commendation *OCF*, 224-233) The family of the donor should be encouraged to celebrate the funeral rites with a Memorial Mass as soon as possible after the person's death. With continual respect for the human body, the amputated extremities of Catholic individuals are to be given reverent Christian burial. These remains may be placed either in specific individual graves or in a common burial area.



DENIAL OF BURIAL

19. Under certain circumstances Christian burial is inappropriate. Canon 1184 states that, unless they have given some signs of repentance before their death, the following are to be deprived of ecclesiastical funeral rites:
- Notorious apostates, heretics, and schismatics
 - Persons who have chosen cremation of their own bodies for reasons opposed to the Christian faith
 - Other manifest sinners for whom ecclesiastical funeral rites cannot be granted without public scandal to the faithful
20. Should the priest seriously believe that Christian burial should be denied, he must consult the Office of the Regional Bishop.
21. Those who have neglected the celebration of the sacraments, those who are involved in invalid marriages and those who have incurred excommunication or interdict are *not* to be denied Christian burial.

MINISTRY AND PARTICIPATION

22. Since all the baptized share in Christ's ministry of love and service, all members of the Christian community are called to share in the ministry of consolation (*OCF*, 9). Members of the parish community are to be encouraged to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, and to comfort those who are grieving. The ritual makes it clear that an important dimension of the pastoral ministry involves awakening the entire community to an appreciation and practice of the various aspects involved in a full and fruitful bereavement ministry, which will bring the faith and charity of the whole parish to those who are mourning the loss of a loved one.
23. Regular catechesis through homilies, evenings of reflection, and bulletin inserts should assist parishioners to understand their role in offering assistance to mourners. As well, pastors should develop parish policies and provide appropriate resources so that the theological meaning and pastoral value of the Catholic funeral rites are clearly known by members of the parish community.

Clergy

24. With regard to the Church's funeral rites, it is the specific responsibility of the clergy:
- to be present at the side of the dying;
 - to teach on the meaning of Christian death;
 - to comfort the family and friends of the deceased and prepare with them a worthy and dignified funeral celebration that has meaning for them; and,
 - to ensure that the liturgies for the deceased are integrated into the entire liturgical life of the parish (*Ordo Exsequiarum*, 25).
25. The celebration of the funeral rites is especially entrusted to priests. However, when no priest is available, a deacon may lead the funeral liturgies, apart from the funeral Mass.



26. When a priest or deacon is not available to preside at the Vigil or Committal liturgies, a lay member of the parish, who has the necessary training and skills to lead public prayer may preside at these services, utilizing the appropriate options listed in these rites (*OCF*, 14).

The Bereavement Minister

27. It would be fitting for each parish to recruit and prepare a person to coordinate the varied aspects of this ministry. As a faith-filled person with good social skills, the bereavement minister may be called upon to visit those who have just experienced the loss of a loved one, to pray with them, to offer the parish's sympathy and support, and to assist them with funeral arrangements.

Family

28. The *Order of Christian Funerals* recommends that family members be involved in the preparation of the liturgical rites (*OCF*, 17). In coordination with the parish priest, the family of the deceased and the funeral director should arrange the places, dates and times for the Vigil, the funeral Mass, and the Committal.
29. As families make their selections and express their wishes, one must keep in mind that the funeral liturgy is not about the deceased or a particular gathered assembly. Rather, it is the communal celebration of the Body of Christ entering into the Paschal Mystery.
30. The funeral Mass should normally be the central element of the funeral rites (*OCF*, 154). If a family is reluctant to schedule a funeral Mass, the parish representative (*e.g.*, priest or deacon) should encourage the offering of a Mass, explaining that it is a powerful prayer for the deceased and a great comfort to the living. Whenever possible, parishes should make provision for the celebration of the funeral Mass when financial considerations on the part of the family would otherwise make this difficult.
31. Family and friends may be invited to take part in various ministries during the celebration of the liturgy as readers, musicians, ushers, and pallbearers unless they would find these activities too burdensome at a time of grief and loss (*OCF*, 15).
32. People express their love and affection for their departed through pictures or by providing flower arrangements. The placement of flowers, photos, and other mementos of the deceased should not be in locations where they may post an obstacle to the flow of the liturgy. Additionally, they should not block access or view of the sanctuary, nor the liturgical action of the rites. Parishes should develop plans for the placement of flowers at funerals.
33. Family requests for non-liturgical elements such as secular music, secular readings, Words of Remembrance, release of doves, or slide shows/pictures are best done at times outside of liturgical prayer. For example, during the wake, but not during the Vigil Liturgy, or the gravesite, but not during the Rite of Committal. These requests could also be made at the funeral meal or reception. While the liturgical rites are *very* specific to what can and cannot take place, it is important to remember that this is a very sensitive time for the family. It is not simply about saying “no,” but rather, helping and guiding the family so that these requests happen at the proper time (outside liturgical prayer: Vigil Liturgy, Funeral Liturgy, Rite of Committal).



Liturgical Ministries

34. The full celebration of the *Order of Christian Funerals* makes multiple demands upon the liturgical resources of the community. Not only the ordained, but also knowledgeable liturgical planners and ministers may appropriately assist the family in choosing the readings and music. If family members do not or cannot proclaim the readings, parish readers should be available to do so. Cantors and funeral choirs could lead the community's sung prayer. Altar servers enhance the dignity of the celebration.

Funeral Directors

35. Funeral directors should have a working knowledge of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, and pastors should offer assistance to funeral arranger/directors with respect to Catholic values, beliefs, and liturgical norms and principles.
36. Many times, the funeral arranger/director is the first person contacted by a family after a death. Funeral arranger/directors and parish ministers need a mutual understanding concerning how the arrangements of dates, time, place, music, style of celebration and other related issues are handled. A cordial relationship and good communications between the parish staff, ministers and the funeral arranger/directors will ensure the best pastoral care for a bereaved family.
37. In obituary notices and announcements, funeral arranger/directors should use the proper names of the various liturgical rites, including: "Vigil for the Deceased," "Funeral Mass" or "Mass of Christian Burial," "Funeral Liturgy outside Mass," and "Rite of Committal". Other terms are NOT to be used, e.g. Mass of the Resurrection, Celebration of Life, Rosary, Wake, etc.

SCHEDULING

38. Each parish should develop a clear policy on funeral schedules that is shared with parishioners and local funeral mortuaries. While local policy should take into account the daily Mass of the parish, the availability of priests, the schedule of liturgies and other parish events, sensitivity to the grieving family should be paramount in scheduling the Funeral Mass.
39. If the Funeral Mass is celebrated in the evening, a sufficient length of time should separate it from the celebration of the Vigil for the Deceased. If this cannot be done, then the Vigil may be omitted.



FUNERAL VIGIL

40. The Vigil is often the first time that family, friends, and members of the parish community gather in remembrance of the deceased for prayer and support. The vigil may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, in the funeral home, or in the church.
41. The Vigil for the Deceased, sometimes mistakenly referred to as wake or Rosary, is the principal rite celebrated by the Church in the time following death and before the Funeral Mass. The practice of scheduling a specific hour for the Vigil for the Deceased is encouraged in order for more of the faithful to participate in this liturgy.
42. Devotions such as the rosary are laudable prayers best done before or after the Vigil Liturgy. The Rosary should never replace the Vigil for the Deceased in the *Order for Christian Funerals*. However, if pastoral circumstances warrant, the rosary or a portion of this prayer, may be incorporated into the Vigil for the Deceased, e.g., following the Prayer of Intercession, Litany.
43. An appropriate time for the final viewing of the deceased and the closing of the casket is determined before the Vigil for the Deceased takes place. The viewing may take place prior to and/ or at the conclusion of the Vigil.
44. After the Concluding Prayer at the Vigil and prior to the Dismissal, it is appropriate for a family member or a friend to speak in remembrance of the deceased. Words of Remembrance could also be shared after the Concluding Rite, allowing the minister to conclude the formal liturgy and inviting family and friends to stay and share their stories and remembrances of the deceased.
45. When no priest or deacon is available, it is permissible for a faith-filled and trained lay minister to be designated by the pastor to preside at the Vigil for the Deceased, providing the person has been formed in an understanding of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, and is also skilled in leading public prayer.
46. The Liturgy of the Hours, from the Office for the Dead, (*OCF*, part IV) provides an optional format for the Vigil for the deceased. Morning Prayer from the Office might also be celebrated on the day of committal, following an evening Funeral Mass (*OCF*, 348). The Rosary may be recited but should not replace the Vigil for the Deceased.
47. When the Vigil for the Deceased is celebrated in a church, clergy vest in an alb and stole. A lay minister who presides wears appropriate clothing, such as a white alb, in accord with the dignity of the role.
48. When a Vigil takes place in the church, the Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church (*OCF*, 82) is celebrated, even when the Vigil is led by a lay person.
49. The presence of a cantor or other music minister at the Vigil for the Deceased is helpful in leading the people in prayer, particularly in the singing of the psalms and responses of the liturgy.

FUNERAL MASS

50. The funeral Mass (or funeral Liturgy outside Mass) is the central celebration of the Christian community on behalf of the deceased. In this 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" (*OCF*, 129).

Time and Location

51. The funeral Mass may be celebrated as one of the regularly scheduled daily Masses in the parish. However, if a Mass intention has already been scheduled, a funeral Mass may not be substituted for a daily Mass without the consent or prior understanding of the person who has requested the announced Mass.
52. Funeral Masses are not to be celebrated on solemnities of obligation, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, or on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season (*OCF*, 178). On these days or other occasions when the Funeral Mass may not take place, a funeral Liturgy outside Mass (see below) may be celebrated.
53. The funeral Mass is generally celebrated in the parish church to which the deceased belonged. However, the funeral Mass may also be celebrated at another church with the pastor's consent and when the pastor of the deceased has been notified (*CIC*, 1177). Funeral Masses for religious should ordinarily be celebrated in the community's church or chapel.
54. Funeral Masses held outside of a parish may be celebrated at Catholic Cemeteries and Catholic Mortuaries. They are not to take place in non-Catholic funeral homes or non-Catholic cemeteries.

Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass

55. As noted above, a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass is ordinarily celebrated on those days when a funeral Mass is not permitted. The funeral Liturgy outside Mass should not be substituted for the funeral Mass when the celebration of a Mass is possible unless, for pastoral reasons, the pastor and family judge this to be a more suitable form of celebration (*OCF*, 154; 178).
56. A funeral Liturgy outside Mass may take place at a parish church, a funeral home, the home of the deceased, or a cemetery chapel. The celebration of this liturgy should include Scriptural readings, the use of music, and, if appropriate, the participation of family and friends.
57. The celebration of a Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass may include Holy Communion (*OCF*, 195), ***only*** when a priest is not available to celebrate a Funeral Liturgy within Mass. Furthermore, when distribution of Holy Communion takes place at a Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass, **it is only allowed at a Catholic Church or Catholic Cemetery.**
58. For the distribution of Communion during the Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass see nos. 409-410 in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. In addition, the following is to be observed from *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside of Mass* (HCWEMM):
 - a. When Holy Communion is administered in a Catholic Church or Catholic cemetery chapel, a corporal should be placed on the altar, which is already covered with a white altar cloth. Two candles should be lit.
 - b. When the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) is concluded, the deacon approaches the place where the Eucharist is reserved (tabernacle), takes the vessel or ciborium containing the



Body of the Lord, places it on the altar, and genuflects. The deacon then introduces the Lord's Prayer.

- c. After the Lord's Prayer, the deacon does the Invitation to Communion (OCF, no. 409).
- d. Holy Communion is then distributed to those who are eligible to receive it in the usual way. While the distribution of Communion takes place, an appropriate liturgical song may be sung.
- e. If there are a number of hosts remaining when the distribution of Communion is complete, the minister returns the Blessed Sacrament to the tabernacle and genuflects.
- f. Then, if appropriate, a sacred silence may be observed for a while, or a psalm or canticle of praise may be sung.
- g. Then, the deacon says one of the Prayers after Communion.
- h. Following the Prayer after Communion, the Final Commendation takes place.

Liturgical Options

- 59. Presiding clergy should be familiar with the wide choices of prayers for different circumstances contained in the *Order of Christian Funerals* and carefully select the most appropriate of these texts in light of the particular circumstances of the funeral (See: *OCF*, Part V, Chapter 20).
- 60. Family members may be invited to select scriptural texts that will be used at the funeral Mass from those listed in Part III of the *Order of Christian Funerals* or from the *Lectionary*, Volume IV, nos. 1011-1026. Non-biblical texts may never replace the scriptural readings or the Responsorial Psalm (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM], 57; *OCF*, 23).
- 61. Clergy and family members may select scriptural passages from another place in the approved Lectionary which are not part of the scriptural selection found in the *Order of Christian Funerals* or Masses for the Dead.
- 62. Family members may also wish to select or request specific musical selections for the celebration of the funeral Mass. These selections should be examples of sacred music and express the Church's beliefs concerning Christ's victory over death and the hope of eternal life. Additional information concerning the selection of music see section below under "Music in the Funeral Liturgy".
- 63. In consideration of the pastoral needs of the mourners, vestments should be chosen so as "to express Christian hope but should not be offensive to human grief or sorrow" (*OCF*, 39). In the United States, white, violet, or black vestments may be worn at the funeral and other offices and Masses for the dead.

Particular Elements of the Funeral Liturgy

Reception of the Body and Introductory Rites

- 64. The Rite of Reception of the body ordinarily takes place at the entrance of the church (*OCF*, 133.). For reasons of space, this rite may also take place inside the church. Flags or insignia of associations to which the deceased belonged should be removed from the casket at the entrance of the church and



may be replaced after the conclusion of the funeral rite (*OCF*, 132). Holy water is used at the reception of the body as a reminder of the Baptism of the deceased (*OCF*, 133). After the sprinkling of holy water, the casket may be covered with a funeral pall in remembrance of the white baptismal garment.

65. Following the Rite of Reception of the body, a procession into the church takes place. Symbols of the Christian life, such as a Book of the Gospels, a bible, or a cross, may be carried in procession and then placed on the casket (*OCF*, 163). The Easter candle may also be placed beforehand near the place where the casket will remain during the liturgy. When arriving at the sanctuary, the celebrant may incense the altar before going to the chair (*OCF*, 163). The Penitential Act and *Kyrie* are omitted, and the Mass proceeds directly to the opening collect.
66. If the Rite of Reception of the body has already taken place at a time prior to the funeral Mass, the Mass begins in the usual way with the sign of the cross and the Penitential Act (*OCF*, 158).

Liturgy of the Word

Readings

67. The Word of God proclaimed at funerals not only offers comfort to the family of the deceased and those attending but also revitalizes the Christian faith and hope of all who listen with attentiveness and devotion. The Sacred Scriptures nourish the spiritual lives of the living who participate in the funeral liturgy, strengthening their Christian faith and hope in the promised future Kingdom.
68. Depending on pastoral circumstances, there may be one or two readings before the reading of the Gospel (*OCF*, 165). Family members or friends of the deceased may be invited to proclaim these readings. They should have access to the readings before hand so that may practice before the liturgy. Readers should ordinarily have prior experience as lectors and be able to proclaim the Word of God with clarity and dignity. In this way, their ministry can serve as an effective aid in bringing the wisdom and hope of God's Word to those who mourn. If there are no qualified lectors among family or friends, the readings may be proclaimed by a parish lector, a deacon, a concelebrant, or, if necessary, the celebrant.

It should be noted that Lectors must be Catholic. However, in exceptional circumstances, with the permission of the regional bishop, a member of another Christian church may proclaim the readings at a Catholic Liturgy. The proclamation of the Word of God is an expression of Christian faith that is done by Christians.

Responsorial Psalm

69. The Responsorial Psalm should ordinarily be sung, if possible, with a cantor leading the congregation in the sung response. Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm (*GIRM*, 61).

Homily

70. The homily at the funeral Mass should be based on the readings that have been proclaimed. It should be brief and "dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord as proclaimed in the Scripture readings" (*OCF*, 141). The homily should never be in the style of a eulogy, but rather, inspire those gathered to find hope in the gift of eternal life and to assist the deceased with the help of



their prayers (*OCF*, 141; *GIRM*, 382). Bearing in mind that he is a minister of Christ's Gospel for all, the homilist should also take into account the presence of those who may be non-Catholics or Catholics who rarely participate in the Eucharist (*GIRM*, 385).

Universal Prayer

71. The petitions of the Universal Prayer may be recited by a family member or friend of the deceased at the discretion of the celebrant. The Universal Prayer should be recited from a prepared text. The formulas provided in the *Order of Christian Funerals* may be adapted to the circumstances of a particular funeral, or other petitions may be composed (*OCF*, 142).

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Gifts

72. During the Preparation of the Gifts, family members and friends may be invited to present the bread and wine or other gifts for the poor or the Church (*GIRM*, 73). The gift bearers are to be Catholic. If incensation of the gifts and the altar takes place during the Preparation of the Gifts within the funeral Mass (*OCF*, 144), the body of the deceased should not be incensed at that time.

Eucharistic Prayer

73. The Preface and Eucharistic Prayer may be recited or sung. It should be noted that Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and III include an option to pray for the deceased by name. For this reason, their use is especially appropriate at funeral Masses (*GIRM*, 365). In the case of a funeral Mass that is celebrated for a non-Catholic Christian, the name of the deceased should not be included in the Eucharistic Prayer (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "On Public Mass for Deceased Non-Catholic Christians," June 11, 1976).

Communion Rite

74. Inasmuch as many who are present at a funeral Mass may not be Catholic, the celebrant, a deacon, or cantor should offer an invitation to those who will receive Holy Communion in these or similar words: "At this time, we invite those Catholics who are spiritually prepared to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion" (See: *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 83-84). A similar message should be included in the worship aid. Please also refer to this resource: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/guidelines-for-the-reception-of-communion>

Words of Remembrance

75. During the time of the celebration of the funeral rites, family members and friends often wish to speak in remembrance of the deceased. These addresses are most appropriately given at the wake, the closing of the casket (either at the funeral parlor, or at the parish prior to the start of the Funeral Mass), or the graveside. At the pastor's discretion, words of remembrance may also be given during the funeral Mass following the Prayer after Communion (*OCF*, 170). When words of remembrance are included within



the funeral Mass, they should not take the form of a eulogy or general remembrance of the deceased, but rather, focus on the deceased's journey of faith and Christian virtues. As well, this address should:

- a) rarely include more than one speaker;
- b) be brief, lasting not more than 5 minutes;
- c) be written out;
- d) be given, not at the ambo, but from another suitable place (e.g. cantor stand);
- e) express Christian values and a belief in the hope of eternal life; and,
- f) avoid any expression that would not be appropriate within the context of prayer.

76. Parishes are encouraged to develop clear guidelines for words of remembrance and share this information with families during the planning of the funeral liturgies.

Final Commendation and Farewell

77. At the final commendation, the members of the community entrust their loved one to the merciful embrace of God (*OCF*, 146). During this rite, the body may be sprinkled with holy water, if this has not occurred at the beginning of the funeral Mass. The body may also be incensed at this time as a sign of respect for the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (*OCF*, 147).

78. The Song of Farewell is the climax of the rite of final commendation. In addition to the selections given in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, this Song may also take the form of a responsory or hymn.

RITE OF COMMITTAL

79. The Rite of Committal is a gathering of the faithful at the time of the interment of the body of the deceased. This rite should normally be celebrated at the graveside or place of interment. However, it may also take place at a cemetery chapel, if necessary (*OCF*, 204).

80. The Rite of Committal offers several optional texts which take into account whether the grave or place of interment has already been blessed, as well as situations when the final disposition of the body will take place at a later time. These texts should be chosen carefully in light of the particular circumstances of the funeral. When a funeral Mass (or Liturgy outside Mass) has not taken place prior to the interment of the body, the “Rite of Committal with Final Commendation” should be celebrated (*OCF*, 205).

81. Proper vesture for clergy who preside at the Committal is a stole worn over an alb. Laypersons or religious presiding at the Committal should be dressed in an appropriate and dignified manner, such as a white alb.

82. The use of music is encouraged at the Committal service. In particular, a hymn or liturgical song which speaks of God’s love and mercy is recommended at the conclusion of the rite (*OCF*, 214).

83. Military honors services, words of remembrance, gestures of leave-taking, and other rites and customs may either precede or follow the Rite of Committal but should remain distinct from the liturgical celebration of the rite. Such rites or customs are typically coordinated with the celebrant of the rite by the funeral arranger/director.



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CREMATION

84. The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed; nevertheless, the church does not prohibit cremation unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine (*CIC, 1176 §3*).
85. When the choice has been made to cremate a body, it is urged that the cremation take place **after** the Funeral Liturgy. ‘The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the church affirms in those rites’ (*OCF 413, US Bishops Committee on the Liturgy*). Continuing effort should be made on the part of pastors and associate pastors to catechize the faithful on this point (*OCF, 414*).
86. In cases when cremation has already taken place prior to the Funeral Rites, in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, it is permitted that the cremated remains be present for the full course of the funeral rites, including the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy and the Rite of Committal. The Bishops Committee on the Liturgy has had additional rites and texts for the “Order of Christian Funerals” prepared to provide for the presence of the cremated remains of a body, including adaptations of the rites for the Final Commendation and the Committal (*OCF, Appendix NCCB Reflections*).
87. The *Order for Christian Funerals* is clear in their guidance for the treatment of cremated remains:
The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they came. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition (417).
88. Furthermore, the Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, reiterated the same guidance regarding proper treatment in the statement issued on March 20, 2023, entitled, “The Proper Disposition of Bodily Remains”:
The basic requirement for showing proper respect to the ashes of the deceased is that they be laid to rest in a sacred place. They may not be kept permanently at home or divided among various family members. They may not be scattered in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way. They may not be carried around encased in jewelry or other mementos. They must be put in a sacred place, usually a cemetery, though it could possibly be a church or some other area that has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority.
In April 2024, Bishop Daniel Flores, Chairman of the Committee on Doctrine, reiterated that the above guidance continues to apply even in light of the December 2023 *responsum* by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, regarding the preservation of cremated remains after cremation.

FUNERAL LITURGY IN THE PRESENCE OF CREMATED REMAINS

89. During the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains of the deceased person, care must be taken that all is carried out with due decorum (*OCF, 427*).
90. For the Funeral Liturgy, a small table or stand may be prepared for the remains. The table or stand may occupy the otherwise place of the casket. The cremated remains of the body are to be put in a



worthy vessel. The vessel containing the cremated remains may be carried to its place in the Entrance Procession or may be placed on the table or stand sometime before the liturgy (*OCF*, 427).

91. During the reception of cremated remains, the placing of the pall is omitted (*OCF*, 434).
92. When selecting from the different options for prayers, it is important to make use of “prayers which do not make reference to the honoring or burying of the body of the deceased” (*OCF* 428).
93. The Funeral Mass is celebrated as laid down in the *Roman Missal*, the *Order of Christian Funerals* (Appendix II), and these guidelines (see above, nos. 45 - 73) with the proper adaptations for cremated remains.

MUSIC AT THE FUNERAL LITURGY

94. It is the pastoral responsibility of parishes to provide liturgical music at all Funeral Masses. The same liturgical norms that apply to music at Mass also apply to a Funeral Mass.
95. An instrumentalist, preferably an organist or pianist; a cantor, and even a choir, where possible, should assist the full participation of the assembly in the hymns, responses, and acclamations of the Funeral Rites (*OCF*, 33). The Funeral Choir is often composed of those parishioners who are retired, self-employed, or whose work gives them a flexibility of schedule in order to serve in this ministry.
96. Certain musical texts of the Funeral Rite are primary and should be sung at the Funeral Mass. They include: the *Responsorial Psalm*, the *Gospel Acclamation*, the *Sanctus (Holy)*, the *Memorial Acclamation*, the *Great Amen*, the *Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)*, the *Communion Hymn*, and the *Song of Farewell*. These should be sung by the assembly rather than by a cantor, choir, or soloist alone.
97. In the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the cantor leads the assembly in song. With the exception of the Responsorial Psalm, which is sung from the Ambo, the cantor ordinarily leads the assembly from a cantor stand.
98. Some form of hymnal or worship program is preferable to assist in the participation of the assembly. This program should contain the name of the deceased, the scripture citations for the Liturgy of the Word, and words and music of the hymns and primary acclamations. Copyright licenses and permissions are necessary. A separate sheet may be prepared for the participation of the faithful in the Rite of Committal at the cemetery. Please contact the Office for Divine Worship for copyright information at (213) 637-7262.
99. The selection of music for the funeral liturgy is often a sensitive issue for bereaved families, parish musicians, and pastoral staff. It is important to keep in mind that while a funeral Mass can be personalized by choosing various options, it is not a celebration of a particular individual, but rather, about the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, the choice of music for Catholic funerals must be in accord with all the norms governing music in liturgy, especially those found in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, the *Order for Christian Funerals*, and *Sing to the Lord* (110-114).
100. *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* specifically states:
Sacred music has an integral role in the funeral rites, since it can console and uplift mourners while, at the same time, uniting the assembly in faith and love (216). Funeral music should express the Paschal Mystery and the Christian’s share in it (217). Since music can evoke strong feelings,



it should be chosen with care. It should console the participants and “help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ’s victory over death and in the Christian’s share in that victory (218). Secular music, even though it may reflect on the background, character, interests, or personal preferences of the deceased or mourners, is not appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy (246).

101. The principle of *Progressive Solemnity*, described in *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (110-114), applies to the rites found in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Application of this principle to the choice of music may be guided by a common musical repertoire of the assembly.

102. The request for popular secular music is not a substitute for the music of the Funeral Liturgy. There are three standards of judgment proposed in *Sing to the Lord*:

1. The text of the music, the form, the placement and style must be congruent with the nature of the Catholic liturgy (*STTL*, 126-129);
2. The music must be technically, aesthetically, and expressively appropriate irrespective of musical idiom or style (*STTL*, 134-136);
3. The music must assist in the prayer of the assembly (*STTL*, 130-133).

The application of such standards is suggested as an effective pastoral means to guide the appropriate selection of music for the funeral liturgy.

103. As music is a preeminent expression of the prayer of the participants in any liturgy, recorded music is not to be used within the liturgy to replace the congregation, the choir, the organist, the cantor, or other musicians (*STTL*, 93-94).

Office for Divine Worship, January 2025