

ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS
GUIDELINES AND PRACTICAL ADAPTATIONS
FOR THE DIOCESE OF LAS CRUCES

Introduction

The response of the Catholic Church to the care of the deceased is based on the belief in death as an entrance into eternity, the hope in a resurrection, the recognition of the value of prayer for the deceased, a reverence for the body which remains, and a sense of the mystery and sacredness which surrounds death.

Pastoral procedure should consider that "the Christian faithful are to be given ecclesiastical funeral rites according to the norm of the law" (Canon 1176).

The Order of Christian Funerals, approved by ecclesial authority in 1989 for use in the United States, provides general directives regarding the vigil for a Christian who has died. This document offers guidelines and adaptations for the Diocese of Las Cruces.

The family, pastor and funeral director must be consulted in making all arrangements for the vigil, funeral liturgy, and rite of committal.

(As a point of definition, what has in the past been called a "wake" is now referred to as "The Vigil Service" in the Order of Christian Funerals.)

THE VIGIL SERVICE

Immediate Outreach to the Bereaved Family

"The time immediately following death is often one of bewilderment and may involve shock or heartrending grief for the family and close friends. The ministry of the Church at this time is one of gently accompanying the mourners in their initial adjustment to the fact of death and to the sorrow this entails." (Order of Christian Funerals, 1989, #52, hereafter referred to as "OCF".)

At the funeral liturgy a priest or deacon is the ordinary presider. However, a lay person may be appointed to lead the community in prayer at the vigil. This is to be done in consultation with the local pastor or parish life coordinator.

In addition to the ministers of the liturgical rites, members of the parish can assist the family of the deceased in many ways. Many of our customs include providing food to the family and serving a meal on the day of the funeral. The parish may wish to develop bereavement committees to look after other aspects of need such as helping the family prepare the vigil and funeral liturgy to reflect the faith journey of the person who has died, suggesting a person who can watch the family property while the family is at the funeral home or church, being present to family members who need help in dealing with the realities of death, and providing an ongoing support group during the weeks and months after death.

The Place of the Vigil

"The vigil may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, in the funeral home, parlor or chapel of rest, or in some other suitable place. It may also be celebrated in the church, but at a time well

before [and separate from] the funeral liturgy.... Adaptations of the vigil will often be suggested by the place in which the celebration occurs." (OCF, #55).

The pastor, in consultation with the funeral home and family, decides where the vigil service is to be held. Factors which should be taken into consideration are: 1) the anticipated number of people coming to the vigil, 2) the ability of family and mourners to come to the chosen place, 3) other facilities that may be necessary; e.g., rest rooms, parking, etc., 4) availability of ministers, and 5) already scheduled use of the church for another function.

If the parish church is used for the vigil, care should be taken that enough time is allowed for mourners to view the body and express their words of comfort to the family. However, this time ought never to exceed one hour after the closing of the vigil service.

The Vigil Service

"The vigil for the deceased is the principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy." (OCF, #54). It may take the form of either a liturgy of the word or of some part of the Office of the Dead. The new Order of Christian Funerals provides two vigil services from which a particular prayer may be structured (OCF, #'s 69-81 and Part IV, p. 296). Its purpose is to proclaim the Word of God, which is "the high point and central focus of the vigil" (OCF, #59). No popular devotion -- rosary or otherwise -- is allowed to be the central feature of the vigil in substitution of Scripture.

In our diocese, the saying of the rosary has a long tradition during the vigil service, and many families request the rosary in place of the suggested vigil from the Order of Christian Funerals. It is strongly recommended that pastors find appropriate times throughout the year to introduce the Order of Christian Funerals to the parishioners so that families can begin to think about and prepare for family funerals. Frequently, family members will find comfort in selecting a scripture passage that describes their loved one's journey of faith.

The challenge is not to abolish what is familiar and beneficial (for example, the recitation of the rosary or a decade of it), but to insure that priority is given to the root of Christian faith -- the Word of God. Families may be encouraged to use the rosary with small groups such as sodalites, organizations or pious societies when they come for private viewing of the body.

A homily, based on the scripture readings, is given at the vigil service to help those present find strength and hope in God's saving word (OCF, #61).

The legitimate custom of having the casket opened during the vigil service, a custom not abrogated by the 1983 Revised Code of Canon Law nor by the directives of the Order of Christian Funerals, may be retained.

The Music Ministry

Music is integral to any vigil. Well chosen music can touch the mourners and others present at levels of human need that words alone often fail to reach (OCF, #68).

Whenever possible an instrumentalist and a cantor or leader of song should assist the assembly's full participation in the singing. In the choice of music for the vigil, preference should be given to the singing of the opening song and the responsorial psalm. The litany, the Lord's Prayer, and a closing

song may also be sung (OCF, #68).

Music for the vigil, as well as for the funeral liturgy, is to reflect the faith of the Christian community and its belief in eternal life. Especially when the vigil is held in the church, the songs are to be appropriate expressions of prayer, expressions of faith, hope, forgiveness and praise to God for the life of our loved one -- songs that sustain the hope and offer Christian compassion to those who mourn.

Reverence for the Deceased

Throughout the vigil, funeral liturgy, and committal, the name of the deceased is to be used in the prayers as indicated within the structure of the prayers.

Words of Remembrance

Within the structure of the vigil as well as at the close of the funeral liturgy, there is a time and place for family members and/or friends to give words of remembrance about the deceased person. This may take the form of a poem, song, story or event in the person's life that has helped the family or friends know the goodness of God's love through the deceased person. During the funeral liturgy, the word of remembrance should take no more than 2-5 minutes. At the vigil service, however, more time may be allowed for words of remembrance.

The Blessing of the Body

The vigil concludes with a blessing. The rubrics suggest signing the forehead of the deceased with a sign of the cross (OCF, #97). Because of the importance of touch in our culture, using this ritual gesture is encouraged.

Care of the Body at the Church

When the body is brought to the church it is accompanied by the family and greeted at the door of the church by the presiding minister. However, it is sometimes necessary for the funeral home to bring the body at an earlier hour. In this case, for purposes of security and respect, it is strongly recommended that someone be present in the church until the family and/or minister arrives. The person attending the body may be either a family member or friend, or someone appointed by the parish as part of the bereavement ministry of the parish.

If the family requests an open casket during the vigil, this request is to be honored. However, once the casket is closed at the end of the viewing period, it is not again opened for public viewing in the church.

Private viewing for family members who have come from a distance and arrive late for the public viewing may be arranged at the discretion of the family and funeral director.

Because of the distance of some parishes from the funeral home, families may request that the body be kept at the church overnight. When this happens, funeral homes and the Diocese of Las Cruces are to enter into a co-insurance agreement as a legal protection for the parishes where this becomes necessary. All efforts are to be made for the security of the body. The church is to be locked throughout the night.

Fees and Donations

When the church is used for the vigil service, the parish may suggest a donation for the use of its facilities.

Under no conditions may a person be denied a Christian burial because of the adverse financial situation of the family (Canons #1181 and #1265).

THE FUNERAL MASS

- A. For those who have lived with and in Christ, death is the beginning of eternal life with the Creator. Because the Eucharistic celebration is the central prayer of the faithful Catholic during life, it is most appropriate that the Mass be offered as part of the funeral rite.
- B. As a rule, the funeral rites for any of the faithful departed should be celebrated in his or her own parish. However, any member of the Christian faithful or those commissioned to arrange for his or her funeral may choose another church for the funeral with the consent of its pastor and after informing the departed person's pastor (Canon #1177, 1 &2).
- C. Catechumens are to be accorded the same funeral rites as baptized Catholics.
- D. All approved parish customs and regulations are to be observed. Local folk customs should be allowed during the Christian Funeral Mass.
- E. The funeral home is not a suitable place for the celebration of the Eucharist and the Funeral Mass is not to be celebrated there.
- F. "Funeral Mass" is the correct title for the Mass prior to the burial. "Mass for the Dead" is the title for the celebration of the Eucharist for the deceased. "Memorial Mass" is used when the body is not present or for a special Mass celebrated between the time of death and burial.
- G. The Funeral Mass is traditionally conducted on the morning of the burial. However, if the family so requests and it is pastorally suitable, the Funeral Mass may be conducted at another appropriate time.
- H. The Funeral Mass, Memorial Mass and the Mass for the Dead may be celebrated on all days except as noted here: Funeral Masses are not allowed in the Diocese of Las Cruces on:
 - All Sundays
 - Easter Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday
 - Holy Days of Obligation
- I. White vestments should be worn because white expresses hope in the resurrection.
- J. It is appropriate that the paschal candle be burning during the funeral liturgy and also during the vigil service when celebrated in the Church. The Easter candle may be placed beforehand near the position the coffin will occupy during the liturgy.

- K. Holy water is normally used as part of the rite of the reception at the church door. If the body was sprinkled during the Rite of Reception, the sprinkling is ordinarily omitted in the Rite of Final Commendation.
- L. At the beginning of the Funeral Mass, a white pall is to be placed on the casket in remembrance of the baptismal garment.
- M. The United States flag is not to be placed on the casket during the Funeral Mass or while the casket is present in the church, although it may be used at other times in the rites; e.g., at the cemetery.
- N. Incense is usually used during the preparation of the gifts. The body is incensed after gifts and altar. Incense may again be used in the Rite of Final Commendation.
- O. The homily is not to be a eulogy. It should relate Christian death to the paschal mystery.

Final Commendation and Farewell

- A. The Final Commendation and Farewell is celebrated by the Christian community as part of the Funeral Liturgy. The Rite helps the Christian community express the honor we hold for our members before the body is given its final resting place in the cemetery.
- B. This normally takes place in the Funeral Liturgy immediately following the prayer after communion. Depending on the local practice, it may be postponed and celebrated at the place of burial.
- C. A family member or friend may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the Final Commendation begins.

Rite of Committal (Burial or Graveside Service)

This rite is the conclusion of the funeral rites and is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member.

- A. Whenever possible the Rite of Committal is to be celebrated at the site of committal rather than at a cemetery chapel.
- B. The Rite of Committal with Final Commendations is to be used when the final commendation does not take place during the Funeral Liturgy or when no Funeral Liturgy precedes the committal rite.
- C. Singing at the Rite of Committal is strongly encouraged.
- D. Local customs are to be respected.
- E. In the absence of an ordained minister, a lay minister may lead those present in the Rite of Committal.

Funeral Liturgy Without Mass

- A. In the case of a baptized Catholic for who Mass is not celebrated, it may be advisable to offer another liturgical service.
- B. Having considered the deceased person's relationship with the Church and the needs and wishes of the family, the priest or deacon or other parish minister may offer an appropriate service of scriptural readings and prayers (Order of Christian Funerals: Liturgy Without Mass).

Ecumenical Affairs

- A. Out of friendship for the deceased or for their families, a priest or deacon may attend the funeral of non-Catholics in their places of worship and may be vested for the ceremony. To the degree allowed by Ecumenical Guidelines for Common Worship, they may participate actively.
- B. Clergy of other faiths and communions may participate in the funerals of Catholics.
- C. In the prudent judgment of the bishop, ecclesiastical funeral rites may be granted to the baptized members of some non-Catholic Church or ecclesial community unless it is evidently contrary to their will and provided their own minister is unavailable (Canon #1183).

CREMATIONTheological Reflection

Throughout the centuries the Church has followed the practice of interment or entombment after the manner of Christ's burial. Because of respect for the human body as part of the Body of Christ, and because of faith in the Resurrection, it is the will of the Church that this hallowed and traditional practice be maintained.

However, the Church does not forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Catholic teaching (Canon #1176). An example is a person who denies the Resurrection.

Rules and Procedures for Cremation

- A. The desire for cremation is generally the specific choice of an individual before death for a number of reasons that might be determined good and/or pastoral, and therefore can be accommodated.
- B. Cremation, however, may be requested by the family of the deceased for what also might be determined good and/or pastoral reasons that can be accommodated.
- C. When doubt arises as to the proper motivations for cremation, the priest, deacon, or administrator is to refer the matter to The Pastoral Center.

- D. When cremation is seen as an acceptable alternative to the normal Catholic burial, the family should be ENCOURAGED to bring the body of the deceased to the church for the Mass of Christian Burial. On March 21, 1997, the Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments approved a request from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for an indult which would allow the presence of the cremated remains of a body at the funeral liturgy, including where appropriate the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The indult authorizes local ordinaries to permit, on a case-by-case basis, the presence of the cremated remains at the funeral liturgy. The Congregation gives to each bishop the right to decide whether to allow this process in his diocese. The Bishop of Las Cruces has approved this practice for the diocese. He has delegated each pastor and parish life coordinator of the diocese to make this determination, on a case-by-case basis, for his or her parish community.
- E. The cremains should either be interred or entombed and the place duly marked. They are not to be scattered or disposed of in any other manner unless the site is appropriately designated; e.g., a meditation garden specifically set aside for the scattering of cremains. The Rite of Committal is to be celebrated at the place and time of interment.

Documentation

Funerals are to be recorded in the parochial death registry.