

# Diocesan Norms for ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

Diocese of Orlando  
Office of Liturgy

## I. DEATH IN THE CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

The Christian response to death must stand as a symbol of the central and pivotal Christian beliefs of a person's life, here and hereafter. Both private and liturgical prayers unite us to the great Paschal Mystery and its hope of eternal union with God.

The events which surround death naturally evoke a community response. The community of relatives, friends and parishioners come together to provide prayerful support. The entire Christian community, through the Church's liturgy, offers prayer for God's mercy for the deceased and God's strength for the bereaved.

As a result of these vital realities of Catholic life, Christian burial is a rite that the Church provides for its faithful departed and is a source of strength, hope and encouragement for those who are bereaved. This rite consists of three parts:

1. The Vigil
2. The Funeral Liturgy
3. The Rite of Committal

Each part has a distinct role, and each must reflect the circumstances of both the deceased and those who mourn. The following guidelines are offered to assist the faithful and those who serve the Church through bereavement and funeral ministry.

## II. THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS (OCF)

### A. The Vigil

Of all the parts of the funeral rites, the vigil (wake) is sometimes the most difficult because it is usually the first time the family and friends view the remains of the deceased and confront the reality of death. While some would prefer to avoid the vigil because of pain and grief, this ritual moment can be a catalyst for the grieving process fostering psychological and spiritual health. Gathering together for prayer and support before the funeral liturgy is important. The *Order of Christian Funerals* offers two formats for vigil services for adults and one format for children (OCF 69, 82, 248).

The place of the vigil service is either the funeral home, the home of the deceased or the parish church. Regardless of the place, the vigil is a liturgical service requiring a presider, a reader and a minister of music. A priest or deacon normally presides and is vested in alb and stole. A friend or relative of the deceased may speak in remembrance following the concluding prayer and before the blessing.

The practice of conducting wakes in church is encouraged. If the vigil is held in church, the body (or cremated remains) of the deceased is received prior to the service. In the case of a body, the coffin may be opened for viewing following the reception of the body. At the conclusion of the wake, the coffin is closed and locked and is covered with the pall. The coffin may remain in place overnight in church until the celebration of the Funeral Mass.

Traditional devotions and prayer such as the recitation of the rosary may be held in addition to the vigil service but never in place of it.

## **B. The Funeral Liturgy**

### **1. Funeral Mass (Mass of Christian Burial)**

The Church encourages the celebration of the Funeral Mass for its deceased members. Some will hesitate to have a Funeral Mass because of doubts about their own faith or worthiness or that of the deceased. In such cases, the judgment of the pastoral minister is essential. It should be explained that the Funeral Mass is a prayer for God's mercy for the deceased and a solace for the living and does not presume a life of exemplary faith or virtue.

It should be noted that the "Funeral Mass" or "Mass of Christian Burial" is the correct title for the mass celebrated prior to burial. The Funeral Mass may be celebrated on any day except those excluded (see below). The presider should make full use of the texts for particular circumstances which are present in the *Order of Christian Funerals* and in the *Sacramentary* and *Lectionary*. In Funeral Masses in which cremated remains are present, prayers which do not make reference to the honoring or burying of the body should be chosen instead of those which contain those images (OCF 424).

**Excluded Days.** The Funeral Mass has first place among the masses for the dead and may be celebrated on any day except solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday and during the Paschal Triduum, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season. (GIRM 381) In the United States, the Holy Days of Obligation are:

Mary, the Mother of God	January 1
Ascension Thursday	
Assumption of Mary	August 15
All Saints	November 1
Immaculate Conception	December 8
Christmas	December 25

While the universal Church does not forbid the celebration of funerals on the Sundays of Ordinary Time, it seems in the best interest of local pastoral practice to refrain from celebrating funerals on all Sundays in the Diocese of Orlando.

On days when a Funeral Mass may not be celebrated, the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass may be celebrated. A Memorial Mass may then be offered on another day.

**Time and Place.** The local parish determines appropriate times for Funeral Masses. The funeral may be scheduled in the morning, afternoon or evening. The funeral rites are to be scheduled at times that permit as many of the community as possible to be present (OCF 11).

Although the funeral liturgy will normally be celebrated in the parish church to which the deceased belonged, it is possible to choose any Catholic church for a funeral liturgy, provided the pastor of that church agrees and the pastor of the deceased has been informed (Canon 1177). The Funeral Mass may also be celebrated in approved chapels of long-term care institutions and in other approved chapels (Canon 1179). The Funeral Mass may not be celebrated in funeral homes or in cemetery chapels.

**Music, Color of Vesture and Symbols.** The use of white vesture and the liturgical pall are customary in this diocese. Other liturgical colors may be used under certain circumstances (purple or black) (GIRM 346) . Good liturgical practice would suggest reflecting the liturgical season in the choice of music and scripture. The seasons of Advent and Lent may also reflect a change in color (OCF 39).

A pall, as a reminder of the baptismal garment, may be placed over the coffin when it is received into church. In the case of cremated remains, the use of the pall is omitted (OCF 38, 428).

During the funeral liturgy and also during the vigil service, when celebrated in church, the Easter (Paschal) candle may be placed beforehand near the position the coffin (or vessel of cremated remains) will occupy at the conclusion of the procession (OCF 35, 428).

Flowers, as symbols of resurrection and hope, are to be used in moderation (OCF 38). However, they should never be placed on or around the casket during the Funeral Mass. Likewise, the flag should never cover the casket in church (see Appendix I: Liturgical and Protocol Notes for Military Funerals) (OCF 38, 132).

A symbol of Christian life may be carried in the procession (the OCF mentions the Book of Gospels, the Bible or a cross). This item is placed on the casket in silence or with an accompanying text as given in the OCF, #400. Only Christian symbols may be used (OCF 21,38).

**Family Participation.** Members of the deceased's family are to be encouraged to assist in the preparation of the liturgy (the selection of music and scripture), the presentation of the gifts and to fulfill the role of readers (OCF 16-20).

**Homily.** A brief homily is always given based upon the readings. (GIRM 382) While a homily must never become a eulogy, it is appropriate for the homilist to "help the members of the community to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and these mysteries are active in their own lives as well" (OCF 27). With the permission of the parish priest, a family member or friend may speak in remembrance of the deceased when the prayer after communion is ended (OCF 170).

**Eucharistic Prayer.** The use of either Eucharistic Prayer III or II is suggested for use at Funeral Masses since they contain specific inserts for use at Funeral Masses (*GIRM 79, 226-231*).

**Communion and Inter-Communion.** Communion should be offered under both species. The faithful, especially the family of the deceased, should be urged to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice by receiving Communion.(GIRM 383) Norms set forth by the NCCB must be adhered to in reference to inter-communion.

**Final Commendation and Farewell.** The Final Commendation and Farewell follows the Prayer after Communion. Following the Invitation to Prayer and the moment of silence, the Song of Farewell is sung, and the body is incensed and revered. The rite ends with the Prayer of Commendation. The instructive dismissal ("In peace let us take our brother/sister to his/her place of rest") is used if the burial will take place immediately. In the case of a body being shipped to another location for burial or cremation, the liturgy ends using the alternate form of dismissal (In the sure hope of the resurrection, let us take leave of our brother/sister: let us go in peace") (OCF 170-176, 437 GIRM 384).

## 2. The Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass

This rite may be used for various reasons:

- a. When the Funeral Mass is not permitted (see excluded days)
- b. When in some places or circumstances it is not possible to celebrate the Funeral Mass before the committal
- c. When for pastoral reasons the Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass is a more suitable form of celebration (OCF 178)

The Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church, but it may also be celebrated in a funeral home or cemetery chapel (OCF 179). The prudent judgment of the pastoral minister is essential in determining the appropriateness of the ritual.

## 3. Funeral Mass without a Body or Cremated Remains Present

In some unusual circumstances (e.g., donation of a body to medical science, a disaster where a body has been lost or destroyed) permission may be requested of the bishop for the celebration of a Funeral Mass without human remains present. Permission must be asked in each individual circumstance through the Office of Liturgy.

It is not permitted in the Diocese of Orlando to schedule a Memorial Mass, that is, a Funeral Mass (Mass of Christian Burial) without a body or the cremated remains of a body present (GIRM 384).

## C. The Rite of Committal

The Rite of Committal is the final act of the caring for the body (or cremated remains) of the deceased member of the church (OCF 204). The movement to the cemetery is a ritual procession to the final resting place of the deceased. A spirit of prayer is encouraged to be maintained throughout the automobile cortege. When a body is to be cremated following the celebration of a Funeral Mass, the Rite of Committal is to be celebrated as soon as possible following the funeral (OCF 425, 431).

When possible, those who were part of the Catholic community are buried together in a Catholic cemetery or in a part of a cemetery reserved for Catholics. Not only is the cemetery a sacred place, it is also a link in the community of the faithful living and dead. It is a recognition of the shared belief of the dead and the living who commit their deceased to holy ground and to the love and mercy of the Lord (Canons 1240-1243).

The use of music (with or without instruments) and of liturgical vesture are strongly encouraged by the ritual (OCF 214). The use of a stole over a suit is not appropriate.

In the Diocese of Orlando, the great majority of burials will be grave side. The grave is blessed in each individual instance unless interment will occur in a Catholic cemetery, in which case the entire cemetery has already been blessed.

### **III. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

#### **A. Cremation**

The Church recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the faithful be observed. The Church does not forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons that are contrary to Christian teachings (Canon 1176, #3). The faithful who choose cremation are presumed to have the proper motives and good intentions. However, a Catholic may not receive the funeral rites of the Church if the request for cremation is motivated by a denial of Christian dogmas or through hatred of the Catholic religion or Church. The parish priest is to refer the matter to the chancellor of the diocese before denying the Church's burial rites.

The Church's Funeral Rites may be celebrated for persons who choose to have their bodies cremated for reasons consistent with the Catholic faith. In some cases cremation will take place following the celebration of the Funeral Mass. In other cases it may be necessary for cremation to take place prior to the Funeral Mass. Funeral Masses are permitted to be celebrated with the presence of cremated remains.

The cremated remains of the body of the deceased must always be treated with respect This includes the use of a worthy vessel, the manner in which they are transported and carried, and the manner in which they are finally placed (OCF 427). Unless serious reason prevents it, the cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium (OCF 427).

The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or the keeping of cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (OCF 427).

#### **B. Donation of Bodies to Medical Science**

As a result of the achievements of science and medicine, particularly in regard to organ transplants, there are requests to donate organs or bodies to medical science. Such requests are legitimate and are not contrary to Christian principles. However, there should be reasonable assurance that the remains will be disposed of in a proper, reverent and dignified manner upon the completion of the scientific research. In such cases, since the body is not embalmed, a wake or a Funeral Mass is usually impossible. The family should be urged to schedule the celebration of a Funeral Mass (without the presence of a body) as soon after death as practical. Permission from the bishop is required for this celebration. Permission may be requested through the Office of Liturgy.

**C. Burial of Children**

The *Order of Christian Funerals* provides a complete Vigil Service, Funeral Mass with Final Commendation and a Rite of Committal for the funeral of a child (OCF 234-342). Various texts for a baptized child or a child who died before baptism make the rites fully adaptable to a given situation. A child who died before baptism may be given Christian funeral rites if the parents intended to have the child baptized (Canon 1183 #2). The family of the deceased child and the pastoral ministers should determine the appropriate funeral rites for the child.

**D. Burial of Fetuses, Stillborns and Amputated Limbs**

The Church urges that stillborns and fetuses of Catholic parents be interred in a Catholic cemetery. The decision and procedure are left to the parents and pastoral ministers. Appropriate prayers may be found in Part V of the Ritual (Additional Texts).

It is recommended that amputated limbs be buried in a blessed place. However, hospital personnel may dispose of portions of bodies in a manner they deem most suitable and hygienic. The preference of the person and family are not to be disregarded.

**E. Burial of Catechumens**

Catechumens are entitled to the full rites of Christian burial. Even though they are unbaptized, they are members of the household of the Church (Canon 1183 #1). Care must be taken not to use the symbols of baptism but rather to reflect upon the love and mercy of the Lord.

**F. Burial of Non-Catholic Christians**

Catholic burial, including the Funeral Mass, is permitted for a baptized non-Catholic who might reasonably be presumed to desire or prefer Catholic burial services. Such a decision would be appropriate where the non-Catholic party worshiped regularly at the Catholic Church or identified with the Catholic Church more than any other. It would not be appropriate if the deceased were an active member of a non-Catholic Christian Church, except in the case where the minister of the deceased were unavailable (Canon 1183 #3).

## **G. Denial of Burial**

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:

1. Notorious apostates, heretics and schismatics
2. Persons who have chosen cremation of their own bodies for reasons opposed to the Christian faith
3. Other manifest sinners for whom ecclesiastical funeral rites cannot be granted without public scandal to the faithful

Should the priest seriously believe that Christian burial should be denied, he must consult the chancellor of the diocese.

Those who commit suicide, 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.

## **H. Offerings for Funeral Rites**

There may be no set charge or fee for the services of the church. Gifts or stipends should remain freewill offerings. Any appearance of a set fee or charge should be carefully avoided both by priests and funeral directors.

No one should be deprived of funeral rites because of an inability to give an offering (Canon 1181).

## **I. Charity Burials**

Inability to meet the cost of burial is never to be a deterrent to burial. In the face of financial hardship and the absence of sources of public and other funds, the parish priest should initiate action for charity burial. The collection taken on All Souls Day might be used to establish a parish fund to be used for funeral and bereavement ministries.



#### **IV. BEREAVEMENT AND FUNERAL MINISTRIES**

As envisioned in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, the ministry of consolation is exercised through a variety of complementary ministries (OCF 8-20):

##### **A. The Community**

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.

The celebration of funerals at the daily parish mass is encouraged. 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 to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery. Through the Holy Spirit the community is joined together in faith as one Body in Christ to reaffirm in sign and symbol, word and gesture that the believer, through baptism, shares in Christ's death and resurrection and can look to the day when all the elect will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace (OCF 129).

##### **B. Ordained Ministers**

The parish priest bears primary responsibility for the liturgical celebrations surrounding Christian death and burial. Only a priest can celebrate the Funeral Mass. Ordinarily a priest or deacon presides at the Vigil and Rite of Committal (OCF 14, 151).

The presence of the parish priest affords the opportunity for both private prayer and for the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation.

##### **C. The Bereavement Minister**

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.

##### **D. Hospitality Minister**

In tightly knit ethnic communities of the past, neighbors could readily count on, even presume, assistance and kindness in their need. In the more "anonymous" society of today, that is not always the case. Every parish should see to it that the communion we share at the Lord's table manifests itself in practical help offered in moments of crisis. Compassion is expressed in providing meals, assisting with the routine tasks of daily living, offering to

baby sit, and simply being willing to listen (OCF 10). The experience of a death is often a time of great openness to conversion and repentance. Besides helping the bereaved family, practical expressions of concern could be an important factor in welcoming back those who may have drifted from the practice of the faith.

At the various liturgical celebrations, the hospitality minister would assist the community by providing worship aids and helping them through the various phases of the services.

#### **E. Liturgical Ministries**

The full celebration of the *Order of Christian Funerals* makes multiple demands upon the liturgical resources of the community. Not only the ordained but 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 communities' sung prayer. Altar servers and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist enhance the dignity of the celebration and bring the fullness of the signs of bread and cup to nourish those who are in need (OCF 21-42, 150-153).

#### **F. Funeral Directors**

Funeral directors, who are practicing members of the Christian community, understand their work not only as a professional service but as a real pastoral ministry. They may appropriately lead the brief prayer that accompanies the family's first gathering in the presence of the body.

Many times the funeral director is the first person contacted by a family after a death. Funeral directors and parish ministers need a mutual understanding concerning how the arrangements of time, place, music, style of celebration and other related issues are handled. A cordial relationship and good communications between the parish ministers and the funeral directors will ensure the best pastoral care for a bereaved family.

#### **Reference Abbreviations**

<i>Canon</i>	<i>Code of Canon Law</i>
<i>GIRM</i>	<i>General Instruction to the Roman Missal</i>
<i>OCF</i>	<i>Order of Christian Funerals</i>

Office of Liturgy  
June 1998 Reviewed August 2006

## APPENDIX I

### LITURGICAL AND PROTOCOL NOTES FOR MILITARY FUNERALS

#### A. Vigil/Wake - Funeral Home

1. No military ceremony is prescribed for the period of visitation, although some American Legion or VFW posts may have a ceremony of their own.
2. The U.S. flag is usually folded triangularly and placed in the casket. If the casket is closed, the flag may be placed on top either folded or draped.
3. The Wake may be the most appropriate setting to display photos, ribbons, medals, the unit flag or other memorabilia of the deceased.

#### B. Funeral Mass - Church

1. Upon arrival at the church the casket, draped with the U.S. flag, may be escorted by military pallbearers or an honor guard.
2. At the entrance to the church, before beginning the liturgy, the U.S. flag should be removed by either the honor guard or the funeral director. The flag, simply folded, may be given to the honor guard, funeral director or family member to safeguard during the liturgy.
3. If there are military pallbearers, according to military custom, they will be in full uniform, including headgear, until seated.
4. Following the Final Commendation, when the casket is being readied to be carried from the church, the funeral pall is removed by the family or funeral director, and the U.S. flag is once again draped over the casket by the funeral director or the honor guard.

#### C. Memorial Mass

1. If the body of the deceased is not present, a Memorial Mass should be celebrated.
2. Personal memorabilia are never placed on the altar nor carried with the gifts of bread and wine when mass is celebrated.
3. The mass is concluded with the usual blessing. The Final Commendation and Committal are omitted.
4. The presider may invite the assembly to move outside the church for the rendering of

military honors.

**D. Committal Service - Cemetery**

1. Once at the cemetery, the U.S. flag should remain with the casket until the flag has been folded ceremonially.
2. The Rite of Committal does not provide for the sprinkling of holy water. If there is a prevailing custom to use holy water at the grave site, the flag remains in place.
3. When the presider is finished with the Committal Service, he should give some indication to the Ceremonial Team Officer or Escort Officer to begin the military ceremonies.
4. The military ceremonies may consist of:
  - a. Rifle salute
  - b. Playing of taps
  - c. Ceremonial folding of the flag
  - d. Presentation of the flag to next of kin
5. If the family has requested to throw soil or place flowers over the grave, this should take place only after the military honors have been completed.

**NOTE:** Material in this Appendix was prepared by the Archdiocese of Chicago. It has been adapted and is used with permission.

## APPENDIX II

### MUSICAL OPPORTUNITIES

(indicated by **bold type**)

#### FUNERAL MASS

##### Introductory Rites

Greeting  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
Placing of the Pall  
Entrance Procession: **Gathering Song**  
(Placing of Christian Symbols)  
Opening Prayer

##### Liturgy of the Word

First Reading  
**Responsorial Psalm**  
(Second Reading)  
**Gospel Acclamation**  
Gospel  
Homily  
**Intercessions**

##### Liturgy of the Eucharist

**Music for the Presentation of the Gifts**  
**Eucharistic Acclamations**  
(Holy, Memorial, Amen)  
**The Lord's Prayer**  
**The Lamb of God**  
**Songs for the Communion Procession**

##### Final Commendation

Invitation to Prayer  
Silence  
**Song of Farewell**  
Prayer of Commendation

#### Procession to Place of Committal

#### VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED

##### Introductory Rites

Greeting  
**Gathering Song**  
Invitation to Prayer  
Opening Prayer

##### Liturgy of the Word

First Reading  
**Responsorial Psalm**  
Gospel  
Homily

##### Prayer of Intercession

**Litany**  
**The Lord's Prayer**  
Concluding Prayer

##### Concluding Rite

Blessing  
**Concluding Song**

#### RITE OF COMMITTAL

##### Invitation

Scripture Verse  
Prayer over the place of Committal

##### Committal

**Intercessions**  
**The Lord's Prayer**  
Concluding Prayer

##### Prayer over the People

**Concluding Song**

Revised 9/1/2010