



**ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE of ORANGE**

PASTORAL CENTER: BISHOP'S OFFICE

13280 CHAPMAN AVENUE, GARDEN GROVE, CA 92840

July 1, 2015

Dear brothers in the Lord,

It is my blessed opportunity to approve and promulgate the Liturgical Norms for the Celebration of Catholic Funeral Rites within the Diocese of Orange. The “three stations of the Sacred Liturgy” surrounding the death of a Catholic Christian offers an opportunity for the Church to provide hope and solace during what can be a difficult and tumultuous time for the bereaved family and friends. Our experience also reminds us that this sacred time of the journey into Eternal Life is a time when those who are far from their Faith can find their way “home”. This is a great blessing but a great responsibility that the Lord entrusts to each one of us.

These liturgical norms reflect the application and integration of the Order of Christian Funerals and the provisions of Canon Law to the particular circumstances of this local Church. I am grateful to the Pastoral Life Committee of the Priests Council, the Diocesan Liturgical Commission and the Office for Worship who dedicated much time and effort to this project in this past year. So many of us –as priests and pastoral workers— are very intimately involved in the journey of this life to eternal life: we live closely with those entrusted to our pastoral care in our common faith as enunciated in the Eucharistic Prayer Preface One for the Mass for the Dead that states “Life is changed but not ended.”

These liturgical norms became effective January 1, 2015, the Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God. It is my hope that these Norms and Policy will assist all involved in the pastoral care, planning and celebration of the Funeral liturgies.

Fraternally and gratefully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann, J.C.D., D.D.  
Bishop of Orange

# LITURGICAL NORMS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

Liturgical Commission  
Diocese of Orange

## INTRODUCTION

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. These liturgical norms are offered to assist Pastors, Parochial Vicars, Deacons, Ministers of Bereavement, and Funeral Directors in preparing the funeral rites with individuals and families according to the ritual traditions and teaching of the Catholic Church and the Diocese of Orange.

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 *Order of Christian Funerals* describes the church's ministry to the deceased and their family in these words:

“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” (OCF, General Introduction, no. 4)

## CATHOLIC FUNERALS

Every Catholic, unless specifically excluded by the norms of law, is entitled to the Church's ministry at the time of death. (*Code of Canon Law*, CIC, can. 1176 §1)

1. The parish should be the first call to check availability for scheduling. Arrangements are made for the Vigil, the Funeral Mass and the Rite of Committal through the parish in coordination with the parish pastoral ministers, the family of the deceased, and the funeral director chosen by the family. .
2. The central element of Catholic funerals in the Diocese of Orange is ordinarily, the Funeral Mass. The Funeral Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is a prayer for God's mercy for the deceased and a solace for the living, including the entire faith community.
3. Catechumens, as members of the household of believers, may be given Catholic Funeral Rites.
4. Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the Funeral Liturgy. National flags or insignia of associations are removed from the coffin at the entrance of the Church. They may be replaced after the coffin has been taken from the church (OCF, no. 38 and no. 132).
5. 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.

6. 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.
7. The Church encourages the burial of Catholics in Catholic cemeteries (CIC, can. 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.
8. A child who dies before baptism or a stillborn or miscarried child may be given Catholic Funeral Rites if the parents intended to have the child baptized. 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.
9. The *Order of Christian Funerals* provides a complete Funeral Liturgy for children who have died (OCF, nos. 234-342). The various texts for a baptized child or a child who died before baptism make these rites fully adaptable to various situations, and offer consolation for those suffering the extraordinary grief which comes with the death of a child.
10. There is no objection for Catholics making prior arrangements to donate their bodies or parts of them, after certain death, to advance medical science. Upon eventual disposition of the body or its parts, there should be reasonable assurance that the remains will be disposed of in a proper, reverential manner. The family of such a donor should be encouraged to celebrate a Mass as soon as possible after death. Whatever remains of the body after an organ transplant or medical research should be given appropriate burial. The Rite of Committal with Final Commendation (OCF, nos. 224-233) offers a model for concluding prayers for the donor and the donor's family.
11. A non-Catholic may be buried in a Catholic cemetery.
12. In the pastoral care of persons who are in same sex unions, two values are at work: respect for the wishes of the deceased, and protection of a Catholic's right to a funeral. When in doubt, the Local Ordinary must be consulted and his judgment followed.
13. The Catholic Funeral Rites may be celebrated when the deceased committed suicide.

### INITIAL PARISH INVOLVEMENT

Since the ministry of consolation belongs to the entire Christian community, the entire community is to be involved in caring for the dying, praying for the dead and comforting those who mourn.

1. Regular catechesis is encouraged to help parishioners understand their role in ministering to those who have suffered the loss of a loved one.
2. Parish policies, procedures and ministerial resources are to be developed in light of these guidelines and communicated clearly to parishioners so they can take full advantage of the services available to them at the time of death.
3. Funeral directors provide an invaluable service to families and to the Church. Often the funeral director provides the first response to a family who has experienced the death of a loved one. It is important for parish ministers and local funeral directors to cultivate an attitude of mutual respect and effective collaboration. Annual meetings with funeral directors within a parish or cluster of parishes are encouraged.

4. Funeral Directors are asked to respect the correct names of the various liturgical rites in written obituary notices. Proper terms such as, "Vigil for the Deceased", "Funeral Mass", "Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass" and "Rite of Committal" are encouraged. Other terms are NOT to be used, e.g. Mass of the Resurrection, Rosary, Wake, etc.

### SCHEDULING

1. Each parish should develop a clear policy on funeral schedules that is shared with parishioners and local funeral directors. 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.
2. 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

The Vigil is often the first time 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.

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.

1. 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 first Scripture reading and prior to the proclamation of the Gospel.
2. 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.
3. 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.

The Diocesan Liturgical Commission has developed a guide for preparing the Words of remembrance for those who will offer a short reflection at either the "Vigil for the Deceased," "Funeral Mass," "Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass," or "Rite of Committal". The guidelines are meant to aid the person offering the reflection in a clear, organized and in a well-timed manner.

4. When no priest or deacon is available, it is permissible for a 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.
5. 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, no. 348). The Rosary may be recited but should not replace the Vigil for the Deceased. Particular groups may be invited to celebrate a prayer service for the deceased in addition to the Vigil for the Deceased.

6. When the Vigil for the Deceased is celebrated in a church, a priest or deacon is to be vested in an alb and stole. A cope may also be worn. A priest may also choose to wear a cassock, surplice and white, purple or black stole. A lay minister who presides wears appropriate clothing in accord with the dignity of the role.
7. When a Vigil takes place in the church, the Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church (OCF, no. 82) is celebrated, even when the Vigil is led by a lay person.
8. 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.

### HOMILIES

"In every celebration for the dead, the Church attaches great importance to the reading of the word of God. The readings proclaim to the assembly the paschal mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. Above all, the readings tell of God's design for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own. A careful selection and use of readings from Scripture for the funeral rites will provide the family and community with an opportunity to hear God speak to them in their needs, sorrows, fears, and hopes." (OCF, no. 22)

1. Only a priest or deacon may preach the homily at the Funeral Liturgy.
2. The homily is to "illumine the mystery of Christian death in the light of the risen Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, no. 1688) as proclaimed in the readings.
3. Excellence in preaching is of critical importance to the evangelizing task of the Church, especially at a moment when the faithful who live apart from the regular life of the Church may yearn for a message of faith and Christian hope.

### THE FUNERAL MASS

In the dioceses of the United States, the principal rituals in the *Order of Christian Funerals* are the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Mass, and the Rite of Committal. The Funeral Mass is the central liturgy of the Christian funeral in the Diocese of Orange.

1. Funeral masses can occur any day except on Solemnities of Obligation, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, GIRM, no. 380). Funeral rites on these days make use of a Liturgy of the Word, closing with the Rite of Farewell (OCF, part I no. 4).
2. Funeral masses always take place in Church. In the Diocese of Orange, Mass may not be celebrated in Funeral homes, cemeteries, or other such places.
3. Artificial flowers in church are not permitted, but a picture of the deceased is at the discretion of the pastor. For military funerals: since the pall is placed on the casket for the Funeral Mass, a suitable place of honor might be available to display the flag.
4. For the sake of modesty there should not be more than two live flower displays in the sanctuary. Remaining flowers should be kept in the narthex.
5. The Introductory Rites of the Funeral Mass presume a greeting of the mourners who accompany the body to the doors of the church. They are greeted by the priest and liturgical ministers, and other persons

who have gathered at the church to await the procession from the funeral home or family home. The ritual plan for a parish must take into account the structure of the liturgy, the size of the assembly and the architecture of the church.

6. The Eucharist is the heart of the Paschal reality of Christian death (CCC, no. 1689). In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church most perfectly expresses her communion with those who have died. The celebration of the Eucharist at the funeral is an opportunity for the community of the faithful, and for the family, to “learn to live in communion with the one who has ‘fallen asleep in the Lord,’ by communicating in the Body of Christ of which he is a living member and, then, by praying for him and with him” (CCC, no. 1689).
7. It is not ordinarily permitted to seat the family members who accompany the body before the body is presented for blessing, unless physical conditions require it. Parishes are called upon to develop, in collaboration with funeral directors, policies which result in seating on both sides of the church and towards the front of the assembly area.
8. Words of Remembrance, often incorrectly referred to as the eulogy, would also be appropriate after communion and before the Final Commendation. The Remembrance statement should have already been prepared in writing and should be no more than five minutes in length. Some parishes might choose, for pastoral and scheduling reasons, to have the Words of Remembrance at the beginning of the Funeral Liturgy or after the Initial Greeting. In either case, the Words of Remembrance should not include more than two people so that the focus of the service remains on the church's liturgy.

### **FUNERAL SERVICES** **OUTSIDE OF MASS**

It is the custom in the United States for a priest or deacon to preside at the Funeral Liturgy when it is celebrated outside of Mass.

1. The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass (OCF, nos.177-203) is celebrated when a Mass is not possible or not deemed appropriate. It is ordinarily celebrated in the parish church, but it may also be celebrated in the funeral home, the home of the deceased or cemetery chapel (OCF, no. 179). The pastoral advice of the parish priest is essential in determining what is appropriate.
2. When it is determined, in consultation with the parish priest, that this form of the Funeral Liturgy is a more suitable form of celebration for that person, the family may choose to celebrate a funeral outside of Mass, and schedule a memorial Mass at a later date.
3. When the Funeral Liturgy is celebrated outside Mass, the community nonetheless gathers to hear the message of Easter hope proclaimed in the liturgy of the word and to commend the deceased to God.
4. The readings are chosen from those approved for Masses for the Dead.
5. Although the *Order of Christian Funerals* includes the possibility of Holy Communion in this form of the liturgy, this practice is discouraged in the Diocese of Orange.
6. Music is an essential element of this form of celebration, which includes the Entrance or Gathering Song, the Responsorial Psalm, the Gospel Acclamation, and especially the Song of Farewell at the Final Commendation.

## MUSIC SELECTIONS

It is the pastoral responsibility of parishes to provide liturgical music for all Funeral Masses. The same liturgical norms applied to music at any Mass, apply to the Funeral Mass.

"Music is integral to the funeral rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love. The texts of the songs chosen for a particular celebration should express the paschal mystery of the Lord's suffering, death, and triumph over death and should be related to the readings from Scripture." (OCF, no. 30)

1. Since sung music within the funeral rites is 'sung prayer', secular music (live or recorded) is not appropriate during funeral liturgies.
2. The full participation of the assembly should be assisted by an instrumentalist, a cantor, and even a choir where possible in singing the songs, responses and acclamations of the funeral rites (OCF, no. 33).
3. Certain musical texts are primary and should be sung at the Funeral Mass: the Responsorial Psalm, the Gospel Acclamation, the three acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer, the "Lamb of God" litany, and the "Song of Farewell." These should not be sung by cantor, choir, or soloist alone. Rather, they belong to the assembly.
4. In the *Order of Christian Funerals*, as in all the reformed liturgical books, the cantor/leader of song has an important task. The task of the cantor is to animate and direct the singing of the assembly. With the exception of the Responsorial Psalm, which is sung from the ambo, the cantor ordinarily leads the assembly from a cantor stand.
5. The selection of music for the Funeral Liturgy is often a sensitive issue for bereaved families. The choice of music for Christian funerals must be in accord with all the recommendations governing music in liturgy, especially those found in the *Order for Christian Funerals* as well as the documents of the Conference of Bishops that provide pastoral norms for the use of sacred music in Catholic worship, i.e., *Sing To The Lord* (STL), *Liturgical Music Today* (LMT), and *Music in Catholic Worship* (MCW).
6. The principle of progressive solemnity, described in the bishops' document stated above, *Sing to the Lord*, applies to the rites found in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. A few things sung well, have priority in funeral liturgies. Many of these may be drawn from the repertoire of the Sunday assembly.
7. The responsorial pattern of singing the psalm in which the psalmist or choir sings the verses and the assembly responds with a brief antiphon, is well suited to the Funeral Liturgy. The practice of substituting metrical hymns based on psalm texts for the Responsorial Psalm is not encouraged since this form affects and alters the ritual pattern of responsorial singing (LMT, no. 40).
8. The request for "favorite songs" of the deceased often results in inappropriate performances of music incapable of bearing the weight liturgy demands. Popular songs, sentimental ethnic music, or songs from Broadway hits are never to be substitute for the music of the Funeral Liturgy. There are three standards of judgment proposed in *Sing to the Lord* (STL, no. 126). 1) The liturgical judgment: is the music's text, form, placement and style congruent with the nature of the liturgy? 2) The musical judgment: is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good irrespective of musical idiom or style? 3) The pastoral judgment: will it help this assembly to pray? Such a process may not be as easy to apply as an absolute list of permitted or prohibited music, but is more effective pastorally.

9. Music is preeminent among the signs expressed by the participants in any liturgy. Therefore, recorded music is not to be used within the liturgy to replace the congregation, the choir, the organist, cantor, or other musicians. (STL, no. 93).

### COMMITTAL

The Rite of Committal is celebrated at the place of burial or interment and never in the church unless there is a columbarium, or crypt, within the Church building proper.

1. The Rite of Committal, whether at an interment chapel, at a mausoleum or at a graveside, is a gathering of the faithful for prayer.
2. Military services and certain cultural or social rites are permissible at the cemetery. These other services should be arranged in advance with the local parish priest and coordinated in such a way that they do not disrupt or distract from the integrity of the liturgical committal service. Funeral directors are called upon to assist in the coordination of these elements, and to safeguard the integrity of the Church's liturgy at the Rite of Committal. Since the Rite of Committal is the final rite of the Church (typically following the funeral mass), flag ceremonies are best conducted following the rite.
3. If a lengthy time has passed since the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy, or if the funeral has been conducted overseas or in a distant state, the Rite of Committal with Final Commendation (OCF, nos.224-233) may be more appropriate.
4. Words of Remembrance would also be appropriate at this time following the Diocesan Liturgical Commission guidelines. The statement should have already been prepared in writing and given to the presiding minister beforehand so the person can be properly introduced.

### CREMATION

While the Church recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed, cremation is permitted as long as it has not been chosen for reasons contrary to Catholic teaching (CIC, can. 1176 §3 and CCC, no. 2301).

1. It is preferred that the Funeral Mass or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass be celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased prior to its cremation. (OCF *Appendix Cremation*, nos.411-438)
2. The significance of having the body of the deceased present for the Funeral Liturgy is indicated throughout the Mass texts and ritual actions. Therefore, when arrangements involving cremation are being made, the parish priest is to recommend that: a) following the Funeral Vigil, or a time of visitation, the Funeral Liturgy is celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased person, and that following the Funeral Liturgy, the body of the deceased be cremated; b) the Funeral Mass conclude with the Final Commendation in the church; c) at an appropriate time, usually some days later, the family gather at the cemetery for the burial of the cremated remains. The Rite of Committal takes place at this time with the inclusion of the proper prayers for the committal of ashes (OCF, no. 406.3).
3. If cremation has already taken place before the Funeral Liturgy, the Pastor may permit the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy in the presence of the cremated remains of the deceased person. The cremated remains of the body are to be placed in a worthy vessel. Parishes may wish to invest in a parish ossuary (a receptacle in which the funeral urn or box is placed). A small table or stand is to be prepared for the cremated remains at the place normally occupied by the coffin. The funeral urn or ossuary may be carried to its place in the entrance procession or placed on this table sometime before the liturgy begins. A pall is never placed on the ossuary or vessel with the cremated remains.

4. Special circumstances occur, such as health concerns or out-of-state or overseas transport, which prompt families to arrange for cremation before making funeral arrangements. If cremation has taken place, the parish priest is to recommend: a) gathering with family and friends for prayer and remembrance of the deceased; b) celebration of a Funeral Liturgy; c) gathering with family and friends for the interment of cremated remains at the cemetery in the Rite of Committal.
5. Cremated remains should be treated with the same respect given to the remains of a human body, and should be entombed or buried, whether in the ground or at sea. The scattering of cremated remains on the ground or at sea or keeping any portion of the remains in individual containers as remembrances is not the reverent final disposition that the Church directs. It should be noted that burial at sea of cremated remains differs from scattering. An appropriate and worthy container, heavy enough to be sent to its final resting place, may be dropped into the sea (OCF, Appendix Cremation no. 417).

### MINISTRY OF CONSOLATION

The establishment of a bereavement ministry is encouraged for every parish of the Diocese of Orange.

1. A bereavement ministry is a part of the ministry of the Church. "Those who are baptized into Christ and nourished at the same table of the Lord are to be responsible for each other" (OCF, no. 8). This ministry of mutual charity, caring for others in sickness, death, and mourning, is a call to every believer - priest, deacon, religious, layperson. The responsibility of the Bereavement Ministry rests with the community, which is to be instructed in this care by pastors, associate pastors, and other ministers.
2. The ministry of bereavement extends beyond the time of the funeral to include the days and weeks after Christian burial. Some parishes might consider journeying with the bereaved for a full year after the death of a loved one.
3. Consideration of developing Bereavement Ministers within the Bereavement Ministry is encouraged if not already in existence in your parish. Ministering to those who experienced a death of a newborn, an infant, a suicide, elderly relative, parent, sibling or spouse, will need the Christian support of your parish. We need to heed the words and example of the Lord: "Blessed are they who mourn; they shall be consoled." (Matthew 5:4) We dedicate this document to the words of Jesus.

Diocese of Orange.  
Liturgical Commission.  
Garden Grove, California.

January 1, 2015

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