

shown to the body of the dead person, it is important to give them a resting place. Your parish (or cemetery) may have a garden of remembrance where ashes can be reverently returned to the earth.

This provides a focus for the parish's sense of communion with the departed, who are still members of the family of faith. The community will pray there and you have a place of memory.

The choice between burial and cremation may involve more practical considerations. The dead person may have expressed a preference or left written instructions as to the committal.

In all this, the key issue is how best to make the farewell for the dead, how best to honour the dead person, and how best to hold them in memory.

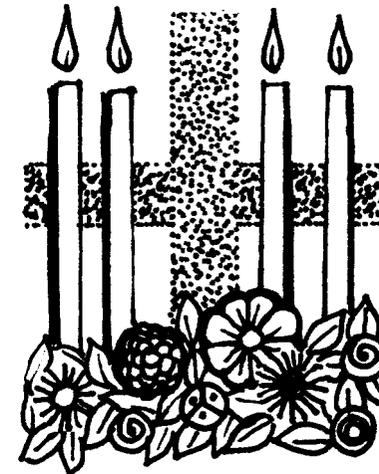
AFTER THE FUNERAL

A funeral is often followed by a reception. This may be the first opportunity for some of the mourners to meet and console one another. So apart from its practical function, the reception can itself be part of the leave-taking. It can set the seal on the liturgy and allow emotional release, since people may be both tired and yet relieved that the stress leading up to the funeral is over; it may even foster an atmosphere of reconciliation. Usually the reception will not have a formal beginning, but if the occasion presents itself, it may be good for someone to say a few words of welcome, appreciation or prayer once everyone is present.

Please note that Our Lady's church has a large car park at the rear, toilet facilities in the porch and a meeting room in church where tea and coffee are available prior to service. The hall behind church may also be hired for a reception. Members of the parish Bereavement Group will be pleased to help you in any way.

Into Your Hands

Planning a Catholic Funeral



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PLANNING THE FUNERAL

This booklet, adapted from the Order of Christian Funerals, has been created by the Bereavement Group of Our Lady's parish to help people plan a funeral.

WHY FUNERAL RITES?

Christians celebrate funeral rites to offer worship and thanksgiving to God, the author of all life. We pray for the deceased, and support the bereaved. A funeral should not be an isolated moment, but part of the life of a community in which people care for each other.

Being involved in preparing and planning someone's funeral - even our own - can be part of coming to terms with death. It also enables people to become engaged in the funeral liturgy itself and allows them to be touched by the occasion. The planning can take place in conjunction with prayers or a service in the family home.

The notes which follow presume that the reader is preparing someone else's funeral. If you are planning your own funeral, however, you will also need to ask yourself the question posed here. You may be considering whether to purchase a pre-paid funeral package. If so, ensure that your preferred options are accommodated on it. Some plans, for instance, do not include a service in church as well as burial or cremation.

Actual funeral practices varies considerably, and the Church provides several options from which we can choose freely. There is greater flexibility and involvement possible than we sometimes imagine.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

Formal reception of the body into church the night before the

Vigil	Vigil
Parish Mass	Funeral
Funeral	Committal
Committal	Memorial Mass

BURIAL OR CREMATION

The fourth area to consider is the choice between burial and cremation. Here are some thoughts to help reach a decision.

Burial has always been part of the Christian funeral. Tradition has given us a rich ceremony, using prayer and symbols drawn from Scripture, focusing on the burial of Jesus.

Burial allows people to face the reality of death. The coffin is lowered into the ground. You can express your farewell by sprinkling earth or holy water on to the coffin. You leave, having 'settled' the dead person in a special place.

Cremation is relatively new for Catholics, and there has not been time to develop traditions like those connected with burial. However, in the crematorium it is still possible to bid farewell in a dignified way.

You may lay a hand on the coffin or sprinkle it with holy water. This can be done during the service or on leaving the chapel. The withdrawal of the coffin from sight in the cremation service is an echo of the lowering of the coffin into the ground at burial.

Cremation should not be the end of the farewell process. It may indeed leave you with a sense of incompleteness. Interning the ashes sometime after the cremation can help bring the natural cycle to completion: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Because ashes should be treated with the same reverence

outside Mass, like a wedding outside Mass, is a full Catholic liturgy, not something second rate.

Factors to consider include the following:

- Was the deceased person a Mass-goer? Are the bereaved ?
- Has the deceased person expressed a preference or left instructions?
- Will there be a large proportion of non-Catholics present?
- Can the funeral take place at the hour of the regular weekday Mass?

All these point to the following question: What percentage of the congregation will be able to take an active part in the Eucharistic liturgy?

Where the circumstances suggest a funeral service, the family could be invited to the Parish Mass on the day of the funeral, or a special Mass may be arranged sometime afterwards.

Note that on certain key feast days of the Church a funeral Mass is not permitted, for instance Ascension Day and Maundy Thursday. Also, if a priest is not available, a funeral service conducted by a deacon or lay leader you know, may be preferable to a Mass celebrated by a priest you do not know, brought in for the occasion.

Thus, a further two options suggest themselves. As before, the reception of the body may take place as part of the funeral liturgy itself, or the body may be brought to church in advance of the vigil or funeral liturgy:

funeral is still a common Catholic practice, though less so than previously. Recent years have also seen a drift towards the single service held in the cemetery chapel or at the crematorium.

In face of this trend the Church is drawing our attention to the human reality of the funeral as a journey: for the one who has died, the mourners, and for the parish community. The model for this is the Easter journey of Jesus Christ from death to resurrection. This is why we are encouraged to celebrate the funeral in three stages or movements: vigil, funeral liturgy, and committal.

1 VIGIL

For many people, the idea of a vigil is something new. Yet this helpful service is to be encouraged. It is the principal rite celebrated between the death and the funeral itself. As the first stage of the farewell journey, its mood is one of quiet support which helps to prepare the bereaved for the final leave-taking.

The Vigil may be held in the home of the deceased, the funeral home, or in another suitable place, for instance a hospital chapel. However, it may also be celebrated in church, possibly in conjunction with the reception of the body (though this may take place at the start of the funeral liturgy itself). Even in church, this vigil takes the form of a liturgy of the word of God, or Evening Prayer. Where there is a delay between death and the funeral, the vigil may be repeated as necessary and adapted according to the circumstances.

2. FUNERAL LITURGY

This is the main liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased person and is usually held in

church. Two forms are possible: a funeral Mass, or a funeral liturgy outside Mass. Whether to celebrate Mass or not is discussed below.

3. COMMITTAL

The rite of committal usually follows on immediately from the funeral liturgy. This final act of leave-taking is celebrated at the graveside or at the crematorium. Whether to have a burial or a cremation is discussed below.

MAKING THE BEST CHOICE

While we are encouraged to celebrate a funeral over these three stage (vigil, funeral liturgy, and committal), for a variety of good reasons this model is not always possible or appropriate to the circumstances.

The family may not wish to have a vigil either in the home or in church. In this case, the body will be received into church at the start of the funeral liturgy itself and the service will lead directly to the committal. The funeral may even comprise a single act of worship either in the cemetery chapel or at the crematorium.

Many combinations of the funeral rite are possible.

Members of the Bereavement Group, deacons and priests will be happy to talk these through with you.

RECEPTION OF THE BODY

The first point to note is that the vigil is not tied to church, and the reception of the body into church is not a necessary part of it. Reception can take place as part of the funeral liturgy itself,

or the body may be brought to church in advance of the vigil or funeral liturgy. This allows three possible formats. These are shown below, in the diagram, a horizontal line indicates the following (or a different day):-

1	2	3
Vigil	Vigil with Reception	Reception
_____	_____	_____
Funeral with Reception Committal	Funeral Committal	Funeral Committal

TIME OF DAY

A second point is that the funeral liturgy itself is not tied to any particular hour of the day. It may be that most of the mourners are better able to attend an evening service, or that a priest is unable to celebrate Mass only in the evening. In such cases, you might hold a liturgy of the word of God, or Morning Prayer, on the following day and this will lead directly to the committal. This format can still include a vigil:

Vigil

Funeral with reception

Liturgy of the Word
Committal

MASS

The third and perhaps the most important question is whether to have Mass or not. The Church encourages a Mass since the eucharist is the memorial celebration of Christ's own death and resurrection. However, while the eucharist is our central liturgy, it is not always the best option for a funeral. Moreover a funeral