

**DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG**  
**GUIDELINES FOR THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS**

*January 12, 1998*

## General Introduction

1. “We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day.”<sup>1</sup>
2. Death is part of the human experience, an event so profound that its inevitability forces us to look for meaning and purpose in life. Death, the consequence of sin, takes on an entirely new meaning in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul says, “Death is swallowed up in victory. Oh death, where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory?”(1Cor 15:54b-55).
3. As a people of faith, the Christian response to death must always be viewed through the context of that same faith. The response to death is both personal, in terms of the family and friends of the deceased, as well as communal as evidenced by the public commemoration.
4. The liturgy of the Church provides for the communal and ritual marking of the mystery of death. It envisions and encourages relatives, friends, and the entire parish community to join together in prayer for the deceased and bereaved.
5. The use of the *Order of Christian Funerals (OCF)* is mandatory as of November 2, 1989 in the dioceses of the United States and no other English translation or edition may be used.<sup>2</sup> The use of *Appendix 2: Cremation* is mandatory as of November 2, 1997 and no other English translation or edition may be used in the dioceses of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Through the provided prayers and rituals, the *OCF* focuses on the various dimensions of this most profound human mystery, as it calls all to join in prayer and support.
6. It is divided into three separate and distinct parts:
  - ◆ The Vigil
  - ◆ The Funeral Mass
  - ◆ The Rite of Committal

Even though not all parts are necessarily celebrated at the time of death, due to various pastoral circumstances, it is important to understand the meaning and role of each of these parts. While providing the standard, the rite allows for adaptation based on culture, particular needs, and various circumstances. These will be addressed within the body of this document.

7. Ultimately our common faith reminds us that beyond all else, the death of a Christian must be seen through the context of Christian hope as reflected in Scripture: “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.” (Rev. 21:4)

## The Funeral Rites

8. “One approach to successful pastoral use of the funeral rites is to regard the ritual moments as three movements in a symphony giving liturgical expression to the aspects of death: between death and the central funeral liturgy; the central funeral liturgy itself; and after the funeral liturgy, including committal and post-funeral memorialization. The *Order of Christian Funerals* includes models for each of these three moments and offers sound pastoral, theological guidelines for each of these model rites.”<sup>4</sup>

9. “(T)he task of preparing the liturgy for any funeral will begin with the life and death of the deceased. Only then can ‘the book’ provide appropriate models and patterns to shape the celebrations.”<sup>5</sup> The *Order of Christian Funerals* provides a rich diversity of texts to better reflect the circumstances and context of the deceased. Care should be taken to avoid simply using a ‘canned’ service without proper regard to the particular situation. Clergy and ministers of bereavement should acquaint themselves with the “Related Rites and Prayers” contained in the *OCF*. These are especially useful since they are examples of what can be done or modeled in particular circumstances (e.g., after death; gathering in the presence of the deceased; and transfer of the body to the church or place of committal). Families should be informed of the options that are available to them so that they may draw upon the rich liturgy of the Church that is theirs. Every effort should be made to encourage the family’s involvement especially in the planning and participation of the liturgical rites themselves.

### ◆ *The Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers*

10. The Vigil for the Deceased is the principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy, or if there is no funeral liturgy, before the rite of committal.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, pious devotions such as the rosary may be held in addition to the vigil service, *but never in its place*. One way of including family members or other parish organizations in the celebration is by allowing them to lead the rosary during part of the time set aside for visitation.

11. The vigil may take the form of a Liturgy of the Word or as part of the Office for the Dead. The two Liturgy of the Word services, “Vigil for the Deceased” and “Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church,” are based on the place of the celebration. These rites are similarly adapted for children.<sup>7</sup>

12. On occasion it is appropriate that the Office for the Dead, or at least some parts of it, be incorporated into the vigil celebration.<sup>8</sup> As with any celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, this service should include sung psalms, canticles and hymns adapted to the occasion and capabilities of the community gathered for worship. Prerecorded music should not be used during the celebration of the vigil itself.

13. The vigil may be held in the home of the deceased, in the funeral home or in the parish church. Celebrating the vigil in the parish church should be encouraged whenever possible.

14. When the “Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church” is used, the body of the deceased is received prior to the service. The casket may be opened for viewing following the reception of the body. At the conclusion of the vigil, the casket is closed, sealed and covered with the pall. Ideally, the casket should remain in place overnight in the church until the celebration of the Funeral Mass, but due to pastoral circumstances may be transferred to another location. The reception rites, however, are not repeated.

15. Whether celebrated at the home, funeral home or in church, the vigil requires the participation of a presider (who is normally a priest or deacon). The presider should be vested in alb and stole or cassock/surplice and stole. Ideally, several other ministers should participate in the celebration, specifically a reader and minister(s) of music.

16. It is appropriate that family members and/or friends offer reflections about the deceased during this service. These would normally take place between the concluding prayer and the final blessing of the vigil. Pastoral prudence suggests that the presider consult with the family first in order to avoid any embarrassment or something that might be otherwise inappropriate in respect to the rite.

17. The vigil services contained in *OCF* may be adapted. For example, the location or the physical/emotional temperament of the bereaved may dictate the length and content of the service.

#### ◆ *The Funeral Mass*

18. In the funeral liturgy the community gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give thanks and praise to God, to commend the deceased to God and to seek strength.<sup>9</sup> In printed materials and announcements, this part of the funeral rites should be referred to as a “Funeral Mass.” Other names, such as “Mass of Resurrection” or “Mass of Christian Burial” should not be used.

19. The use of white vesture and pall are customary in this diocese as they express Christian hope. Violet or black vestments may also be worn at the funeral rites.<sup>10</sup>

#### INTRODUCTORY RITES

20. The community of faith assembles and all non-Christian symbols (e.g., flags) are removed before bringing the casket into church, though sensitivity should be exercised so that the family understands that these symbols may be replaced after the liturgy.<sup>11</sup> After the family is greeted, the casket is sprinkled with holy water in remembrance of entrance into the Church by water and the Spirit. The casket may be covered with a pall by members of the family, friends or the minister. If other Christian symbols (e.g., a Bible, cross, etc.) are to be placed on the casket, they should be carried in procession by the person who will place them on the casket. The procession, led by the liturgical ministers and followed by the casket and family, proceeds into the church accompanied by a gathering song.<sup>12</sup> The casket is placed in front of the Easter

Candle, which is put in place beforehand. Once the casket is in place, the symbols, if used, are placed on the casket. The introductory rite continues immediately with the opening prayer. The penitential rite is omitted. If the Reception of the Body took place at the vigil, these rites are omitted and the Funeral Mass begins in the usual way, i.e., introductory rite and opening prayer.

#### LITURGY OF THE WORD

21. The family should be consulted regarding the Scripture passages which will be proclaimed. The Word of God is essential to the celebration of the funeral liturgy as it conveys the hope of being united again. One or two readings may precede the gospel. If two readings are used, it is preferable to have different readers for each. If family members do not or cannot proclaim the readings, parish readers should be available to do so. During the Easter Season readings from the Old Testament should not be used. Since the responsorial psalm is a song, it should be sung. If the gospel acclamation is not sung, it should be omitted.<sup>13</sup>

22. The homily is based on the readings expressing God's love, compassion, and hope as evidenced in the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is not a eulogy.<sup>14</sup>

23. The Liturgy of the Word concludes with intercessions for the deceased, all the dead, the mourners and for the assembly. The intercessions provided in the *OCF* may be used or adapted (See PART I: FUNERAL LITURGY and PART V: ADDITIONAL TEXTS). Intercessions may also be composed in accordance with standard form.<sup>15</sup>

#### LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

24. As music is an integral part of Catholic prayer and worship, the Mass parts and acclamations should normally be sung.

25. Due care should be taken to guide those present, especially non-Catholics, during the liturgy. As funerals are occasions when many non-Catholics or non-practicing Catholics may be present, attention should be given to the guidelines for receiving Holy Communion as set forth by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. A blessing may be offered to non-Catholics at communion.

#### CONCLUDING RITES

26. The appropriate time for a remembrance of the deceased is following the prayer after communion. A family member or friend of the deceased is best suited for this role. Pastoral guidance should dictate its length.

27. The *OCF* calls for an invitation to prayer followed by a moment of quiet reflection and prayer. The song of farewell is then sung. There are various options available in terms of other appropriate songs. Since this is a song, it should never be read. The ritual also notes that the most appropriate time to incense the body is during or immediately following the song of farewell. These rites conclude with the prayer of commendation. If a symbol of Christian life had been placed on the casket, it should be removed at this time. The presider and the liturgical

ministers lead the casket, followed by the family and the rest of the assembly, to the waiting coach. If a pall had been used, it should be removed at the rear of the church, and flowers and other secular symbols may be returned.

#### THE FUNERAL LITURGY OUTSIDE OF MASS

28. The Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass may be used when a Mass is not permitted (solemnities of obligation, the Easter Triduum, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season); when it is not possible to celebrate a Mass; or if for pastoral reasons this seems the more suitable form of celebration. It is normally celebrated in the parish church, but may be celebrated in a home, a funeral home, or cemetery chapel. The proper vesture for a priest or deacon is alb and stole.<sup>16</sup>

#### ◆ *The Rite of Committal*

29. “The Rite of Committal at the conclusion of the funeral rites is the final act of the community of faith caring for the body of its deceased member. It may be celebrated at the grave, tomb, or crematorium and may be used for burial at sea.”<sup>17</sup> It should be celebrated, when possible, at the site of the committal rather than a cemetery chapel. The Rite of Committal expresses our hope in the resurrection of the body.<sup>18</sup>

30. The first form, “The Rite of Committal,” is used when final commendation is celebrated at the conclusion of the Funeral Mass. The second form, “The Rite of Committal with Final Commendation” is used when the final commendation is not celebrated during the Funeral Mass or when no funeral liturgy precedes the committal.<sup>19</sup> There is no need to prolong the committal rite if the Funeral Mass has just taken place, but it may be adapted and expanded, including a brief homily. It is appropriate to use the Rite of Committal when there has been an extended period of time between the funeral and actual internment (e.g., body donated to science).<sup>20</sup>

31. The ordinary minister for the Rite of Committal is a priest or deacon. If a layperson presides at the Rite of Committal, they do not wear liturgical vesture. Suitable mourning clothes, e.g., suit or dress, are appropriate.

#### ◆ *Music for the Funeral Rites*

32. The *Order of Christian Funerals* clearly states, “Music is integral to the funeral rites.”<sup>21</sup> Since the Church considers music as one of the signs and symbols of preeminent importance used to celebrate its faith,<sup>22</sup> the funeral rites (inclusive of the Vigil, the Mass, and the Rite of Committal) deserve the same care and attention to quality given to all sacred liturgy of the Church.

33. *Music in Catholic Worship* sets up clear guidelines to help families and musicians determine the value and appropriateness of musical selections.<sup>23</sup> Those criteria are *musical judgement* (music that is technically, aesthetically, and expressively good), *liturgical judgement* (music that is appropriate in the liturgy, appropriately sung by the entire assembly, or by the cantor, or choir alone), and *pastoral judgement* (music that is prayerful for these people, at this time, etc.).

34. Consideration should also be given to the priority of musical opportunities. *Music in Catholic Worship* clearly places a high priority on the acclamations (gospel, eucharistic prayer, Lord's Prayer), processional songs (entrance and communion) and the responsorial psalm.<sup>24</sup> A Funeral Mass, for example, with a vocal solo at communion, while the responsorial psalm and eucharistic acclamations are spoken, would indicate a misunderstanding of the function and nature of the liturgical parts.

35. It is highly encouraged that parishes develop choral groups to aid in the music at funerals, especially congregational singing. Although a solo, instrumental, or choral piece might be appropriate as a prelude, during the preparation of the gifts, or as a communion meditation, preference should generally be given to congregational singing over solos or musical performances. When planning liturgies, such as Funeral Masses, the Sunday liturgy is the norm and standard to follow.

36. A list of appropriate music selections is available from the Office of Worship.

## Special Circumstances

### ◆ *A Child Who Died before Baptism*

37. The funeral rites may be celebrated for a child who died before baptism if it was the intention of the parents to have the child baptized. The family of the deceased child and the parish priest should determine the appropriate funeral rites for young children and infants in which there are texts particularly written for such occasions.<sup>25</sup>

### ◆ *Burial at Sea*

38. The *OCF* contains appropriate sections for prayers for burial at sea. These prayers may be used when a body (with weighted casket according to government regulations) or a weighted urn is committed to the deep. In the case of cremated remains, they should never be scattered over the water, but must be placed in a sealed container and committed to the sea.

### ◆ *Catechumens*

39. Catechumens are entitled to the full funeral rites of the Catholic Church. Even though they are unbaptized, they are members of the household of the Church.<sup>26</sup> Appropriate prayers for catechumens should be selected, and baptismal symbolism should be omitted.

◆ *Cremation*

40. “The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the resurrection.”<sup>27</sup> “The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed; it does not, however, forbid cremation unless it has been chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching.”<sup>28</sup> While most people today, who choose cremation, do so for financial or ecological reasons, pastors should see to it that the faithful understand our belief in the resurrection of the body and the mandate to care for mortal remains regardless of their condition or form.

41. The faithful should be guided in making funeral arrangements in ways that reflect the Christian faith, the celebration of life, and the hope of the resurrection. Consequently, the Church clearly advocates that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites. Indeed, the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites.<sup>29</sup> On the occasion when it has been decided to cremate the body of a loved one, pastoral sensitivity must be exercised by those who minister to the family of the deceased.<sup>30</sup>

42. The cremated remains of the deceased should always be treated in a respectful manner. This includes proper interment. Pastors are obligated to educate their people regarding this. It is against Christian sensibilities to leave cremated remains in one’s house or scatter them over land or bodies of water. Rather, they should be interred in something that is permanent and dignified.

43. In its introduction to the *OCF* and *Appendix 2: Cremation*, the Church recommends that cremation take place after the funeral liturgy. Therefore, the vigil and related rites and prayers for the deceased should be celebrated as found in the *OCF*.

44. By virtue of an indult granted by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the celebration of the funeral liturgy, including Mass, in the presence of the cremated remains of the body of a deceased person is permitted in the dioceses of the United States of America.<sup>31</sup> All rites, prayers and related texts are to be taken from the *Order of Christian Funerals* and its *Appendix 2: Cremation*. No other English translations may be used in the dioceses of the United States.

45. “The cremated remains of the body are to be placed in a worthy vessel. A small table or stand is to be prepared for them at the place normally occupied by the coffin. The vessel containing the cremated remains may be carried to its place in the entrance procession or may be placed on this table or stand sometime before the liturgy begins.”<sup>32</sup> “After the people have assembled, the Funeral Mass is celebrated as laid down in the *Roman Missal* and the ritual from the *Order of Christian Funerals Appendix 2: Cremation*. Prayers which do not make reference to the honoring or burying of the body of the deceased should be chosen instead of those which have these themes. Following the prayer after communion, the Rite of Final Commendation takes place. The alternate form for the dismissal is used.”<sup>33</sup>

46. “When cremation and committal take place before the funeral liturgy, the Prayers after Death and the Vigil for the Deceased may be adapted as necessary and appropriate and used before the funeral liturgy. The Rite of Committal with Final Commendation may also be



celebrated at that time. The alternate form for the words of committal is used.”<sup>34</sup> “Following the committal, the family and friends of the deceased join the Catholic community for the funeral liturgy.”<sup>35</sup>

◆ ***Military or Fraternal Order Services at Funerals***

47. The *Order of Christian Funerals* should never be replaced with other traditions no matter how noble. The *OCF* should be respected and its integrity maintained. Additional elements are permissible so long as they are not contrary to Christian faith and values. Traditional military hymns and readings may not be appropriate during the funeral rites. Arms may not be carried or displayed within the church. Color Guards, the bearing of arms, ceremonial weapons, and salutes by weaponry are more appropriate to the cemetery, when the rite of committal has concluded. American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars services should focus solely on civil honors and not serve as another quasi-committal rite which would be an unnecessary duplication.<sup>36</sup>

◆ ***Non-Catholics***

48. 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 if the deceased were an active member of a non-Catholic Christian Church, or where the family members are practicing Catholics.<sup>37</sup>

49. To avoid breaking close family ties, non-Catholic members of Catholic families may be interred in a Catholic cemetery. Non-Catholic ministers may participate in a Catholic funeral for non-Catholics by offering comments and prayers for the dead. Non-Catholic ministers are welcome to vest in the garb that is appropriate to their faith tradition.<sup>38</sup>

◆ ***Stillborn***

50. With continual respect for the human body, a child of Catholic parents who dies before birth should be given a reverent Christian burial. These remains may be placed either in specific individual graves or in a common burial area.

<b>Conclusion</b>
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51. The rites set forward in the *Order of Christian Funerals* are meant to draw all those involved, family, ministers and friends, into closer intimacy with the Paschal Mystery. Taking the time to educate, plan, and participate in these rites can draw others more closely into the life of the Church. It is in the contemplation of our own mortality that we gain greater insight and understanding of our Lord’s passion, death and resurrection.

## Notes

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1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #989 Washington: USCC, 1994
2. *Decree of National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, August 15, 1989
3. *Decree of National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, August 15, 1997
4. *The Death of a Christian: The Order of Christian Funerals* (revised edition), Richard Rutherford, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990, p. 160-161
5. *The Death of a Christian: The Order of Christian Funerals*, p. 160
6. *Order of Christian Funerals*, International Commission of English in the Liturgy, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989, #45 and #54.
7. *Order of Christian Funerals*, Part II: Funeral Rites for Children
8. *Order of Christian Funerals*, Part IV: Office for the Dead.
9. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #129
10. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #39
11. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #132
12. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #133-135
13. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #138-140
14. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #141
15. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #167
16. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #178-179 and #182
17. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #204
18. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #204 & #206
19. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #205
20. *Order of Christian Funerals*, # 211-212
21. *Order of Christian Funerals*, #30

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22. *Music in Catholic Worship*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington: USCC, revised 1983, #23
  23. *Music in Catholic Worship*, #26-41
  24. *Music in Catholic Worship*, #53-74
  25. *Code of Canon Law*, Latin/English Edition, Canon Law Society of America, #1183.2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1261; *Order of Christian Funerals*, #237.
  26. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1183.1
  27. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2300
  28. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1176.3
  29. *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation*, #413
  30. *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation*, #415
  31. *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation*, #426
  32. *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation*, #427
  33. *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation*, #428
  34. *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation*, #422
  35. *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix 2: Cremation*, #423
  36. See paragraph #20
  37. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1183.3
  38. *Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters, Part I*, # 59, 1967