



## FUNERALS AND OBSEQUIES IN THE DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD

### Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide governance and regular practice of funeral liturgies and obsequies celebrated in the Diocese of Springfield. It defines the intention of the relative liturgical law, the demands of proper liturgical practice and the expectations of the universal and local Church.

The following regulations reflect universal law of the Latin Church, particular law for Dioceses of the United States of America as well as particular law for this Diocese of Springfield. Because these regulations are primarily liturgical, the many canonical and pastoral questions that may arise in the course of pastoral ministry may be directed to the appropriate diocesan office.

### Recipients of the Church's Funeral Rites

Every Catholic is entitled to the Church's ministry at the time of death unless specifically excluded by ecclesiastical law.<sup>1</sup> As well, the Church's funeral rites may be celebrated for catechumens who are counted among the Christian faithful.

Funeral rites may also be celebrated for a child who dies before Baptism or a stillborn or miscarried child if the parents intended to have the child baptized. The *Order of Christian Funerals* includes special texts to be used at funeral liturgies in these circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

Within the Diocese of Springfield, the celebration of the Church's funeral liturgies, including the funeral Mass, is also permitted for a deceased baptized non-Catholic when this is not contrary to their will and provided that their own minister is unavailable. This would be appropriate, for example, when a non-Catholic worships regularly in the Catholic Church or identifies with the Catholic Church more than another church or ecclesial community.

### Ministry and Participation

#### **Presiding Ministers**

With regard to the Church's funeral rites, it is the specific responsibility of the clergy to be present at the side of the dying; to teach on the meaning of Christian death; to comfort the family and friends of the deceased and prepare with them a worthy and dignified funeral celebration that has meaning for them; to ensure that the liturgies for the deceased are integrated into the life of the parish.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Canons 1183-1185.

<sup>2</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals* [OCF], 234-342.

<sup>3</sup> *Ordo exsequiarum*, 25.

The celebration of the funeral rites is especially entrusted to priests. However, when no priest is available, a deacon may lead the funeral liturgies, apart from the Mass. When a cleric is not available to preside at the Vigil or Committal liturgies, a layperson with the necessary training and skills to lead public prayer may preside at these services, utilizing the appropriate options listed in these rites.<sup>4</sup>

### **Family**

The *Order of Christian Funerals* recommends that family members be involved in the planning of the funeral rites.<sup>5</sup> In coordination with the parish priest, the family of the deceased should arrange the places and times for the Vigil, the funeral Mass and the Committal.

The funeral Mass is to be the central element of all the sacred obsequies.<sup>6</sup> If a family is reluctant to schedule a funeral Mass, the priest or other parish representative is to encourage the Mass, explaining its power for the deceased and the living alike. Financial difficulties on the part of the family of the deceased must never prevent the celebration of the funeral Mass. Parishes are to make provisions for such conditions.

Family and friends may be invited to take part in various ministries during the celebration of the funeral Mass liturgy as readers, musicians, ushers and pallbearers unless they would find these activities too burdensome at a time of grief and loss.<sup>7</sup>

### **Funeral Directors**

Funeral directors should have a working knowledge of the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Pastors are to assist funeral directors with respect to Catholic values, beliefs, liturgical norms and principles. Parishes and funeral directors are to collaborate closely in planning and celebrating the funeral rites. Meetings between funeral directors and the parish staff, or at least the parish clergy, are laudable and encouraged.

### **Liturgical Books**

When the funeral rites are celebrated in the Ordinary Form, the latest *editio typica* of the Roman Missal is to be used in conjunction with the latest approved *Order of Christian Funerals*.<sup>8</sup> For the Extraordinary Form, only the 1962 *editio typica* of the Roman Missal is to be used in conjunction with the funeral rituals approved for use in the United States of America and in force in 1962.

### **Cremation**

It is the Church's fervent preference that the body of the deceased be buried or interred. Nonetheless, cremation is permitted if the practice is not chosen for reasons contrary to Catholic teaching.<sup>9</sup> When a body is to be cremated, it is preferable that the funeral Mass or funeral Liturgy outside of Mass is celebrated in

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<sup>4</sup> OCF, 14.

<sup>5</sup> OCF, 17.

<sup>6</sup> OCF, 154.

<sup>7</sup> OCF, 15.

<sup>8</sup> The 1970 *Rite of Funerals*, nor any other revision, is to be used in the Ordinary Form. Only the latest approved by and published under the auspices of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is used licitly.

<sup>9</sup> Canon 1176, §3.

the presence of the body prior to cremation, unless it is truly not possible.<sup>10</sup>

When the body has been cremated prior to the funeral, a funeral Mass or funeral outside of Mass may still be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains.<sup>11</sup>The appropriate texts in the *Order of Christian Funerals* are to be used.<sup>12</sup> In this case, the family members should be reminded that cremated remains are to be buried or entombed in an appropriate container and are not to be scattered, kept at home, divided or made into jewelry for any reason.<sup>13</sup>

### Terminology

In obituary notices and announcements, the proper names of the various rites are to be used. Among these are *Vigil for the Deceased*, *Funeral Mass* or *Mass of Christian Burial*, *Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass* and *Rite of Committal*. The funeral Mass is not to be designated as “Mass of the Resurrection,” since this term is reserved to the celebration of the Solemn Easter Vigil.

### The Vigil

The vigil usually takes the form of the Vigil for the Deceased as given in the *Order of Christian Funerals*.<sup>14</sup> This liturgy may be simplified or shortened, as circumstances dictate.<sup>15</sup>Alternatively, some part of the Office of the Dead may be celebrated at the Vigil service, except on solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, the octave of Easter and All Souls’ Day.<sup>16</sup> Additional appropriate Catholic prayers, including the recitation of the Holy Rosary or other acts of piety and devotion, may supplement the Vigil but must not replace it unless, for some grave reason, the Vigil for the Deceased cannot be celebrated.

The Vigil takes place where the body is being viewed. In the Diocese of Springfield, this may take place in the home of the deceased, a funeral home or in the parish church.

In the Diocese of Springfield, the proper vesture for clergy who preside at the Vigil is a stole worn over an alb, or a cassock and surplice. If the circumstances demand it, the stole may be worn over a clerical suit. When the Vigil is celebrated in a church, the presiding priest or deacon wears an alb or cassock and surplice with a stole and, if desired, cope. In the case of a layperson presiding at the Vigil, he or she dresses in a modest and dignified manner which befits the service.

Those who lead the Vigil should encourage the participation of those present, with due sensitivity given to those who are mourning. Printed programs may be distributed to assist this participation. The use of music at the Vigil is encouraged and can be helpful in leading the people in prayer, particularly in the singing of an opening song and the Responsorial Psalm.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> OCF, 411-438.

<sup>11</sup> OCF, 426.

<sup>12</sup> OCF, 432-438.

<sup>13</sup> OCF, 417.

<sup>14</sup> OCF, 54-81.

<sup>15</sup> OCF, 55.

<sup>16</sup> OCF, 348; *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, 245.

<sup>17</sup> OCF, 68.

## Funeral Mass

### **Time**

Parishes are to develop clear guidelines and policies for scheduling funerals. This information is then to be shared with parishioners and local funeral directors. When developing these policies, pastors should consider the schedule of parish Masses, the availability and number of priests, the scheduling of liturgies and other parish events and the more common requests of those who mourn. All involved should be aware that it may not be possible to accommodate the family's preferences under all circumstances.

The funeral Mass may be celebrated as one of the regularly scheduled daily parish Masses. However, if a Mass intention has already been scheduled, a funeral Mass may not be substituted for it without the consent or the prior understanding<sup>18</sup> of the person who has requested the announced Mass.

Funeral Masses are permitted on most days of the year, including Sundays. Funeral Masses are not to be celebrated on solemnities of obligation, Holy Thursday, GoodFriday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, or on the Sundays of the Advent, Lent and Easter seasons.<sup>19</sup> On these days or other occasions when the Funeral Mass may not take place, a funeral liturgy outside of Mass (see below) may be celebrated. The annual *Ordo* provides information specific for each day.

### **Location**

Ordinarily, the funeral Mass is celebrated in the parish church to which the deceased belonged. However, the funeral Mass may be celebrated at another church with that pastor's consent after the pastor of the deceased has been notified.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, funeral Masses for religious are to be celebrated in the community's church, chapel or oratory. The Funeral Mass is permitted in chapels of Catholic long-term care institutions.

### Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass

As noted above, a funeral liturgy outside of Mass is ordinarily celebrated on those days when a funeral Mass is not permitted. The funeral outside of Mass should not be substituted for the funeral Mass when the celebration of a Mass is possible unless, for grave reasons, the pastor and family judge it to be the only suitable form of celebration.<sup>21</sup>

A funeral outside of Mass may take place at the parish church, a funeral home, the home of the deceased or a cemetery chapel. The celebration of this liturgy should include Scripture readings, the use of music and, if appropriate, the participation of family and friends.

### Liturgical Options

Presiding clergy are to be familiar with the wide choices of prayers for different circumstances contained in

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<sup>18</sup> This may be discussed with the one requesting the daily Mass intention at the time it is scheduled. Appropriate contact information may be obtained if the one requesting is willing to reschedule the Mass intention on relatively short notice.

<sup>19</sup> *OCF*, 178.

<sup>20</sup> Canon 1177.

<sup>21</sup> *OCF*, 154; 178.

the *Order of Christian Funerals* and carefully select the most appropriate of these texts in consideration of the circumstances of the funeral.<sup>22</sup>

Family members may be invited to select Scripture texts from among those listed in Part III of the *Order of Christian Funerals* or from the *Lectionary*, Volume IV, nos. 1011-1026. Non-biblical texts may never replace the Scripture readings or the Responsorial Psalm.<sup>23</sup>

Family members may also wish to select or request specific musical selections for the celebration of the funeral Mass. These selections must be examples of sacred music and express the Church's beliefs concerning Christ's victory over death and the hope of eternal life.

In consideration of the pastoral needs of the mourners, vestments should be chosen so as "to express Christian hope but should not be offensive to human grief or sorrow."<sup>24</sup> In the United States, white, violet or black vestments may be worn at any and all of the funeral rites, offices and obsequies for the dead, regardless of the temporal season of the liturgical calendar.

### **Particular Elements of the Funeral Liturgy**

#### **Reception of the Body and Introductory Rites**

The Rite of Reception of the body ordinarily takes place at the entrance of the church.<sup>25</sup> For reasons of space, this rite may take place inside the church. Banners or insignia of associations to which the deceased belonged are removed from the casket at the entrance of the church and may be replaced after the conclusion of the funeral rite.<sup>26</sup>

Holy water is used at the reception of the body as a reminder of the Baptism of the deceased.<sup>27</sup> After the sprinkling of holy water, the casket may be covered with a funeral pall in remembrance of the white baptismal garment. In the Diocese of Springfield, if the American flag is draping the casket at the time of its arrival, it may remain on the casket and the funeral pall placed over it at the appropriate time. This exception applies only to the official flag of the United States of America, in its design and form current at the time of the funeral.

Following the Rite of Reception of the body, a procession into the church takes place. Symbols of the Christian life, such as a Book of the Gospels, a bible, or a cross, may be carried in procession and then placed on the casket.<sup>28</sup> These symbols must be appropriate to the Divine Liturgy and not of a secular or purely sentimental nature. The exception is a properly folded American Flag in the case of a deceased who has given public or military service. The Easter candle is placed beforehand near where the casket will remain during the liturgy. When arriving at the sanctuary, the celebrant may incense the altar before going to the chair.<sup>29</sup> The casket is not incensed at this time. The Penitential Act and *Kyrie* are omitted, and the Mass

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<sup>22</sup> See *OCF*, Part V, Chapter 20.

<sup>23</sup> *General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM]*, 57; *OCF*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> *OCF*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> *OCF*, 133.

<sup>26</sup> *OCF*, 132.

<sup>27</sup> *OCF*, 133.

<sup>28</sup> *OCF*, 163.

<sup>29</sup> *OCF*, 163.

proceeds directly to the Collect.

If the Rite of Reception of the body has taken place prior to the funeral Mass, the Mass begins in the usual way with the Sign of the Cross and the Penitential Act.<sup>30</sup>

## **Liturgy of the Word**

### *Readings*

There may be one or two Scripture readings before the Holy Gospel.<sup>31</sup> Family members or friends of the deceased may be invited to proclaim these readings. Readers should have prior experience as lectors and be able to proclaim the Word of God with clarity and dignity, considering their emotional condition. If there are no qualified lectors or other competent readers among family or friends, the Scriptures may be proclaimed by a parish lector, a deacon, a concelebrant or, if necessary, the celebrant.

### *Responsorial Psalm*

If reasonably possible, the Responsorial Psalm is sung with a cantor leading the congregation in the sung response. No other texts, including songs or hymns, may replace the Responsorial Psalm.<sup>32</sup>

### *Homily*

The homily at the funeral Mass should be brief and “dwell on God’s compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord as proclaimed in the Scripture readings.”<sup>33</sup> The homily should never be in the style of a eulogy, but rather inspire those gathered to find hope in the gift of eternal life and to assist the deceased with the help of their prayers.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Prayer of the Faithful*

The petitions of the Universal or Prayer of the Faithful may be recited by family members or friends of the deceased at the discretion of the celebrant. These prayers are recited from the formulas provided in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. These may be adapted to the circumstances of a particular funeral, or other petitions may be composed.<sup>35</sup>

## **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

### *Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts*

During the Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts, family members and friends of the deceased may be invited to present the bread and wine or other gifts for the poor or the Church.<sup>36</sup> It is the practice in the Diocese of Springfield to incense the gifts, the altar and, if opportune, the casket during the rite.

### *Eucharistic Prayer*

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<sup>30</sup> OCF, 158.

<sup>31</sup> OCF, 165.

<sup>32</sup> GIRM, 61.

<sup>33</sup> OCF, 141.

<sup>34</sup> OCF, 141; GIRM, 382.

<sup>35</sup> OCF, 142.

<sup>36</sup> GIRM, 73.

The Preface and Eucharistic Prayer may be recited or sung. It should be noted that Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and III include the opportunity to pray for the deceased by name. For this reason, their use is particularly appropriate at funeral Masses.<sup>37</sup> In the case of a funeral Mass that is celebrated for a non-Catholic Christian, the name of the deceased is not included in the Eucharistic Prayer.<sup>38</sup>

### *Communion Rite*

Inasmuch as many who are present at a funeral Mass may not be Catholic, a celebrant may wish to offer a brief invitation to those who will receive Holy Communion in these or similar words: "At this time, we invite to receive our Lord in Holy Communion those Catholics who are spiritually prepared to do so."<sup>39</sup>

### **Words of Remembrance**

During the time of the celebration of the funeral rites, family members and friends often wish to speak in remembrance of the deceased. In the Diocese of Springfield, the appropriate time for this address is at the wake, at the time of closing the casket, at the church prior to the start of the funeral Mass, the graveside or the reception. At the Pastor's discretion, words of remembrance may be given during the funeral Mass following the Prayer after Communion.

When words of remembrance are included within the funeral Mass, they should not take the form of a eulogy or general remembrance of the deceased, but rather, focus on the journey of faith and the Christian virtues evident during the life of the deceased. This address is not to be given at the ambo, but from another suitable place. It should be brief, preferably written, and rarely include more than one speaker. The address should express Christian values and a belief in the hope of eternal life. It must avoid any expression that would be inappropriate within the context of sacred worship and must not include anything contrary to the faith, teaching and practice of the Catholic Church.

Parishes are encouraged to develop clear guides and policies for words of remembrance. These are shared with families at the outset of planning the funeral rites.

### **Final Commendation and Farewell**

During the final commendation and farewell, the body may be sprinkled with holy water, if this has not occurred at the beginning of the funeral Mass. The body may also be incensed at this time.<sup>40</sup> This is accomplished by use of the thurible in a reverent and dignified manner. The Paschal Candle may be incensed at this time with three swings of the thurible. (Cf. *GIRM*, art. 277.)

The Song of Farewell is the climax of the rite of final commendation. In addition to the selections given in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, it may also take the form of a responsory or hymn.

In the Diocese of Springfield, it is a laudable practice to sprinkle the casket with holy water as the procession

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<sup>37</sup> *GIRM*, 365.

<sup>38</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "On Public Mass for Deceased Non-Catholic Christians," June 11, 1976.

<sup>39</sup> See: *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 83-84.

<sup>40</sup> *OCF*, 147.

with the body leaves the main body of the church, after the funeral pall has been removed.<sup>41</sup>

### Rite of Committal

Normally, the Rite of Committal is celebrated at the graveside or place of interment. However, it may also take place at a cemetery chapel if circumstances require.<sup>42</sup>

The Rite of Committal offers several optional texts that consider varying circumstances, such as whether the grave or place of interment was blessed previously, or when the final disposition of the body will take place at a later time. When a funeral Mass or Liturgy outside of Mass has not taken place prior to the interment of the body, the “Rite of Committal with Final Commendation” used.<sup>43</sup>


In the Diocese Springfield, the proper vesture for clergy who preside at the Committal is a stole worn over an alb or cassock and surplice. If the circumstances demand it, the stole may be worn over a clerical suit. Laypersons or religious presiding at the Committal should be dressed in an appropriate and dignified manner.

The use of music is encouraged at the Committal service. In particular, a hymn or liturgical song that speaks of God’s love and mercy is recommended at the conclusion of the rite.<sup>44</sup>

Military services, words of remembrance, gestures of leave-taking and other rites and customs may precede or follow the Rite of Committal but should remain distinct from the liturgical celebration of the rite. Such rites or customs are typically coordinated by the funeral director in cooperation with the celebrant of the rite.

These regulations, approved in whole by the Bishop of Springfield, become in force for this Diocese of Springfield on Sunday, 28 November 2021, the First of Advent, for the period *ad experimentum* until Sunday, 05 June 2022, the Solemnity of Pentecost.

From the Chancellor, prepared in cooperation with the Office of Divine Worship.  
Approved in whole by the Most Rev. William D. Byrne, Bishop of Springfield,  
28 October 2021, the feast of the Holy Apostles Simon and Jude.

  
Very Rev. John G. Lessard  
Chancellor



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<sup>41</sup> See *OCF*, 173.

<sup>42</sup> *OCF*, 204.

<sup>43</sup> *OCF*, 205.

<sup>44</sup> *OCF*, 214.