



EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

CATHOLIC PARISH

Funeral Planning Guide



*"Into your hands, Father of mercies, we commend our loved ones, in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, they will rise with him on the last day."
(Excerpt from the "Rite of Christian Funerals")*

Compiled & Produced by Father Michael Geiger ~ Last Revised July, 2017

Introduction

The death of a loved one is always sad and tragic for the human heart. It is always unexpected, no matter if the death was sudden or if the deceased had been ill over a period of time. A funeral is a time flooded with emotions of all kinds that may include grief, sorrow, resentment, bitterness, hurt, anger, confusion, shock, loss, and emptiness. Grief can place a great burden on us, and making the necessary plans can be both a struggle and a trial. Some of these arrangements include the planning of the Funeral Liturgy, also known as the **Funeral Mass**. The Funeral Liturgy, also referred to as the Sacred Liturgy is the perfect prayer of the Church – the highest prayer that we can offer our beloved deceased this side of eternity.

As Catholic Christians, the celebration of the funeral rites recalls for us God's incredible mercy and brings hope and consolation in a time of crisis. This planning guide has been put together to support and help you and your loved ones plan a Funeral – whether that be a Funeral Mass or a Funeral Outside of Mass. Along with Father Michael Geiger, Fr. Tony Vera, Mrs. Shellee Murcko (our Liturgy Coordinator), and Mr. Tony Zsigray (our Director of Liturgical Music) our parish will work compassionately to assist you in planning and preparations. We hope these materials will be a support and help to you in planning a Funeral Liturgy which actively involves those gathered in prayer and grief to give praise to our merciful God.

We realize that most family members of the deceased may not be comfortable with the planning and participation in the Funeral Liturgy, especially during such a difficult time. If you do not wish to participate in the selection of music or family members offering the readings at Mass, please let us know. We will gladly have others assist from the parish with these roles. On behalf of the staff and parishioners of Epiphany of the Lord Parish, may the peace and consolation of Christ be yours in this difficult time. Please know that your parish community holds you in prayer and thought.

The Order of Christian Funerals:

The full order of Catholic Funerals is celebrated in three stages--the vigil service and/or the recitation of the holy rosary, usually done as a part of the visitation and viewing the evening prior to the Funeral Liturgy; the Funeral Liturgy on the following day, and the committal service at the graveside or mausoleum. Each component is an important part of the Funeral Liturgy of the Catholic Church.

The Vigil Service/Visitation

The word “vigil” literally means, “to keep watch with light”. The Vigil Service most often takes place at a funeral home at the conclusion of the visitation, and consists of a Scripture Service and/or recitation of the Rosary. The Vigil Service is the appropriate time to share stories and eulogies about the deceased. It may be possible to incorporate favorite music, whether sacred or secular; the options should be discussed with your Funeral Director. Normally, Deacons at Epiphany of the Lord Parish will lead the Vigil and/or a member of our Altar-Rosary Society, will lead the recitation of the Rosary. Visitation may take place in the funeral home the night before and conclude with Vigil Service (described above), or it may take place in the church prior to the Funeral Liturgy.

The Funeral Liturgy:

This planning guide will assist you in planning the Funeral Liturgy to be celebrated in one of Epiphany of the Lord Parish’s three church campuses: Sacred Heart, St. Stephen, or St. Thomas Aquinas. In some circumstances, a Funeral Service (not a Mass) may take place in the funeral home.

The Committal/Graveside Service:

Most often, the committal/graveside service takes place immediately after the Mass. In unique situations, this may not be true if the burial is to take place in another city, or if the body is to be cremated after the Mass. On rare occasions and for a just cause, a Committal/Graveside Service may take place after the funeral luncheon.

Cremation:

The Church permits Cremation in many situations. The Church requires the cremains to be interred in a grave site or mausoleum just as a body would immediately after the Funeral Liturgy. The Church does not permit cremains to be placed in jewelry, stored as a personal belonging on a shelf, mantle, or area in a residence, scattered over a body of water, or a spread over a field or yard. In order to respectfully care for the cremains, they are to be interred immediately in a grave site or other approved repository.

Funeral Luncheons:

Each church of Epiphany of the Lord Parish has a gathering space for funeral luncheons; there is no fee for use of the space. There are very limited kitchen facilities available. Although some assistance with meal coordination/set-up is provided, generally, licensed caterers must be used and the family is responsible for the cost. If a large number of attendees for the luncheon is anticipated, the luncheon is best held at another facility. Generally, our church halls accommodate up to 100 people comfortably.

Scripture Selections for a Funeral Mass:

The Catholic Church offers a wide selection of Scripture readings for the funeral rites. In the pages following, you will find several scriptural options. To clarify, you will need to choose **three** Sacred Scripture readings for the Funeral Mass:

- † First Reading from the Old Testament
- † Second Reading from the New Testament Epistles
- † Gospel Reading (Father or Deacon will proclaim)

The first and second reading may be proclaimed by a family member or friend. The readers must be baptized Catholics should have a good grasp of the principles of proclaiming the Word of God in public. Be sure to give them a copy of the reading in advance, and encourage them to practice the reading at the ambo (lectern) in church to get the feel of the acoustics and microphone. The responsorial psalm will be chosen and sung by the musician. Readers will sit with their families and will be invited forward by the priest when they are to proclaim the readings. You may choose one, two or three readers to proclaim the readings and the prayers at Mass. - one person for the Old Testament reading, one for the New Testament reading and third for the petitions. Or optionally, the same person may proclaim multiple readings. **At the conclusion of this booklet/guide, are numerous Sacred Scripture readings that may be chosen for a Funeral Liturgy.** Shellee Murcko, Liturgy Coordinator, will be happy to assist your family in Scripture selections.

Music guidelines for Catholic Funerals:

Music is an important part of Catholic funeral rites. Music has the power to strengthen the faith and hope of those present. The hymns chosen should express the mystery of our salvation in Christ, namely, the saving power of the Lord's suffering, death and resurrection. Funeral music should support, console, and uplift those present and help create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christian's share in that victory.

Secular songs (popular/non-religious songs), even though they may have been meaningful to the deceased or the family, do not capture the Gospel message of hope nor the sacred quality of Christian worship, and so secular songs are not appropriate and not permitted for funeral services. Secular songs would be more appropriate for the Vigil Service at the funeral home, or the funeral reception if there is one. On the following page are some hymn titles for your consideration. Other appropriate selections can be made from the parish worship books. Mr. Tony Zsigray, our Director of Liturgical Music, will be of great support to your family if needed, in choosing appropriate hymns.

Suggested Hymns:

Amazing Grace

Ave Maria

Be Not Afraid

Blest Are They

Christ, Be Our Light

Come to the Water

Eat This Bread

Has Not Seen From

Hail Mary: Gentle Woman

Hosea: Come Back to Me

How Great Thou Art

I Am the Bread of Life

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Isaiah 49 Jesus

Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Lead Me, Lord

Like A Shepherd

Lord of All Hopefulness

On Eagle's Wings

Only In God

Prayer of St. Francis

Shelter Me, O God

Speak, Lord

The Lord Is My Light

We Will Rise Again

Yes, I Shall Arise

You Are Mine

You Are Near

Use of Pre-Recorded Music:

The playing of pre-recorded music (CD's, tapes, DVD's etc.) may take place during the visitation, at the Vigil, or at the Committal/Graveside Service. Pre-recorded music **is not** permitted during Mass.

Use of Secular or Popular Music:

Secular or popular music can sometimes be meaningful, and may be included at the Vigil or during the Committal Service. It **may not** be included at the Funeral Mass.

Homily:

You will have the opportunity to share important memories and details about your loved one's life with the priests and Shellee Murcko, Liturgy Coordinator, who will meet with you to assist in the planning of the Funeral Liturgy.

Prayer of the Faithful:

The general intercessions, also known as petitions, come after the homily. In the general intercessions we pray not only for the deceased and his or her family and friends but also for all the dead and those who mourn them, and for the needs of the wider community. One or more family members should read the general intercessions. Shellee Murcko, Liturgy Coordinator, will assist you in preparing these beautiful prayers.

Gift Bearers:

Choose family members or friends of the deceased to bring the gifts of bread and wine to the altar. You should keep in mind, though, that the presentation of the gifts is not the time to carry up personal memorabilia or symbols of the life of the deceased.

Military Honors:

If there will be military honors taking place at the cemetery, your funeral director will assist with necessary arrangements. If the casket comes to the church draped in a flag, the flag is removed before the liturgy begins and then put back on the coffin after the pall has been removed at the end of the liturgy.

Eulogies from Family Members or Loved Ones:

The Rite of Christian Funerals does not include the addition of personal eulogies at a funeral Mass. The rite actually reads, "A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service; but there is never to be a eulogy." (Order of Christian Funerals # 141) The custom of the eulogy comes from Protestant funeral services that may not have the rich ritual and prayers that are ours. Nevertheless, it has indeed become a custom in some places to allow words of remembrance to be said at a Catholic liturgy.

For pastoral reasons, the Church does allow a brief personal reflection to be given. The preference would be that it be done at the Vigil Service, a time when people gather to remember, tell stories, and celebrate the life of the one who has died. In cases where it is not possible to have the eulogy at the vigil service, it may take place at the Committal/Graveside service at the cemetery, rather than at the Funeral Liturgy.

Please remember the following:

- † The remembrance must be brief: no more than 2-3 minutes.
- † No more than one person can speak; another may accompany the person to the ambo/lectern for support, but multiple speakers are not permitted.
- † The remembrance should be well prepared (typed or written) in advance so that it is focused and stays within the 2-3 minute time limit.
- † These guidelines are not meant to squelch remembrance or tribute, but to maintain an atmosphere of reverence and decorum at the Funeral Liturgy.
- † For pastoral reasons, the priest presider may decide to prohibit words of remembrance being given.

The Funeral Liturgy 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. The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass is celebrated when a Mass is not possible or deemed appropriate. It can be celebrated in one of our church campuses, or in the funeral home, or cemetery.

Some families may opt for a Committal/Graveside Service which is when the pastor or deacon conducts a brief prayer service before the body is placed in the ground or in the mausoleum. There we take our leave of our deceased loved one. The rite of committal is simple: the priest leads a short scripture reading, and blesses the grave.

Some important symbols are used during the funeral liturgies:

The Paschal Candle is placed close to the casket when it is received at the church. It reminds us of Christ's presence among us and of his victory over death, a victory in which we share through our baptism.

Holy Water is used to sprinkle the coffin when it is received at the church, and/or during the final commendation at the end of the funeral Mass. It may also be used on other occasions during the wake or funeral: at the gathering in the presence of the body, during the vigil service, when the coffin is being closed, and at the time of committal or burial. The holy water reminds us of our baptism and the baptism of our deceased loved one.

A Pall may be placed on the coffin by family members or friends when it is received at the church. The pall is a large white cloth that covers the coffin during the liturgy. It is a reminder of the white robe that is put on the newly baptized to symbolize his or her new life in Christ. It is also a reminder that all are equal in the eyes of God.

A Bible or Cross may be placed on the coffin. The Bible reminds us that Christians are called to live by the Word of God, and that it is by being faithful to that word that we gain eternal life. The cross reminds us that Christians are marked by the sign of the cross in baptism, and that it was through his suffering on the cross that Jesus won for us the promise of resurrection.

Incense is used to honor the body of the deceased, who through baptism became a living temple of God's presence. It is also a sign of the community's prayers for the deceased rising up to heaven, and a sign of farewell.

Offerings for Funeral:

It is customary for the family to make a financial offering to Epiphany of the Lord Parish if able. This offering covers the costs of the use of the Church facility. This is not required if there is significant financial need. A family may also choose to make a financial offering to the priest or deacon; this is not required and is up to the sole discretion of the family.

A NOTE TO NON-CATHOLICS or NON-PRACTICING CATHOLICS:

In our society, it sometimes happens that the surviving family members of a deceased Catholic are not Catholics themselves or though Catholic, do not practice their faith. Our experience is that sometimes there is confusion about what happens at a Funeral Liturgy and what is permissible. It will be helpful for family members need to understand some basic things about what a Catholic funeral is and how a Catholic funeral must proceed.

A Catholic funeral is an act of worship offered by the local Catholic community in union with the universal Church. Catholic funerals normally take place within a Catholic Church building, since it is a place set aside for prayer and worship.

Since a Catholic funeral is an act of worship, God is always the central focus of our actions. We always listen to God's word in the Bible. We always pray to God through his Son, Jesus Christ, who is Lord and Savior. We always use sacred music. We always try to use musicians and singers (rather than CD players), because the funeral, like all forms of Catholic worship, is a "work" of the Catholic community. The service is led by a priest or a deacon. We always pray for God's help and blessing. We always pray for the deceased person. These actions and dispositions are proper marks of true worship.

Since a Catholic funeral is an act of worship, it goes without saying that the funeral is not meant to be a form of entertainment. It is not meant to be a vehicle for the expression of personal interests. It is not meant to provide a "stage" for friends and family members. It is not meant to be a vehicle for the expression of personalized religious beliefs.

The Catholic Church has a two-thousand year history. Truth, wisdom, and tradition are aspects of the great treasure of the Catholic Faith. From her great storehouse of wisdom and experience, the Church provides directions about how funerals are to be conducted. The Church directs what is to take place during a funeral service. The Church provides the texts and prayers that are to be used. These directives and texts are mandatory. It is always the duty of the priest or deacon to see to it that the Church's norms are followed. For Catholic funerals, the priest or deacon has authority to determine what is acceptable and what is not, and he will be happy to offer guidance and suggestions.

One more thing should be noted: The Catholic Church is compassionate and certainly sensitive to the fact that not all Christians share our Catholic beliefs. We view baptized Christians as our brothers and sisters, and we respect them as such, but we have not yet achieved the unity of faith that all Christians hope for. Non-Catholic Christians have beliefs and practices that differ from those of Catholic Christians. It is important to understand that at Catholic funerals, it is the Catholic faith that will be celebrated, expressed, and vocalized. Of course, non-Catholics are always welcome at Catholic funeral services. They simply need to be aware that the funeral will take place in a Catholic setting and follow a ritual that is based on Catholic beliefs.

When Catholic clergy are called upon to provide funeral services, they will assume that the person making the request seeks to have a funeral that is celebrated according to Catholic beliefs and norms. They will also assume that, even if friends and family members of the deceased do not hold the Catholic Faith, they are willing to give due respect to Catholic practices and authority.

Can Non-Catholics receive Communion at a Catholic Mass?

Unfortunately, those who are not Catholic are not permitted to receive the Holy Eucharist. Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of our oneness in faith, life and worship. Members of churches with whom we are not yet fully united are therefore not permitted to participate in Holy Communion.

We welcome our fellow Christians to the celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Although all are welcome to attend and pray at a Catholic Funeral, all cannot be admitted to Holy Communion. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

Non-Catholics and those not receiving Holy Communion may come forward during to receive a blessing, rather than Holy Communion. As they come forward, it is suggested that they cross their hands over their chest as they approach the priest or deacon. This indicates that they are coming forward for a blessing, and not for Communion.

Summary:

The Catholic Church has over two thousand years' experience escorting the deceased into the Kingdom of Heaven, and just as much experience consoling those who remain by leading through prayer and ritual to a deeper grounding in God's merciful, embracing and infinite love as He leads from life to eternal life. Prayerful preparations and planning of the funeral liturgy will help you and you loved ones deal successfully and gracefully with the ultimate rite of passage through death to life.

We do hope that this booklet helps you, not only celebrate the life of your loved one who has died but also helps bring you, his or her loved ones, the comfort, strength, healing and hope the Catholic Church offers through its Funeral Mass and funeral rituals.