



FUNERAL & BURIAL GUIDELINES FOR PRIESTS

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

Lord God,
you chose our brother N.
to serve your people as priest
and to share the joys and burdens of their lives.

Look with mercy on him
and give him the reward of his labors,
the fullness of life promised to those who preach
your holy Gospel.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Order of Christian Funerals #348-19

I. FUNERALS

A. LAST WILL FUNERAL AND BURIAL INSTRUCTIONS should include:

1. The location of the original copy of your will. All diocesan priests are encouraged to file a copy of their Last Will along with their burial instructions with the vicar general. These documents are to be in separate sealed envelopes which will be placed in each priest's file at the pastoral center.

2. It is recommended that a priest's last will be drawn up by an attorney. A list of possible attorneys can be obtained from the office of the vicar general or the diocesan business office.

3. **Funeral and Burial Instructions should include:**

a. The location of the original copy of your will
and

b. **either** - Simple statement that all funeral and burial arrangements may be left to the discretion of the bishop of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

or

A detailed listing of your instructions regarding your funeral and burial. These could include the funeral director, place of burial, ministers of funeral Mass, pall bearers, homilist, etc. (See Appendix A to this document)



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- c. A list of all relatives who are to be notified with their address and phone numbers

B. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR FUNERALS

1. Christian Burial:

- a. Catholics have a right to Christian Burial unless they are deprived of such by ecclesiastical law. (Canon 1176)

- b. The Order of Christian Burial (ecclesiastical funeral rites) consists of three parts (stations):

- i. The vigil service in the form of a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word or Office of the Dead in the home of the deceased person, in a funeral parlor, or in the church where the body of the deceased has been placed during the period before the funeral rite;
- ii. The eucharistic celebration in the church;
- iii. The rite of committal.

Pastoral Note:

- The recitation of the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not included as one of the options in the official rites of Christian Burial. The rosary may certainly be prayed on the occasion of the death of a Catholic, but should not replace or comprise the Vigil service. Part or all of the Rosary may be incorporated into the Vigil service but is not to be incorporated into the beginning of the Mass or Christian Burial by way of combining Vigil/Mass.

- c. All such rites are to be celebrated according to the norm of liturgical laws (Canon 1176§.2). See entire Order of Christian Funerals (1986) for directives and official texts.

- d. The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the dead be observed (Canon 1176§.3).



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2. Prohibited Days for Funeral Mass:

a. The Funeral Mass has first place among masses for the dead and may be celebrated on any day EXCEPT solemnities that are days of obligation, Holy Thursday, the Easter Triduum and the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 336)

b. If funeral rites take place on these excluded days, it is fitting that there be a liturgy of the word with a rite of commendation and farewell as provided in the Order of Christian Funerals (cf. n. 4 “Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass”). Readings should be selected according to their appropriateness to the liturgical season. Whereas singing is permitted during the celebration, the distribution of Communion is not.

C. PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING THE FUNERALS OF PRIESTS (The word “principle” has a force between law and mere suggestion)

1. The given liturgical structures and processes should be respected with a view to avoiding duplications, repetitions or additions. **The norm is a Vigil service, followed by a Funeral Mass, followed by a Rite of Committal.**

2. The needs of the diocesan community regarding the main Funeral Mass should be respected. Accordingly, the Funeral Mass should be celebrated in a large, centrally located church accessible to the diocesan community.

3. The needs of the people to whom the priest finally ministered should be respected, if the place of ministry does not coincide with number 2 above. Accordingly, part of the whole funeral process (for instance, the vigil service or an additional memorial Mass, but not the main Funeral Mass) may be held at the place of final ministry.

4. Principle of appropriateness should be respected, so that over-planning and the inclusion of unusual elements are avoided. It is important to recognize that the liturgical details will, in actual fact, be worked out by the office of the bishop in consultation with the office of liturgy, the priest’s family, and the relevant parish or institutional ministers.



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Note: *The purpose of these principles is the following:*

- a. *To assist priests in writing funeral instructions.*
- b. *To assist priests in revising instructions already prepared.*
- c. *To assist the bishop in dealing with situations where priests have left no funeral instructions.*
- d. *To assist the bishop in dealing with extraordinary situations.*
- e. *To assist religious priests in the diocese to work out funeral plans without prejudice to the directives of their own orders and congregations.*

D. CREMATION

Cremation, although not prohibited by the church, is not the norm and is not encouraged. Pastors should strive to teach their people the significance of the body and its Christian burial.

General guideline: Cremains demand respect and care in their disposition. Nonetheless, cremains are not accorded the same reverence and rites shown to the body.

Funeral Rites:

1. Normally, the Mass of Christian Burial is celebrated with the body present in the Church. Cremation occurs afterwards. Cremains are not normally brought to the church.
2. Should pastoral sensitivity require the presence of cremains in the Church, a simple memorial Mass with appropriate readings and prayers is celebrated. The special liturgical honors accorded the body are omitted. The Mass of Christian Burial is not to be celebrated with cremains present.

Deposition of Cremains:

Cremains are to be interred. The Order of Christian Funerals may be used.



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Note: *For families wishing cremation and a Mass of Christian Burial with the body present parishes or vicariates could make provision with area mortuaries for a rental casket with insert. This provision allows for the proper celebration of the Order of Christian Funerals without the expense of casket purchase.*

Rationale: *“It does not seem suitable to celebrate with the ashes present the rite which is intended to honor the body of the dead. This is not to condemn the practice of cremation but rather to respect the integrity of the signs within the liturgical action. In fact, the ashes which are an expression of the corruptibility of the human body are unable to express the inherent character of one “sleeping”, awaiting the resurrection. The body, not the ashes, receives liturgical honors since it was made the temple of the Spirit of God in baptism. It is important to respect the verity of the sign in order that the liturgical catechists and the celebration itself be authentic and fruitful.” (Translated from Notitiae, 13, Jan. 1977.)*

How often our own ministry of kingdom-building, of comparing the status quo with the possibilities the reign of God offers us, puts us somewhere between being run out of town and being led to the brow of the hill to be cast over the edge. The only hope in all of this, a hope most fully expressed and made present at liturgy, is the promise of Jesus that giving one's self fully for others means a passage from death to life - that death is indeed overcome, as well as anything that has to do with death; racism, sexism, militarism, the arms race, sickness, poverty, hatred, oppression of every sort.

--Raymond G. Hunthausen (retired Archbishop of Seattle)
from a homily prepared for the meeting
of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions,
San Diego, October 1988