



## ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

### I. Basic background:

The Order of Christian Funerals was promulgated in Latin in 1969 and given as the only form to be used after June 1, 1970. It was mandated for use in the United States in the English edition as of October 1, 1989. Though it is not a sacrament, we include it in these guidelines because of the frequency of its celebration in the parish and the ministry required by many of the parish staff to prepare and celebrate funerals well.

When a death occurs in a family two overwhelming experiences are often faced at once: that of the tremendous loss and sense of grief; and at the same time, the new and stressful experience of preparing for and celebrating the liturgical rites surrounding death. In the face of this situation some people give up on themselves and hand over the liturgical preparation to others: the funeral home staff, the parish grief minister or the pastor. And yet, the preparation of the various funeral services to cover the journey from death to burial can be the most comforting and healing ministry we may ever experience. It is our last gift to the deceased and it can be a deep source of consolation for us. Since we believe death should be celebrated in a positive way, we encourage the full participation of the family.

In addition to the rites of the church being celebrated for the deceased, a funeral is a time of evangelization for the family, the parish and the larger community. It is a time of vulnerability when people are often asking the deeper questions of the meaning of life and the place of faith and religion. A funeral, well celebrated in all three stations can be a source of comfort for many and also conversion for some.

### II. Canonical requirements:

#### Canon 1176 --

§1. *Deceased members of the Christian faithful must be given ecclesiastical funerals according to the norm of law.*

§2. *Ecclesiastical funerals, by which the Church seeks spiritual support for the deceased, honors their bodies, and at the same time brings the solace of hope to the living, must be celebrated according to the norm of the liturgical laws.*

§3. *The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed: nevertheless, the Church does not prohibit cremation unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine.*

#### Canon 1177 --

§1. *A funeral for any deceased member of the faithful must generally be celebrated in his or her parish church.*



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§2. *Any member of the faithful or those competent to take care of the funeral of a deceased member of the faithful are permitted to choose another church for the funeral rite with the consent of the person who governs it and after notification of the proper pastor of the deceased.*

§3. *If a death occurred outside the person's own parish, and the body was not transferred to it nor another church legitimately chosen for the funeral rite, the funeral is to be celebrated in the church of the parish where the death occurred unless particular law has designated another church.*

### **Canon 1180 --**

§1. *If a parish has its own cemetery, the deceased members of the faithful must be buried in it unless the deceased or those competent to take care of the burial of the deceased have chosen another cemetery legitimately.*

§2. *Everyone, however, is permitted to choose the cemetery of burial unless prohibited by law.*

### **Canon 1181 --**

*Regarding offerings on the occasion of funeral rites, the prescripts of can. 1264 are to be observed, with the caution, however, that there is to be no favoritism toward persons in funerals and that the poor are not deprived of fitting funerals.*

### **Canon 1182 --**

*When the burial has been completed, a record is to be made in the register of deaths according to the norm of particular law.*

### **Canon 1183 --**

§1. *When it concerns funerals, catechumens must be counted among the Christian faithful.*

§2. *The local ordinary can permit children whom the parents intended to baptize but who died before baptism to be given ecclesiastical funerals.*

§3. *In the prudent judgment of the local ordinary, ecclesiastical funerals can be granted to baptized persons who are enrolled in a non-Catholic Church or ecclesial community unless their intention is evidently to the contrary and provided that their own minister is not available.*

“Among the Masses for the Dead, the Funeral Mass holds first place. It may be celebrated on any day except for solemnities that are holy days of obligation, Holy Thursday, the Easter Triduum, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, with due regard also for all the other requirements of the norm of the law.” (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, #380).



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### III. Catechetical and Liturgical background:

This ritual is called an “order” because it is celebrated in stages at different times and places; it is “ordered” in the ecclesiastical sense of the word. People are encouraged to celebrate all three pivotal major steps of Christian burial: the Vigil, the Mass of Christian Burial and the Committal Service. Each of these steps plays an important part in helping the survivors to come to accept the fact of death and to make peace with the change it will bring in their lives. It gives them time to express their grief, to remember the departed and to share stories and faith in a safe and familiar environment with family and friends from the parish community.

The actual planning for a funeral may be done unexpectedly when death of a loved one occurs and includes some stress and trauma. However, it may be planned ahead of time by anyone. If this is encouraged by the parish it may be good to consider having special sessions to speak of end-of-life issues, one of which is the planning of the funeral liturgical rites. Done ahead of time it relieves the stress and allows for questions and discussions which can defuse some of the myths and fears surrounding death.

The genius of our liturgical life in the Church is that it is sacramental, it involves ritual and symbol. Through them we enter with our total person, body, soul, mind and spirit, into the expression of our faith and our prayer. We express that which we often cannot verbalize. The psalms allow for deep lament and crying out to God, the sprinkling of holy water and incense remind us of the baptismal life of the person and her or his pleasing fragrance before God. The singing, prayers, presentation of gifts, community procession to receive holy communion and the exchange of peace place us in the midst of community from whom we absorb our strength and witness God's care.

The structure of the ritual allows for choices and personal emotional expression while saving us from the possibility of an uncontrollable grief-stricken outburst, more likely to happen in an unstructured and free-flowing atmosphere. We have centuries old prayers of the church, our Christian symbols and our ritual patterns to guide us. And at the grave we have a final opportunity to say goodbye as we share in the sprinkling of holy water, or place a flower or handful of earth on the coffin as it is lowered. Helping prepare and taking part as ministers in the funeral rites is a time to lovingly hand over our loved one to God.

Funeral and grief ministry are essential elements of parish life. Yet parishes often relegate it to last place due to lack of monetary or personnel resources. We encourage each parish to consider the possibility of providing such for your parishes and missions.



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### IV. Other items to discuss with the family in planning the funeral:

1. Role of the rosary: Part of the family's private prayer during the funeral rites, it may be recited after the sharing of memories at the end of the Vigil.
2. Role of the cantor: Vigil – leads hymns, psalm, Gospel acclamation, Funeral Mass – leads service music and hymns.
3. Recorded music: appropriate use at the sharing of memories.
4. Lay Liturgical ministers: (preferably from the family)  
Assist in selection of readings from Scriptures given in ritual,  
Rehearse with those who will read,  
Invite those able to be servers, distributors, presenters of the gifts.  
Invite family members to place the pall and Christian symbols,  
Invite family to close the coffin,  
Invite family to extend some sign of closure at the committal ritual (placing a flower, putting in a handful of earth, etc.)
5. Funeral reception: Inform family of what is available and whom to contact for luncheon or reception after the funeral services.

Revised & Promulgated  
By Bishop Michael W. Warfel  
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### **Order Of Christian Funerals**

Gathering in the Presence of the Body  
Sign of the Cross  
Scripture Verse  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
Psalm  
The Lord's Prayer  
Concluding Prayer  
Blessing

The vigil/wake time may include many elements; various types of prayer, a caring presence to the family and a time of reminiscing and storytelling. The primary prayer of the community at this step is the Vigil Service, a liturgy of the word. Liturgy of the Hours (Morning and Evening Prayer) are also prayed on occasion. In addition, various other forms of prayer, eulogy and remembrance may be added. The vigil/wake is the best place for personal/familial sharing, rather than the funeral liturgy. It is a more intimate setting and allows for more prolonged sharing of mementos and remembrances.

### **Vigil Service**

#### **With Reception of Body**

#### **Introductory Rites**

Greeting  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
Placing of the Pall  
Entrance Procession  
Placing of Christian Symbols  
Invitation to Prayer  
Opening Prayer

#### **Liturgy of the Word**

First Reading  
Responsorial Psalm  
Gospel  
Homily (*on the scripture*)

#### **Prayer of Intercession**

Litany  
The Lord's Prayer  
Sharing of Memories  
- (*family member/friend may speak*)  
Concluding Prayer

#### **Concluding Rite**

Blessing  
Song/Silence

#### **Without Reception of Body**

Greeting  
Opening Song

Invitation to Prayer  
Opening Prayer

First Reading  
Responsorial Psalm  
Gospel  
Homily (*on the scripture*)

Litany  
The Lord's Prayer  
Sharing of Memories  
- (*family member/friend may speak*)  
Concluding Prayer

Blessing  
Song/Silence



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### Funeral Mass

#### **Introductory Rites**

Greeting  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
Placing of the Pall  
Entrance Procession  
Placing of Christian Symbols  
Opening Prayer

Do not repeat if the body is in the worship space and this has already occurred at the time of the Vigil.

“Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and hope of the just.”

*Order of Christian Funerals #5*

#### **Liturgy of the Word**

Readings  
Homily  
General Intercession

#### **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

#### **Final Commendation**

*(Words of family may be offered here)*

Invitation to Prayer  
Silence  
Signs of Farewell  
Song of Farewell  
Prayer of Commendation

#### **Procession to Place of Committal**

#### **Rite of Committal**

Invitation  
Scripture Verse  
Prayer over the Place of Committal  
*(blessing of the grave, if needed)*  
Committal  
Intercessions  
The Lord's Prayer  
Concluding Prayer  
Prayer over the People  
*(gesture of leave taking)*

“The rite marks the separation in this life of the mourners from the deceased... the act of committal is a stark and powerful expression of this separation. When carried out in the midst of the community of faith, the committal can help the mourners to face the end of one relationship with the deceased and to begin a new one...” (*Order of Christian Funerals, #213*).