



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. An indult was later granted on March 21, 1997, giving permission to allow cremated remains to be present at the Funeral Liturgy and is included as an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Because of the frequency of funerals in parish life and ministry and the sensitivity demanded by the occasion, parish priests and staff and parishioners need to prepare funerals well and celebrate them in a way that both comforts the grieving and provides hope in eternal life.

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, what is often a stressful experience of preparing for and celebrating the liturgical rites surrounding death. In the face of this situation some people prefer to hand over the liturgical preparation to others, namely, the funeral home staff and the parish. And yet involvement of the family with the preparation of the various funeral services, to cover the journey from death to burial, can be a very comforting and healing process. It is the last gift to the deceased and it can be a deep source of consolation. Every legitimate accommodation of the deceased and/or their family, under the guidance of the pastor, should be extended. Christian faith affirms that death should be celebrated in a positive way. While there is the pain of loss, there is also the hope of eternal life through the merits of Christ's death and resurrection.

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. It is not an occasion to question the quality of the deceased individual's practice of the faith nor of his/her family. Unless there has been a renunciation of Catholic faith, challenging a family about a deceased person's inactivity in the church or that of the family is counter-productive. Rather, it is a time to focus on Christian hope and the mercy of God. If there is distance from the church by a family, it is an opportunity to re-invite them to the church. In this light, a funeral, well celebrated in all three stations can be a source of great comfort for many and also conversion for others.

II. Canonical requirements:

Canon 530 –

The following function is especially entrusted to a pastor:

§5. *The performance of funeral rites.*



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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.*
(N.B.: The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. Appendix: #417.)

Canon 1177 --

- §1. *A funeral for any deceased member of the faithful must generally be celebrated in his or her parish church.*
- §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 caution, however, that there is to be no favoritism toward persons in funerals and that the poor are not deprived of fitting funerals.



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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. (Pastors in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings are authorized to use their discretion with regard to these cases without need to have recourse to the local ordinary.)*

“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).

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 grieving family 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 among themselves and friends and members from the parish community.

Planning in advance for a funeral is often overlooked. For many, only when death of a loved one occurs unexpectedly do family members consider arrangements for the funeral. However, it may be planned in advance by anyone but ought to be guided by the pastor to assure conformity to the Order of Christian Funerals (See Funeral Planning Sheet). 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 in advance, it relieves the stress in planning for the funeral and allows for questions and discussions to come before hand which can defuse some



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of the myths and fears surrounding death. It also allows for an individual to have some say in the manner in which their funeral will be celebrated as well as who they prefer to preside at the funeral. The pastor of a parish holds primary responsibility to preside at funerals of his parishioners in his parish. However, unless there is serious reason why a particular priest should not preside at a funeral liturgy in his parish, the pastor, out of charity, may allow another priest to preside, especially if this was the desire of the deceased and/or of the family.

The funeral homily should be somewhat brief (8 to 10 minutes) and be focused on the paschal mystery. Some personal information about the deceased can be important and should be included, but the homily is never to be a eulogy. Nor should the homilist ever assert that the deceased is already in heaven! The funeral liturgy is not a canonization ceremony but a time to pray for the deceased and assist the family members in their time of mourning.

The genius of the Church's liturgical life is that it is sacramental, it involves ritual and symbol. Through them people may enter with their total person, body, soul, mind and spirit, into the expression of Christian faith and worship. Ritual and symbol express that which often cannot be verbalized. The psalms allow for deep lament and crying out to God, the sprinkling of holy water and incense recall 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 the bereaved in the midst of a community from whom they absorb added strength and witness God's care.

At the grave, there is a final opportunity to say goodbye by sharing in the sprinkling of holy water, or by placing a flower or handful of earth on the coffin. At a Catholic funeral, it is encouraged to lower the coffin during the Rite of Committal. Helping prepare a family and allowing them to take part actively in the funeral rites is a time to lovingly assist them to hand over their loved one to God.

Funeral and grief ministry are essential elements of parish life. These should have a primary place in the normal ministry of every parish.

IV. Other items that may be discussed with the family in planning the funeral:

1. Role of the rosary: The rosary is a prayer with deep roots in Catholic tradition. It is an appropriate prayer at the time of death, but it is a prayer in its own right. Families with a devotion to the rosary, may wish to gather to pray the rosary at a special time distinct from the time of the Vigil so that family and friends may gather in prayer.



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2. Role of the cantor: During the Vigil, the cantor leads hymns, responsorial psalm, Gospel Acclamation; during the Funeral Mass, the cantor leads service music, responsorial Psalm and hymns.
3. Recorded music: appropriate for use only at the sharing of memories but not during the funeral liturgy.
4. Slide presentation: appropriate during the Vigil only and best during sharing of memories.
5. Lay liturgical minister roles (Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion, Musicians, choir members and vocalists, etc.) should be properly rehearsed and approved by pastor or equivalent authority prior to the funeral liturgy, especially if they are not parishioners.
6. The liturgical color chosen for funerals should express Christian hope but should not be offensive to human grief or sorrow. In the United States, white, violet, or black vestments may be worn at the funeral rites and at offices and Masses for the dead” (*Order of Christian Funerals #39*). The preferred color for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings is white. While a choice of violet or black is an option in the Order, this should be discussed with the bereaved family prior to the funeral when planning the funeral liturgy.
7. Liturgy planning: Family should assist in selection of readings from Scriptures given in ritual. They may suggest/offer family members/parishioners to fulfill various liturgical roles, e.g. Altar Servers, Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion, etc. They may 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.).
8. Funeral reception: Inform family of what is available and whom to contact for luncheon or reception after the funeral services.

Bishop Michael W. Warfel

Chancellor