

# *Funeral Mass Planning Guide*

Saying Goodbye in Prayer

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has the  
heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for  
those who love Him. (1 Cor 2:9)*



## Introduction

This guide is provided to assist you with pre-planning your funeral and it is our hope that you find it helpful in assisting in this act of love. Whether you are approaching the funeral of a departed loved one or planning ahead to your own funeral, the following resources are meant to assist you in preparing for this moving occasion with dignity, beauty, and all the riches of our Catholic tradition.

*“...When a member of Christ’s Body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love...”*

The Liturgy at a funeral is a beautiful way to ritualize, in ways that are meaningful and spiritual, our belief that one’s life has meaning and purpose on this earth and eternal happiness afterward. The prayers, readings, intercessions, and musical selections should represent the “Prayer of the Church” and still be universal in nature.

In the celebration of the funeral rites, the laity may serve as readers, musicians, ushers, pallbearers, and, if they are already commissioned to do so, as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. The family is encouraged to assist the parish ministers in planning the funeral rites: in the choice of readings from the prescribed scriptural texts, the selection of music appropriate for the rites, and in the designation of liturgical ministers, such as servers and readers.

The purpose of the Funeral Liturgy is to offer worship and thanksgiving to God, the author of all life; to pray for the deceased, and to offer support to the bereaved. The Church encourages us to celebrate a funeral in three main stages:

- The Vigil of Prayer, usually the evening before the funeral.
- The Funeral Liturgy, which may be a Mass (in the Church) or a Funeral Service with Liturgy of the Word only (in a Funeral Home).
- The Committal at the cemetery or crematorium.

## The Vigil

This Vigil (also called “prayer service” or “wake”) is the first stage of the farewell journey. The Catholic Vigil is an occasion for family and friends to gather at the funeral home or a chapel to pray together, grieve together, and remember the life of our loved one, and is usually held the evening before the funeral. In some cases (especially if many people are expected), the Vigil may be held in the church. It often includes:

- A viewing of the body or casket when appropriate
- Scripture reading, singing, intercessory prayer
- Displays of memorabilia and flowers
- Eulogies or sharing of precious memories of the departed (*Eulogies are not permitted to take place during the Funeral Mass*)

The Vigil (*not the Funeral Mass*) is the preferred time for individuals to share remembrances of the deceased, with an emphasis on trust in God's mercy and hope for eternal life, more than simply the telling of stories.

## The Funeral Liturgy

The funeral liturgy normally takes the form of a Funeral Mass, which is held at the parish church. It is also possible to celebrate a "Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass" in cases where the pastor and family deem it appropriate not to celebrate a Mass. The funeral liturgy is the place for the following:

- To give thanks and praise to God for Christ's victory over sin and death.
- To commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion.
- To seek strength in the proclamation of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
- To celebrate special ritual moments such as the procession of the casket, the placing of the pall, and the song of farewell, which help us to grieve with hope and support.

### Mass

The Mass is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral and the Church's main time of prayer for the deceased person. The Eucharist is at the center of the Catholic faith – the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When one of the Church's members dies, it is encouraged that the highest form of prayer, the Mass, is celebrated.

Scripture readings and prayer also play a prominent role in the Catholic funeral, along with songs, hymns, and a brief message. While following the directives of the Church's ritual in planning the liturgical celebration, the choice of music, biblical readings, and homily should reflect the family's wishes, while emphasizing as well the community aspect of faith which remains unbroken in death.

### No Mass

Following careful consideration of the deceased's relationship with the Church, the needs and wishes of the bereaved family, the pastor may offer a funeral liturgy outside Mass to take the form of a Liturgy of the Word. This rite may also be appropriate for a deceased Catholic when no members of the family practice the faith. The Funeral Service usually takes place at the Funeral Home Chapel.

Even though Mass may not be celebrated as part of the funeral rite in these situations, it may be offered at another time for the repose of the soul of the deceased and for the spiritual well-being of the relatives and friends.

## The Committal

The Rite of Committal is the final ritual of the community of faith in caring for the body or cremated remains of the deceased member. The burial (also called the "committal"), takes

place at the cemetery after the funeral liturgy. It may occur immediately after the funeral or at another time. The committal includes:

- Brief prayers, scripture reading, the Lord's Prayer ("Our Father"), and a blessing of the remains.
- Military honours for veterans.
- Placing flowers or earth on the casket if desired.
- The casket may be lowered into the ground.
- Cremated remains are either buried or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium.

The Catholic Church has always preferred traditional burial over cremation, as it better expresses the reverence and beliefs we hold regarding the human body. The cremated remains of the deceased must be given the same respect as a body is given during the Rite of Committal and should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium.

**Please note:** The practice of scattering ashes over the sea, on the ground, or from the air is not permitted for Catholics and is not considered to be the reverent disposition of the cremated remains. Catholics should never retain the cremated remains in their homes, places of work, or any other personal space. Neither should Catholics divide and share the cremated remains of the deceased.

## Scripture Readings

Two readings may be selected for use during the Funeral Liturgy. The first reading is taken from the Old Testament and the second is selected from the New Testament options. The Responsorial Psalm should always be sung. The Psalm should never be replaced by a regular hymn which contains no psalmody. The Gospel will be selected by the Presider. The Gospel may only be proclaimed by a priest or deacon.

For a list of suggested readings please contact the parish office or go to our website at [www.allsaintslethbridge.org/funerals.html](http://www.allsaintslethbridge.org/funerals.html).

The General Intercessions are to be taken from *The Order of Christian Funerals*.

## Music Selections

Sacred music is an integral part to the celebration of the funeral liturgy. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love. The selection of music must be liturgical and express our Christian belief in the gift of the resurrection. Religious hymns should speak to the mysteries of our Faith regarding death and resurrection.

While popular music may warm the hearts of those who are left behind, it must never replace sacred music, and is not suitable for a Funeral liturgy. Such music is better suited to be played during the visitation or during the luncheon, if applicable. Every effort must be made to accompany the funeral rites with appropriate hymns, responses, and acclamations.

The parish hymnal is an excellent resource for this purpose. Secular or pre-recorded music is not permitted within the Liturgy; however, secular songs important to the deceased might be included during the reception or other family gatherings.

For a list of suggested hymns please contact the parish office or go to our website at [www.allsaintslethbridge.org/funerals.html](http://www.allsaintslethbridge.org/funerals.html).

## **Liturgical Ministers**

Keeping in mind that liturgical roles are to be fulfilled only by Catholics, members of the family who are Catholic are encouraged to assume the role of readers and assist in the offertory procession. They may receive Holy Communion under both species. In accordance with the Church's teaching, Holy Communion is not given to non-Catholics, but they may serve as pallbearers.

Consider the different ministerial roles at a funeral, and suggest individuals you would like to fill those roles.

The casket remains closed during the Funeral Mass and should be covered with a white pall in remembrance of the baptismal garment. In addition to its liturgical significance, the pall serves a very practical purpose: it avoids ostentation, prevents possible embarrassment of the poor and emphasizes Christians' equality before God.

## **Other Considerations**

### **Funeral Mass Stipends**

Most funeral directors itemize all costs within their billings. This is something that should be discussed with them.

### **Mass Intentions**

It is important for a Catholic to have the Mass offered for the repose of their soul. Traditionally this is shortly following the death, a month after death and annually on the anniversary of death. Please speak to the Priest and he will help in arranging for the Mass to be offered.

## Initial Information

Name of Deceased: \_\_\_\_\_

Next of Kin: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (h) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) \_\_\_\_\_

Funeral Home: \_\_\_\_\_

## Prayer Vigil

Prayer Vigil Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like these additional elements included in my Vigil:

- ☐ Display of Memorabilia    ☐ Rosary  
☐ Sharing of Memories    ☐ Video/Slide Show  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Eulogy (*name of Eulogist*): \_\_\_\_\_

## Funeral Liturgy

I would like my Funeral Liturgy to be a:    ☐ Mass    ☐ No Mass

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I wish to be buried    ☐ I wish to be cremated

Cemetery: \_\_\_\_\_

Interment:    ☐ After Mass    ☐ After Reception    ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Honour Guard

☐ Catholic Women's League Council: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Knights of Columbus Council: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Readings

Scripture readings I would like at my funeral:

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm (*sung by choir*): \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Gospel (*read by priest or deacon*): \_\_\_\_\_

1<sup>st</sup> Reading read by: \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading read by: \_\_\_\_\_

## Hymn Choices

Hymns I would like at my funeral:

Prelude: \_\_\_\_\_

Entrance: \_\_\_\_\_

Offertory: \_\_\_\_\_

Communion: \_\_\_\_\_

Meditation: \_\_\_\_\_

Recessional: \_\_\_\_\_

**Organist** (*needs approval of priest*): \_\_\_\_\_

**Cantor/Choir** (*needs approval of priest*):

☐ Resurrection Choir

☐ Other Choir: \_\_\_\_\_

**Soloist** (*if applicable*): \_\_\_\_\_

## Funeral Reception

I would like the reception after the funeral to take place at: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Liturgical Ministers *(Sections may be left blank if you wish the parish to provide ministers for you)*

**Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion** *(family or friends who have been trained and commissioned as Eucharistic Ministers):*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Altar Servers** *(needs approval of priest if applicable):*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Gift Bearers** *(bring bread and wine at offertory):*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Family representatives placing the Pall** *(if applicable):*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Pall Bearers:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Comments

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed by me: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please keep this booklet with your papers at home, and a copy with:

- 1) Your Parish;
- 2) Your Will at your Solicitors;
- 3) Your Next of Kin; and
- 4) Your nominated Funeral Director (if you have a pre-paid funeral plan).