

# Archdiocese of Dublin Funeral Ministry

*'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the  
death of his faithful ones' Psalm 116:15*

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## Introduction

The Christian community since the earliest times has accompanied people through providing a ritual framework within which a funeral takes place. These rites are acts of public worship at which a number of elements are involved: God is praised; the Resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed conveying the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom; prayers are offered for the soul of the deceased person and the bereaved are consoled. Principles apply to these rites which can enrich the experience for the bereaved family and the wider community. Through these rituals, which expresses our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, space is offered to the bereaved family to express grief and sorrow. They also provide an opportunity to celebrate the life and memory of the deceased person.

Over a period of time members of a Diocesan Working Group, which included those engaged in the funeral ministry from pastoral and professional perspectives have been engaged in discussion and consultation on how funerals are organised and celebrated in this Diocese. Parishes and funeral ministry teams formed part of this consultative process. We are very grateful to the Irish Association of Funeral Directors who made a significant contribution to the shaping of this document. The principal aim of this process of reflection is to improve, where possible, the ministry of accompaniment and consolation to the bereaved, and the dignified and worthy celebration of funeral rites. These discussions take into account the changing reality of Irish society today. This fresh look considers the ageing population which can be concentrated in certain parishes or groupings. It looks to the future when the lay faithful will be more centrally involved in carrying out this ministry in our parishes. It also acknowledges the relative distance of many people from parish life and religious practice in recent times. This document is the fruit of this work and lays out Diocesan Policy in this important area of pastoral ministry.



“As they celebrate the funerals of their brothers and sisters, Christians should be intent on affirming their hope for eternal life. They should not, however, give the impression of either disregard or contempt for the attitudes or practices of their own time and place. In such matters as family traditions, local customs, burial societies, Christians should willingly acknowledge whatever they perceive to be good and try to transform whatever seems alien to the Gospel. Then the funeral ceremonies for Christians will both manifest paschal faith and be true examples of the spirit of the Gospel.”

(Introduction - *Rite of Christian Funerals*, Art.2)

# What Happens When a Member of the Christian Community Dies?

## Initial Contact

When someone in the parish dies and a church funeral is requested, the Priest/Pastoral Team or Parish Office should be contacted as soon as possible, by a family member or, as is often practice, by the Funeral Director. An appropriate pastoral response to the bereaved family requires that a good system of communication between the Funeral Director and the Parish is already in place. When the Parish Office is closed each parish or grouping of parishes should have an 'out of hours' contact phone number that is known to Funeral Directors. It would seem appropriate for the Funeral Director to make initial contact in advance of meeting with the family so that the Parish can prepare for the funeral. In this way too the Funeral Director will have a clear idea from the parish of available times for the funeral to help them when planning with the family.

## Good Communication

Efficient communication can help the bereaved family feel very much part of the early preparation in planning the funeral. Once provisional times and dates are organised the family can meet with the priest and/or the members of the funeral team to prepare the various rites. The Funeral Director may make the family aware that there is the possibility of the celebration of a funeral in the Roman Catholic Church with the Mass or a Funeral Liturgy when Mass is not celebrated.

For pastoral reasons it is Diocesan Policy that Funeral Masses are not to be celebrated in Crematorium Chapels, Funeral Homes or similar locations as these celebrations properly belong in the parish church, the centre of the faith community.

## Prayer Resources

It is more appropriate for the priest/deacon/parish pastoral worker or funeral ministry team members to bring the relevant materials and resources directly to the family such as the Parish Funeral Rites Booklet, Choice of Readings and Sample Intercessions.

## Gathering in the Presence of the Body

There are also other opportunities for prayer which might be considered, such as, gathering in the presence of the body at home, in the funeral home, or mortuary chapel.

“In any celebration for the deceased, whether a funeral or not, the rite attaches great importance to the readings from the word of God. These proclaim the paschal mystery, they convey the hope of being gathered again in God’s kingdom, they teach remembrance of the dead, and throughout they encourage the witness of a Christian life.”

(Introduction - *Rite of Christian Funerals*, Art.11)

## Support in Making Choices

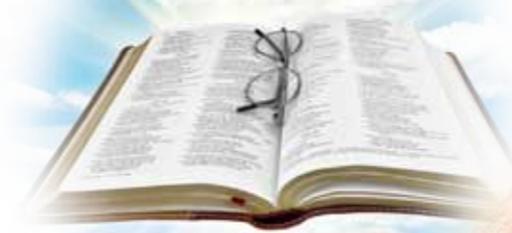
It is important that those who have direct contact with the bereaved in the planning of a funeral make them aware of the liturgical possibilities – Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy (Prayer Service) without Mass. No impression should be given that one choice of liturgy is preferred over the other. In drawing attention to the presence of Christ in Sacrament and Word the priest or member of the funeral ministry team will help the bereaved come to a decision that is most appropriate in the circumstances.

### The Funeral Mass

The Second Vatican Council said that the Mass or Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ By this it meant that the Eucharist was the source or font from which the Christian faith is nourished and simultaneously the summit or highest point of worship of God. The integrity of the Eucharist is maintained by stressing the need for appropriate words, liturgical music and actions. At this difficult time music can be very helpful and consoling. There are times when particular musical preferences are discouraged as they are not in keeping with the celebration of the funeral rites or a place of Christian worship. A wide range of suggestions are available see (appendices on website).

### Funeral Services when a Mass is not celebrated

The Order of Christian Funerals provides a Rite of a Funeral Liturgy of the Word when a Mass is not celebrated. This consists of the following: Entrance Procession, Introductory Prayers, Scripture readings, Homily/ Reflection, Prayer of the Faithful and concluding with the final Prayers of Commendation. Family members may be involved through presentation of symbols related to the person, reading from the Scriptures, delivering an appreciation of the person. The Funeral Liturgy when Mass is not celebrated may be led by a priest, deacon, or parish pastoral worker or some other suitable trained and appointed lay person.<sup>1</sup>



“Priests are to be particularly mindful of those who attend liturgical celebrations or hear the Gospel because of the funeral, but are either non-Catholics or Catholics who never or seldom take part in the Eucharist or have apparently lost faith. Priests are, after all, the servants of Christ’s Gospel on behalf of all.”

(Introduction - Rite of Christian Funerals, Art.18)

## Funeral Ministry Team

Every parish in the Archdiocese of Dublin is encouraged to have a funeral ministry team. The team consists of religious and lay, men and women, who have been trained in providing support at a time of loss. The team will assist in helping to organise a Christian funeral with the help of the comforting rituals that the Church has to offer the bereaved.

On receiving word of the death of a person, one or two members of the funeral ministry team may visit the bereaved family either on their own or with the priest, deacon or parish pastoral worker. The purpose of the visit is to sympathise with the family, to bring the Peace and Hope that the Gospel has to offer and to assure the bereaved family that the parish community is praying for them and their loved one.

They will also bring the Parish Funeral Rites Booklet which contains the Scripture Readings and sample intercessions for the Prayer of the Faithful which will be used during the funeral ceremony. They may discuss the liturgy and help the family make the decisions on choosing the appropriate readings and prayers for the deceased person.

Members of the funeral ministry team may be involved in leading some of the prayers at the family home or the funeral home, in the church or at the graveside or crematorium.

The diocese is committed to providing ongoing training to funeral ministry teams both centrally and locally.

“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.”

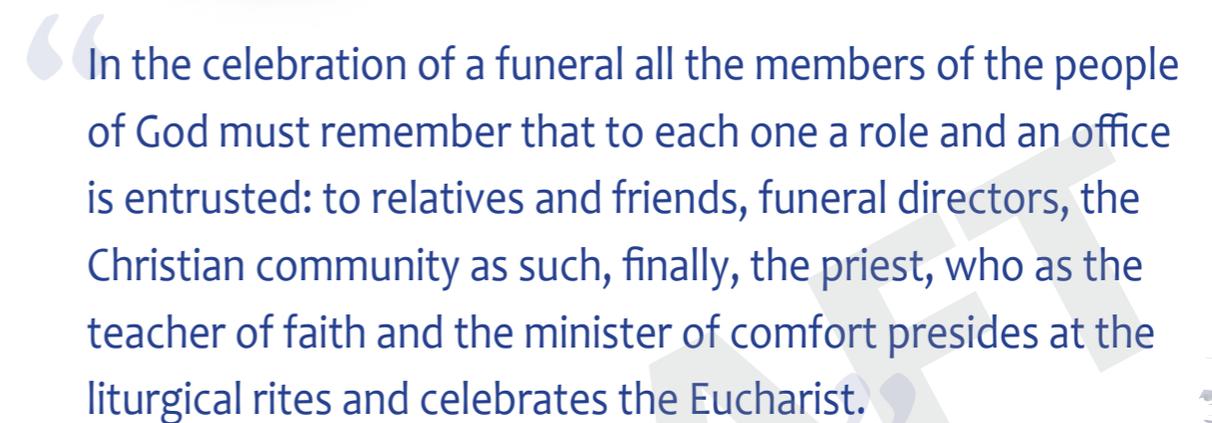
(Introduction – *The Order of Christian Funerals* Art.8)

## The Role of the Funeral Director

The Funeral Director plays a significant role in ensuring that so many things connected with the funeral occur in an appropriate, timely and fitting manner. Funeral Directors, in the first instance, assist the bereaved after the moment of the death of the deceased until after the burial or cremation. The role of the Funeral Director is essentially twofold: the first is the care of the body of the deceased. The second consists in the care of the family of the deceased person by co-ordination of the funeral arrangements.

Traditionally in Ireland funerals have taken place very quickly, often less than forty-eight hours after death has occurred. Changes in society and in the Church require a review of this practice. Increase in the number and frequency of funerals, the desire by families and the Christian community to make funerals fitting celebrations; the availability of priests; the travel needs of family members living abroad, all must be taken into consideration. It is suggested that the Funeral Director alert family members to the fact that these elements require co-ordination and that while every effort will be made to meet the wishes of the family all the above factors must be taken into account, and will influence the timing of the funeral.

The Funeral Director should advise the family to discuss with the priest and the funeral ministry team the range of possibilities available with regard to the various funeral rites. This will help the family in making the choice that is most appropriate for the deceased person.



“In the celebration of a funeral all the members of the people of God must remember that to each one a role and an office is entrusted: to relatives and friends, funeral directors, the Christian community as such, finally, the priest, who as the teacher of faith and the minister of comfort presides at the liturgical rites and celebrates the Eucharist.

*(Introduction - Rite of Christian Funerals, Art.16)*

## Words of Appreciation

While it is not actually a part of the Christian Funeral Rite, a custom has begun at some funerals of a eulogy or an appreciation of the person being given by a relative or a friend of the deceased. Sensitivity has to be exercised around this as occasionally insensitive and indeed inappropriate things have been said at funerals. Saying something uplifting and in a spirit of appreciation about the person who has died should be the main emphasis of these words.

Best practice suggests the following:

- A few words on behalf of the family is possible but not obligatory. People should feel totally free not to have one.
- They should be brief, no longer than five minutes and delivered by one person.
- An immediate family member may not always be the best person to offer the words of appreciation, particularly if they are not accustomed to public speaking or overcome with grief. Someone who is once removed or a family friend could be more suitable.
- They should be short and only contain words of tribute to the deceased and of thanks to those who have helped and supported the deceased's family during this time.
- When there is a Funeral Mass, the Words of Appreciation should take place outside of the Liturgy of the Mass. A number of possibilities are suggested.
  - At the Reception of the Body at the Church, commonly referred to as the 'Removal'.
  - Before the Funeral Mass begins (in the event there was no 'Removal' the previous evening).
  - Immediately after the Concluding Rite of the Mass and just before the Prayers of Commendation and Farewell.
  - At the Crematorium or Graveside.

## Removal of the Body to the Church

Often the body of the deceased is received into the Church on the morning of the Funeral Mass. It is good practice that the celebration of the Eucharist begins at the designated time and that the funeral announcement indicates that the body will be received 15 minutes before the start of the Mass. This time provides an opportunity for a number of elements to happen.

The Bible and the Cross as important Christian symbols and funeral Pall can be placed on the coffin accompanied by designated prayers. A relatively new custom, which is not strictly part of the Funeral Rites, is the presentation of mementoes of the person who has died symbolising aspects of their life, work, interests, achievements etc. These can be placed on a 'table of remembrance' placed in the sanctuary or near the coffin. They are not gifts and so are unsuitable for the Offertory Procession. This time before the Eucharist begins affords an opportunity for some words of appreciation and welcome to be offered.

## Appendices

See [www.dublindiocese.ie](http://www.dublindiocese.ie) for

- Music suggestions and resources
- Sample of Funeral Participation Leaflet
- Do's and Don'ts for Words of Appreciation
- Resources for Funeral Ministry Teams
- A helpful checklist for the bereaved and Parish Team
- Diocesan Guidelines for planning, construction and maintenance of Columbaria
- Diocesan Guidelines in dealing with various media outlets and social media platforms
- Diocesan Policy on what can be placed on a coffin, ie., Flags, Military/Garda Insignia etc.
- Links to various websites and publications that will help in drawing up the Parish Funeral Rites Booklet.

*Diocesan Policy Prepared with the assistance of:*

**Parish Funeral Ministry Teams**

**Irish Association of Funeral Directors**

**Diocesan Council**

**Chancellery**

**Diocesan Council of Priests**

**Vicars Forane**

**Diocesan Liturgical Resource Centre**

**Office for Evangelisation and Ecumenism**

Archdiocese of Dublin