



# POLICIES OF THE DIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY ~ ST. JOSEPH

Policy #: 130.1

Order of Christian Funerals

Approved By: Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland, D.D.

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## [Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph](#)

- Ordinarily, those who are divorced and remarried may have Catholic funeral rites,<sup>1</sup> if public scandal will not ensue.<sup>2</sup> In case of doubt, the pastor should ordinarily choose to provide the appropriate rites.
- Non-practicing Catholics may be given Catholic funeral rites at the request of the family. Such are moments for evangelization and outreach.
- Those who have died by suicide should not as a rule be denied Catholic funeral rites in the Church.<sup>3</sup>
- Catholic funeral rites can be celebrated for baptized non-Catholics,<sup>4</sup> provided that this is not contrary to their will and provided that their own minister is unavailable.<sup>5</sup> Their own minister is considered unavailable if they have not participated in their own denomination for some time.

The Order of Christian Funerals

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that rituals for Christian burial should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death, conform to various cultural traditions, and be adapted to local circumstances.<sup>6</sup> The Order of Christian Funerals (1989) [OCF] and its Appendix for Cremation with its prayers and commentary is the fruit of that effort for adaptation and presents a number of additions and modifications to reflect funeral customs in the United States. It is intended for use by the ordained and the laity who minister at the time of death and shows how both can share in a common ministry of consolation and hope.

Vigil Service

Above all, the vigil provides an opportunity for a specifically Christian expression of the meaning of death and for prayer on behalf of the deceased. The scriptural model presented in OCF for a vigil service is to be preferred to other forms of vigil service.

- However, Catholics have long treasured the practice of praying the Rosary at vigil services. While no mention is made of the Rosary in the rite, the practice of praying the Rosary is not to be discouraged, but rather encouraged as a way for the family and friends to pray together at some other appropriate time.
- If a relative or friend wishes to speak about the deceased,<sup>7</sup> it is preferably done at the Vigil Service rather than during the Funeral Mass.<sup>8</sup> The customs of different ethnic communities may require some pastoral flexibility regarding the proper moment for family and friends to speak about the deceased. However, this never displaces the homily.
- The custom of waking the body in the parish church is permissible, and may be encouraged.

## Funeral Liturgy

### The Mass

Since the Eucharistic celebration is the central prayer of the faithful Catholics while they live, it is most appropriate that the Eucharistic liturgy be celebrated in connection with their death.<sup>9</sup>

- A Funeral Mass is to be celebrated only in a parish church; it is never to be celebrated at a funeral home or in the chapel of a cemetery.<sup>10</sup>
- It should be noted that "Funeral Masses," "Funeral Liturgy," or "Mass of Christian Burial" are the correct titles for the Eucharist celebrated either prior to burial or with the presence of cremated remains. The title "Mass of the Resurrection" is not used appropriately when referring to a Funeral Mass.
- Parishioners should always be encouraged to participate in the Funeral Mass. Evening Funeral Masses may allow for greater participation. A Funeral Mass may also be celebrated at a regularly scheduled weekday Mass.
- A Funeral Mass may be celebrated on all days except during the Sacred Triduum, on Holydays of Obligation, Holy Thursday, and Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season.<sup>11</sup>
- Funeral Masses may also be celebrated, for good reason, on a Sunday in Ordinary Time, but not ordinarily at a regular parish liturgy. On restricted days (listed in the previous paragraph) other than the Triduum, the Mass of the day with the Introductory Rite and Commendation and Farewell from the OCF is to be celebrated.
- During the Triduum, the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass may be used in the parish church.

If the only time the person can be buried coincides with one of these restricted days, the body may be brought to the church for a non-Eucharistic liturgical service. In this case, the rites from the various sections "Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass" are to be used.<sup>12</sup>

The OCF explicitly forbids eulogies.

- The Rite specifies that a "brief" homily should not be a eulogy, but should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the Paschal Mystery of the Lord, how this mystery was present in the life and death of the deceased and that this mystery is active in the lives of those who are present as well.<sup>13</sup>
- If one family member wishes to speak in remembrance of the deceased, it is preferable that it be done at the Vigil. If it is necessary for someone to speak after Communion, prior to the Commendation and Farewell, remarks should be limited to two minutes, and should be reviewed by the presider before Mass.

The rite permits the designation of a lay person to lead the prayers after death, for the Vigil, and at the cemetery or mausoleum,<sup>14</sup> when it is not possible for a priest or deacon to be present. Pastoral Administrators in parishes served by a Sacramental Minister can

have a suitable share in leading the various funeral rites.<sup>15</sup> For good reason, a layperson may lead the Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass either in a funeral home or in church.<sup>16</sup>

## Funeral Rites for Children

- When preparing to celebrate the funeral of an infant or child, presiders are strongly encouraged to read closely the introduction to this section of the rite, numbers 234-242.
- Especially at the death of a child, the Christian community seeks to offer support and consolation to the parents and family during and after the time of the funeral rites.<sup>17</sup>
- Those adults who have lost children of their own are to be especially encouraged to support the bereaved in their struggle to accept the death of a child.<sup>18</sup>
- In the preparation of a Funeral Mass for a deceased child, if it is foreseen that many children will be present, the principles contained in the Directory for Masses with Children may be considered.
- Funeral rites may be celebrated for any infant or child whose parents intended them to be baptized but who died before baptism. In such celebrations, the Christian community entrusts the child to God's love and finds strength in Jesus' affirmation that the Kingdom of God belongs to little children.<sup>19</sup> Planners and presiders should take particular care to use the prayers and readings provided in the rite for this circumstance.
- The "Rite of Final Commendation for an Infant" may be used in the case of a stillborn or a newborn infant who dies shortly after birth. This rite is a model and the minister should adapt it to circumstances. It may be used in the hospital or place of birth or at the time of the committal of the body.<sup>20</sup> The Book of Blessings offers a blessing for parents after a miscarriage.

## Cremation

The Church "earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the body of the deceased be observed." However, cremation is permitted as long as it is not chosen for reasons contrary to Christian teaching.

- The extent to which the Rites of the Order of Christian Funerals may be used depends on when the person is cremated. Prior to cremation, the family may wish a viewing, a Vigil Service and a Funeral Mass. These rites are to be made available to a person who will be cremated afterwards. The rite also allows the commendation to be celebrated at the crematorium, prior to the cremation.<sup>21</sup>
- If, however, the person is cremated immediately after death, the rites may be celebrated at an appropriate and convenient time with the cremated remains present in a suitable and dignified container. Consult the Appendix for Cremation for the Order of Christian Funerals for the directions, rubrics, and texts for the Funeral Liturgy celebrated in the presence of cremated remains.
- The remains of cremated bodies should be treated with the same respect as the corporeal remains of the human body. The cremated remains of a body should be interred or entombed. The practices of scattering cremated remains or keeping the remains in the home of a relative or friend are not the reverent disposition the Church requires. Whenever possible, appropriate means for memorializing the deceased should be utilized, such as a plaque or stone that records the name of the deceased.<sup>22</sup>
- Columbaria - niches for entombment of cremated remains - are not permitted in churches or public oratories within the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph.

## Record Keeping

After the burial, an entry is to be made in the register of the dead<sup>23</sup> for the parish in which the funeral took place.

<sup>1</sup> The pastoral determination of which of the rites offered in the Order of Christian Funerals may be most appropriate for a given situation is best made in dialogue with the family of the deceased.

<sup>2</sup>

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "On Ecclesiastical Burial of Manifest Sinners," September 20, 1973.

<sup>3</sup> For catechetical background on the matter of suicide, see CCC, 2280-2283.

<sup>4</sup> CF footnote 2.

<sup>5</sup> Canon 1183, §3.

<sup>6</sup> *Order of Christian Funerals*, 81-82. For catechetical background on death and resurrection, see CCC, 988-1060.

<sup>7</sup> *OCF*, 366.

<sup>8</sup> *OCF*, 170.

<sup>9</sup> *OCF*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> While not to be preferred or encouraged, it has been a custom of several decades' duration for Funeral Masses to be offered in the Horrigan Chapel at Mount Olivet Cemetery in St. Joseph. This location is the *only* exception to the rule restricting the location for Funeral Masses.

<sup>11</sup> *OCF*, 178.

<sup>12</sup> *OCF*, 177-203.

<sup>13</sup> *OCF*, 27.

<sup>14</sup> *OCF*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> As one example, the Pastoral Administrator could pray with the family in their home immediately following the death, could lead prayer at the first viewing of the body (Gathering in the Presence of the Body) and, possibly, preside at the Vigil. The Sacramental Minister could then preside at the Funeral Liturgy and Rite of Committal. The decisions regarding prayer leadership should be made collaboratively, while keeping the feelings and preferences of the family in mind.

<sup>16</sup> The designated layperson should have received specialized formation in this ministry, for example, the diocesan program for Lay Leaders of Prayer.

<sup>17</sup> *OCF*, 238.

<sup>18</sup> *OCF*, 240.

<sup>19</sup> *OCF*, 247-294.

<sup>20</sup> *OCF*, 318, 337-341; "Texts of Sacred Scripture," Part III, 15.

<sup>21</sup> *OCF*, 204.

<sup>22</sup> Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites by the Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

<sup>23</sup>

Canon 1182.