



Killaloe Diocese

FUNERAL GUIDELINES

Killaloe Diocesan Liturgy Group

Approved 2024



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Introduction

Reverence and respect, coupled with pastoral and spiritual care have always been the hallmark of how the Christian community cared for the dead and for the bereaved. Culturally, funeral rites have played a significant role in the day to day lives of the People of God. At a personal level all of us have journeyed with a family member, a loved one, or a friend in their final days or we have supported a grieving loved one.

At times of such loss, we gain additional meaning and hope from our faith and the support we receive from the faith community we call Church. Our faith that tells us that we are created for eternal life, that Jesus by his death and resurrection has broken the power that death has over us. This reality is captured in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. For where he has gone, we hope to follow.

‘You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized into his death; in other words when we were baptized, we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection’ (Romans 6:3-5).

Why we pray for the dead and journey with the bereaved.

We invest time and resources in the Funeral Rites because in faith we believe that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds we forged in this life. It is also the reason that we minister to those who are mourning. By our pastoral care of the bereaved we live out the command of Jesus to love our neighbour. In how we perform the funeral rites with our use of scripture we give comfort. In the rituals of sacrament, we endeavour to instil faith filled hope. In the words of the Order for Christian Funerals the praying Christian community hopes 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 the hope of the just.’
(Order of Christian Funerals – General Introduction)

The human reality of loss, grief and separation can disempower us, yet our belief in one ‘communion of saints’ reminds us that that our departed benefit from our prayers. At the final commendation and farewell we acknowledge this sense of separation but in doing so we commend our departed to the love and mercy of God. Yet again affirming the spiritual bond between the living and the dead. It also affirms that one day we will all be reunited in a new heaven and a new earth where death will be no more.

The celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living. While proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and witnessing to Christian hope in the resurrection, the funeral rites also recall to all who take

*part in them God's mercy and judgment and meet the human need to turn
always to God in times of crisis.
(Order of Christian Funerals – General Introduction)*

We hope that these Diocesan Guidelines will enable parishes and Pastoral Areas to make this a lived reality for our faithful departed, for those who mourn their loss, and for those who exercise various funeral ministries at this crucial time in the lives of the People of God and the broader community.

In presenting these guidelines we are very conscious of the demands that funerals place on the pastoral life of parishes and Pastoral Areas. The availability of clergy and our neglect in empowering and enabling people to exercise this ministry as outlined in the Order for Christian Funerals is all too evident. With the implementation of these guidelines, it is hoped that our dead will be prayed for, our bereaved will be accompanied, and those who minister as part of Funeral Teams will be equipped, guided, and supported in their role.

[A Pastoral Response inspired by Gospel values.](#)

In this regard we take our lead from Jesus himself.

*While he was speaking to them, suddenly one of the officials came up, who bowed low in front of him and said, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved.'
Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him.
(Matthew 9:18-19)*

It is hoped that each Pastoral Area would establish a means by which a bereaved family and Funeral Directors can make contact easily and efficiently with a member of the Pastoral Area Team or a member of the Funeral Ministry Team in each parish or Pastoral Area. This is important so that an appropriate pastoral response can be made. It is vitally important that good lines of communication are already in place between Funeral Directors and Pastoral Area Teams. Due to the nature of this ministry Funeral Directors would need to have an out of hours contact phone number. The Diocese encourages Funeral Directors to contact the Parish at the earliest convenience so that the parish is aware of the upcoming funeral. Early contact also offers an opportunity to explore times and availability to enable initial planning with the bereaved family.

[Resources](#)

The Order of Christian Funerals contains a wealth of resources to help guide and support both the bereaved and those who minister to them as they journey toward the funeral Mass and Rites of Committal. It is not expected that all these prayers are said. The Vigil for the Deceased, Funeral Mass/Liturgy and Rite of Committal should be given priority where possible.

- Prayers for the Dead
- Gathering in the Presence of the Body
- Vigil for the Deceased
- Transfer of the Body to the Church
- Reception of the Body at the Church
- The Funeral Mass
- Reception of the Body before the Funeral Mass/Liturgy
- Funeral Liturgy outside Mass
- Rite of Committal

It is appropriate for the Presider/Minister of Pastoral Care or a Funeral Ministry Team members to bring the relevant materials and resources directly to the family such as the Parish Funeral Booklet, Choice of Readings, Music, and sample Intercessions.

Moments for Prayer on the Funeral Journey

Gathering in the Presence of the Body

Following the death of a parishioner there are many opportunities for prayer which might be considered, these include, Prayers after Death, Gathering in the presence of the Body at home, in the funeral home, or mortuary chapel and the Vigil for the Deceased. These prayers can be found in the Order for Christian Funerals. Coupled with these structured moments of prayer the Rosary has always played a significant role in the funeral journey.

Removal of the Body to the Church

The body of the deceased is received into the Church on the evening before or on the morning of the Funeral Mass. It is good practice that the celebration of the Eucharist begins at the designated time which may necessitate the body being received earlier than the announced funeral Mass time. This gives the family time to find their place in the church and for the different elements involved in this part of the ceremony to take place.

This includes:

- The reception of the body at the Church
- The placing of the Pall on the coffin as a reminder of baptism
- The placing of the bible and the cross on the coffin as important Christian symbols

The Funeral Mass

The Funeral Mass has always held a special place in the faith life of the Christian community as the Mass is the highpoint of Christian worship. When planning this liturgy, it is important that consideration is given to the Liturgy of the Word, Liturgical Music, and liturgical action.

Funeral Services when a Mass is not celebrated

The Order of Christian Funerals provides a Rite of a Funeral with a Liturgy of the Word when a Mass is not celebrated. This consists of the following:

- Entrance Procession,
- Introductory Prayers,

- Readings from the Sacred Scriptures (Bible),
- Scripture Homily/ Reflection,
- Prayer of the Faithful
- Prayers of Commendation.

The Funeral Liturgy where Mass is not celebrated may be led by a priest, deacon, Minister of Pastoral Care, a member of the Funeral Team or some other suitable trained and appointed layperson.

Words of remembrance

The eulogy does not form part of the Funeral Liturgy and as such families should not feel under pressure to provide somebody to undertake this task. For those families who do wish to share some words of remembrance and thanks, we hope that what follows will help structure words of remembrance that are fitting for a place of prayer and for a public setting.

If a family chooses to share words of remembrance the following practices are expected:

- Only one person is to speak on behalf of the bereaved family.
- The words to be said should be scripted, be no more than three minutes and agreed with the celebrant of the Funeral Mass or Liturgy.
- As a basic structure we encourage that the focus be placed on words of appreciation for the person who has died and their faith. It might also include words of thanks for those who have helped support the family around the time of the death.

The most appropriate time for such words to be delivered is:

- At the Reception of the Body, if it takes place the evening before the Funeral Mass.
- At the graveside or Crematorium.
- At the Funeral Mass after the Concluding Prayer and before the Prayers of Commendation and Farewell.

Presentation of Personal mementoes

Within the funeral rite there are several symbols used and gifts presented. These include a Book of the Gospels, Cross, Pall and the Presentation of Gifts of Bread and wine.

In many parishes in our diocese there is a custom of presenting mementoes of the deceased person's life. These are presented to capture something of the person's life, their interest, what their life meant to others and their faith. As this is not part of the official rites a family should not feel that mementoes must be presented. If a family does wish to present such mementoes, we would advise the following:

- That a suitable table of remembrance be prepared near the coffin or within the sanctuary. It is here that these mementoes should be placed.
- The chosen mementoes should be respectful of the church setting.

- If mementoes are to be presented this should happen at the Reception of the Remains or at the beginning of the Funeral Mass. Every effort should be made to avoid presenting such mementoes as part of the preparation of the altar and presentation of the bread and wine.

The Choice of Music

Within the liturgy music plays a central and significant role. Its aim is to enable us in our prayer for the deceased and in our worship of God. Within the funeral liturgy it also aids in expressing emotion and in pouring balm on grieving hearts. In this regard an instrumental can play a significant role. Musical choices for a funeral liturgy ought to be sympathetic to the faith setting in which the funeral liturgy is celebrated. A list of suggested hymns can be found in our Funeral Resources.

On occasion a family will request a secular piece of music which was significant in the deceased person's life. When such a request is made, we advise the following:

- The lyrics of any music played ought to be sympathetic to Christian beliefs and appropriate to a place of Christian worship.
- Music and Hymn choices should be discussed with the celebrant or a member of the Funeral Ministry Team prior to the funeral liturgy.
- If a secular song is agreed we suggest that it is played during the sympathising at the evening removal, or as the coffin leaves the church, or during the prayers at the crematorium or at the graveside.

Rite of Committal

This is the final act of the Christian community in their care for the deceased body and it concludes the funeral rites. The prayers of committal express the connection between the church on earth and the church in heaven. We pray our prayers of farewell in the hope that the faithful departed are being welcomed into the presence of God. The Rite of Committal can be led by a priest, a deacon, a member of the Funeral Team or somebody approved by the diocese to exercise this ministry.

Crematorium

A growing number of people are choosing to be cremated and this is an accepted practice within the Catholic Church. The cremated remains ought to be shown respect in line with the reverence we have for the sacredness of the person who we now commend to God's care. As with the remains of all our faithful departed a place of burial or entombment ought to be found at the earliest opportunity. This gifts the deceased a place of rest and the family and friends of the deceased a place to go and pray for their deceased loved one. It is also in keeping with our faith tradition that believes that Jesus himself was laid in a tomb.

Funeral Masses are not to be celebrated in Crematorium Chapels, Funeral Homes or similar locations as these celebrations properly belong in the parish church, at the heart of the praying faith community. The prayers normally said at the Crematorium are the "Rite of Committal at a Crematorium" which can be found in the Order of Christian Funerals.

Columbarium

In a response to the increased numbers of people opting for cremation several parishes are exploring the possibility of erecting a columbarium on parish grounds or in church buildings. Parishes are reminded that approval from the Diocesan Trust is required prior to commencing any such works. In planning such projects parishes are reminded to factor in the cost of ongoing maintenance and upkeep of such facilities. They are reminded that they are entering a commitment in perpetuity. Future uses of these buildings or land, coupled with ongoing maintenance cost should be considered carefully before any commitment to erect a columbarium is given.

Funeral Ministry and Funeral Ministry Teams

Traditionally funeral ministry has been exercised by ordained ministers, but this has not always been the case. *The Order for Christian Funerals* hopes that Funeral Ministry would be a collaborative ministry conducted by the Christian community. This is an area of church life where the charisms of everyone are to be exercised for the good of the whole community.

The Church calls each member of Christ's Body- priest, deacon, layperson — to participate in the ministry of consolation: to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn.

(Order of Christian Funerals – General Introduction no.8)

This is a ministry that is most effective when the ministry of consolation rests with the whole community. Each member of the believing community shares in this ministry in accordance with their gift, their charism, and the role they hold within the praying community. In this regard we hope that these resources will help inform the believing community as to how it can help families in preparing for a funeral liturgy and in praying for themselves and their departed loved ones. We are reminded that the Christian community has a role well beyond the liturgies and prayers. We are also called to help in everyday practical ways.

Our response to an ever-changing society

As a diocese we are very conscious that we minister within a context that is increasingly disconnected from the sign, symbols, and rituals of the Catholic faith. That said, we are especially mindful of the explicit call in the General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals when it states:

The minister may also describe the funeral liturgy and explain why the community gathers to hear the word of God proclaimed and to celebrate the eucharist when one of the faithful dies. The priest and other ministers should also be mindful of those persons who are not members of the Catholic Church, or Catholics who are not involved in the life of the Church.

(Order of Christian Funerals – General Introduction no.12)

In this regard extra care and consideration ought to be given as to how we accompany families who in their hearts feel a Christian ritual is warranted and yet they acknowledge their own lack of connection to the praying community. While this is an opportunity to offer practical support it is also

an opportunity for us to witness by our words and actions to the God of love and understanding we profess to follow.

Diocesan Policy on the placing of Flags on a Coffin

In line with the Irish Episcopal Conference recommendations when the regulations of the Defence Forces permit it, there should be a general permission to place the national flag on coffins of serving members of the Permanent Defence Forces, serving members of the Reserve Defence Forces, retired members of the Permanent Defence Forces who have received permission from the Adjutant General's Office, and serving members of An Garda Síochána

Resources:

See www.killaloe-diocese.ie for additional resources:

- Scripture Readings (Bible)
- Music suggestions and resources
- Resources for Funeral Ministry Teams
- A helpful checklist for the bereaved and Parish Bereavement/Funeral Ministry Team