

## APPENDIX IX

### Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie Funeral Guidelines

#### **The Current Situation**

To begin with, it is to be noted that the policies of November 2002 written by the Diocese at that time still apply. It is a well written document that should have had the desired effect of allowing all clergy of the diocese the flexibility to respond to the varied needs and requests of those who are burdened with grief. Most have been very good at doing their best to help people put order and peace back into the chaos created by the death of a loved one.

Unfortunately, there have been some who have made up their own rules. Each of the Funeral Directors indicated that there are several "idiosyncrasies" that they have to deal with depending on the priest or clergy they are attempting to arrange a funeral service with.

At the same time different demands are being made concerning death and funerals. The trend has become much more prevalent to have a Funeral Home service or a Memorial Mass at the parish at a convenient time. "Immediate disposal" of the remains of a person with no service of any kind has become more common place. A definite sense of "one stop shopping" and for the least cost, at the most convenient time for the family is the experience of many of our clergy and pastoral workers.

There is also the problem that many Funeral Celebrations, especially at the Funeral Home are not recorded in any parish register. The question of stipends and who celebrates some of these liturgies has also become problematic. Funeral Directors across the Diocese and in many other locations in North America have had to deal with various difficulties in trying to find someone to provide some form of liturgy for those who have died.

#### **Possible Solutions**

##### **1) Education**

The first thing to be noted is that it is NOT the time to try to enforce discipline while preparing a funeral with a family. It may well be that their understanding of what is appropriate for a service does not match the current liturgical discipline of the Church. It is time we became more proactive in addressing the problems we encounter than reactive in our responses to some requests. In this light then, it may be that the whole subject of death, dying, how we celebrate death and why we celebrate at all can be taught at various times of the year. Two times come to mind immediately. One being the month of November when there is an emphasis in the Church and in our society on remembering the dead with All Saints Day and All Souls Day as well as Remembrance Day. This month could provide a very good stage to look at questions of how we as Christians and Catholics celebrate and deal with death. The time of Lent, Holy Week and Easter Season is clearly a prime time to explore many of the same questions. After all, the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord is the basis for our hope in eternal life. The celebrations of Holy Week are truly the centre of our teaching and discipline concerning Christian funerals.

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### 2) Accountability

The second question concerns accountability. This is not a simple matter and so will have to be dealt with in parts. The Church has lines of accountability clearly drawn up that were designed to assist in providing consistent service to the people. It is not a question of absolute conformity, but rather a consistent level of service in all of our parishes. Some of our clergy indicated that there is no sense in having a policy if it is not enforced. This has been our experience in the diocese and in the Church as a whole. It was clear in the recent consultation on the upcoming Synod for the Family that we have wonderful documents that are well written, but not well read, understood or implemented.

#### a) Chain of responsibility in resolving problems with funerals

In order to avoid continued difficulties, our own diocesan structures will be utilized to make sure that diocesan policy and guidelines are followed. If there is a difficulty, in this case with questions involving funerals, the first person responsible to look into the situation will be the Regional Chair. The hope is that the matter can be dealt with at the local level. The basis for this are the responsibilities of the Vicar Forane outlined in Canon Law. This priest used to be called the Dean, we now refer to them as Regional Chairs. If it is not possible to have the matter dealt with by the Regional Chair, then the Episcopal Vicar responsible for the area or sector is to attempt to solve the difficulty with the clergy in question. If this fails, then the Chancery will become involved. It is sincerely hoped that such measures will not have to be used.

#### b) Questions of refusal

Some of the areas of accountability that have fallen through the cracks are: 1) ease of contact with the parish priest and a response within a reasonable time, 2) refusal of funerals due to geography, church attendance, registration in the parish, time of the week (my day off or during my vacation) and 3) location of the requested service (I don't do funeral home services).

In the case of those seeking some form of service for their departed all of these remarks amount to a large No or refusal to aid the family in their time of need. The word NO or a refusal is all that the family burdened with dealing with a death will hear. They do not hear the logic or reasoning or the possibilities they have heard only No and feel rejected. This is not who we are. We are not guards or police making sure people follow the rules. We are to be Pastors who are to assist and comfort our people with the Good News. Therefore, no request for a funeral service may be refused without the expressed permission of the Diocesan Bishop or his Vicar General. Any such refusal will be dealt with as described above.

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### c) Accessibility

There is no question that there are many demands upon priests today, and that there should be provision for days off and vacation. At the same time, death does not take a holiday and is not always convenient. It is therefore the responsibility of the pastor to make sure that he can be contacted at all times in the case of a funeral request, or provide for a replacement who will be responsible for funerals during his absence, or have other contact numbers so that the Funeral Home may give a timely answer to their request for funeral services in a matter of hours and not days.

### d) Celebrant of funeral liturgies

It is the responsibility of the parish, whether by territory or by membership or by long previous membership, especially for those who are in long-term care facilities, to provide funeral services for those who have died. No one is without a parish in the structure of the Church envisaged in the Code of Canon Law. If for one reason or another, such as the priest is already booked for another funeral and the family cannot change the time or day, then the funeral homes are directed to use the list of names of those who have been appointed and approved and appointed by the diocese to perform these liturgies at the funeral home or in a parish church or some other suitable location in their area.

## 3) Record Keeping

Tied to the questions of accountability are also the questions of record keeping, honoraria and offerings for funerals. With regard to record keeping, it is the parish priest who is responsible to keep accurate records of all funeral services within the parish whether in the parish church, at the funeral home or even in some other location such as a community centre. In many cases this has not been done. The parish, at times, has no idea that one of the clergy attached to the parish has conducted a funeral service. At times priests have felt that since the funeral service did not occur in the church there is no need to record it in parish records. This is false. All services are to be recorded in the parish registers.

## 4) Suggested Donations

With regard to the suggested donations attached to funeral services there was no consistency. In some parishes the offering is given to the parish and then a supplement for the organist and then another for the cantor and so on. It can become a rather costly proposition when you consider that some parishes are adding supplemental charges to the whole celebration. This has given us a very bad image and made us look like we are nickel and diming the people at the time of a funeral. Some have seen it as a punishment for not being practicing members of the parish. In response to this inconsistency, the suggested donation for a funeral celebration will be two hundred and seventy-five dollars. The funeral rite includes the liturgical celebration in the Church or service in a funeral home, as well as the wake service and burial of the remains, whether ashes or a body.

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The suggested donation amount of up to two hundred and seventy-five dollars will be paid to the parish whether it took place in the church or at the funeral home. This will help to guarantee that the appropriate records are kept at the parish and that the donation is not a fee for services rendered. A funeral, as envisaged by the Church with ashes or a body, a memorial mass with or without the presence of ashes or a service at the funeral home or some other suitable location with the presence of a body or ashes consists of three specific moments: the wake service, the funeral rite itself and the burial.

Each parish is to notify the funeral homes in their area concerning the extra amount for honorariums the funeral home is to collect for organists, musicians, cantors and choirs if applicable. The supplemental amount and the donation is to be remitted to the parish who will then pay the musicians. It is desirable that the cheque be itemized to clearly indicate the suggested donation amount and then the amount for the musicians.

### **5) Dignity of Human Remains**

This brings up the question of what to do with various types of human remains. It is true that in the present liturgical books there is a distinction as to how liturgical celebrations are to be conducted with the presence of a body and with the presence or absence of ashes or body. All human remains are to be given the same dignity. New liturgical norms are in the making and will be published at some date.

There is a new trend to divide the ashes of the deceased among the surviving relatives by using little urns or even putting some of the human remains in jewelry. This practice is one that is difficult to comprehend let alone condone. At the same time it is a reality for some families and parishes. Therefore, at any celebration there should be only one urn or container representing the human remains and not multiple containers or urns. What is done with the human remains after the service is the responsibility of the family. Yet, they should be encouraged to treat the human remains with the dignity and respect that they deserve. In areas where the funeral home has developed what they are calling an Arch to bring in the human remains as ashes, the preference of the family is to be respected in this matter.

### **6) Memorial Masses**

There is the further question of the growing demand to have a memorial mass at the church, usually with ashes, but no involvement of the funeral home as far as visitation or the reception of donations to various causes, even the parish. There are those who would prefer a direct answer on this issue to say that these requests are to be denied. It is not as simple as it looks. Our purpose is to try to bring some form of order and peace to a chaotic situation with death. In many of our rural locations, the normal location for visitation is at the parish church. This usually involves the collaboration of the funeral home.

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There are three parts to this question:

First, we are not funeral homes and do not want to be in competition with the many funeral directors who do such a great job at trying to guide people in what is best for the grieving family. They too feel the change in attitude to death and are also caught up in trying to adapt to the needs of those they serve. At the same time, there are those who simply cannot afford what would be considered a "proper funeral."

Secondly, the fact of the matter is that many of our people for various reasons are choosing not to have a 'traditional funeral' with visitation and all the rest. These situations, at present, represent a small minority of those we deal with. On this point it is best that there be an honest discussion with the funeral home who is dealing with the arrangements so that an appropriate response can be framed.

Thirdly, it is the responsibility of the pastor, with the collaboration of the funeral home and the family to make a decision that truly reflects the best for all concerned. This team approach will avoid partiality and the sense that the priest has decided on his own what would happen. The more we work together as collaborators the sooner we will come to an appropriate response to the ever changing demands of our ministry, especially in the face of death.

### **7) Words of Remembrance**

The question of words of remembrance is still a touchy topic since there have been some negative experiences of these presentations. The fact of the matter is that some people have a need to express their grief through sharing in a public forum some of their memories. The use of words of remembrance may not have been part of our Catholic tradition, but it would not be the first time, in our history, that something that was not even Christian in origin has been incorporated into our liturgies. It would seem that there are two possibilities for the insertion of these words of remembrance. First, right at the beginning of the liturgy, before the penitential rite. The second would be after the prayer after communion and before the final commendation and farewell. Both of these places offer a liturgical pause for this kind of remembrance. It will be up to the celebrant to aid the people in developing an appropriate presentation.

### **8) Music**

There is also the prevalent question of appropriate music for the celebration. In the church it should be sacred music. There are numerous liturgical norms indicating that sacred and not secular music should be used in our celebrations. Yet what can be done when the family really wants a piece of music that was designated by the deceased as their favorite song and they want it played at the funeral? It would seem that there are some possibilities. 1) The song could be played at the funeral home even during the Wake Service. 2) It could be played at the reception. 3) It could be played at the graveside. 4) It could be played before the service in the church begins. 5) It could be played as part of the words of remembrance at either of the two possible spots in the mass mentioned above. Once again where the song would be most appropriately played would have to be discussed with the pastor and the family so that the dignity of the liturgy is preserved.

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Obviously, services in the Funeral Home are more open to the insertion of secular music before, after or during the celebration itself. It is still important to try to assist the family in using music that would best meet the needs of the family and at the same time respect the dignity of the occasion.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, these are guidelines not rules to be used to limit what can be done to assist those who come to us for solace and direction in the face of death. Certainly, we are to gently try to guide the family to a dignified service for their loved one. Christian celebrations are not only a celebration of their life here on earth, but rather a rejoicing in the redemption gained for us by Christ and an expression of our faith in eternal life.