

FUNERAL POLICY

Diocese of Beaumont

(Rev. 2/2016)

"At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of baptism and strengthened at the eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the sacrament of the Eucharist." (*Order of Christian Funerals, #4* - hereinafter "OCF")

"In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity. Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just. The Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral." (OCF 1, 5)

"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." (OCF 7)

- I. All baptized Catholics have the right to an ecclesiastical burial celebrated according to Church law (C. 1176).
 - A. Catechumens are buried as Christian faithful (C. 1183.1).
 - B. Children whose baptism was intended by their parents, but who died before being baptized, are also to receive Christian burial (C. 1183.2).
- II. Every Christian is free to choose his/her place of burial or repository for ashes (C. 1180).
 - A. The appropriate blessing from the Order of Christian Funerals should be prayed over the place of committal if it has not already been blessed (OCF 218, 405).
 - B. A prayer of praise and thanksgiving is recited over the place of committal if it has already been blessed (OCF 218, 405).
- III. Christian Symbols should be used appropriately at the rites of Christian funerals. These may include an Easter candle, holy water, incense, fresh flowers, the Book of the Gospels, and/or a cross on the coffin. Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy (OCF 35-38).

Any national flags or the flags or insignia of associations to which the deceased belonged are to be removed from the coffin at the entrance of the Church. They may be replaced after the coffin has been taken from the Church. Once in the Church, the coffin is covered with the pall, a reminder of the baptismal garment and a sign of the Christian dignity of the person (OCF 132). The use of the pall also signifies that all are equal in the eyes of God (OCF 38).

- IV. The rites of Christian funerals may take place at several different stations, i.e., the home, the funeral home, the church, the cemetery and/or a chapel. The three principal rites in Christian funerals are: the Vigil (OCF 51-97), the funeral liturgy (OCF 128-203), and the rite of committal (OCF 204-233). As a general rule, the funeral rites for the faithful departed must be celebrated in his or her own parish church. However, any member of the Christian

faithful or those commissioned to arrange for his or her funeral may choose another church for the funeral rites with the consent of its rector and after informing the pastor of the deceased (C. 1177).

The funeral liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. There are two forms of the funeral liturgy: the "Funeral Mass" and the "Funeral Liturgy outside Mass." When one of its members dies, the Church encourages the celebration of the Mass. But when the Mass cannot be celebrated (See "A" below), the second form of the funeral liturgy is used, and a Mass for the deceased is scheduled after the funeral at a time convenient for the family and the parish priest (OCF 128).

- A. The funeral *Mass* is not permitted on solemnities of obligation, on Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season (OCF 178). In addition, in the Diocese of Beaumont, due to the possibility of confusion of the faithful regarding the importance and the obligation of the Sunday Eucharist, as well as the shortage and the physical limitations of parish priests, *funeral Masses may not be celebrated on Sundays*. A funeral liturgy outside Mass, on a day when the funeral Mass is prohibited, is left to the discretion of the pastor of the deceased and will be granted only for serious cause.
 - B. The funeral Mass is not to be celebrated in funeral homes or cemetery chapels.
 - C. It is permitted to have the Wake Service (or Rosary) and visitation in the Church, followed by the funeral Mass and burial all on the same day.
 - D. Regarding eulogies, a general policy for this diocese is that a eulogy for the deceased may be given only at the conclusion of the Wake Service (or Rosary) after the celebrant has exited. This applies whether the Wake Service (or Rosary) is celebrated at the funeral home or prior to the funeral Mass at the Church.
 - E. The family of the deceased and funeral directors must not set a date and time for the funeral without first consulting the priest/deacon who will preside.
 - F. The family of the deceased should be invited to assist in planning the funeral rites and, if possible, exercise some of the liturgical ministries within the liturgy (OCF 15-17). Persons selected as Eucharistic Ministers must have been approved by their local Ordinaries. Persons who may be selected as Lectors must have been trained for this ministry or have the required skills to proclaim Scripture slowly, with proper voice projection, and with understanding of the text. If such are not available, parishioners who are trained Eucharistic Ministers and Lectors are to be selected.
 - G. Music is integral to the funeral rites and is to be chosen with care so that it supports, consoles, and uplifts the participants and helps to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and the Christian's share in that victory. Rather than adopting popular and secular songs which are inappropriate to a liturgical setting, we should seek out good liturgical music on a paschal theme. Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy, and whenever possible, for the funeral processions and the rite of committal (OCF 30-32).
 - H. Additional liturgical guidelines and resources, appropriate music selections, training for those involved with funerals, and help with worship aids are available from the diocesan Office of Worship. See also the information regarding funerals on the Office of Worship webpage on the diocesan website.
- V. Presiding Minister: Priests, as teachers of faith and ministers of comfort, preside at the funeral rites, especially the Mass; the celebration of the funeral liturgy is especially entrusted to pastors, parochial administrators, and parochial vicars. When no priest is


available, a deacon, as minister of the Word, of the altar, and of charity, presides at the funeral rite outside of Mass. When no priest or deacon is available for the vigil and related rites or the rite of committal, a trained layperson presides (OCF 14). At the request of the family of the deceased, it is permitted to have a non-Catholic minister proclaim a reading during the funeral Mass, but not the Gospel. The non-Catholic minister may not preach or concelebrate.

- VI. Funeral Rites for a Baptized Person Belonging to a Non-Catholic Church or ecclesial community are allowed provided that: 1) this is not clearly contrary to the wishes of the deceased, and 2) the minister of the deceased, for whatever reason, is not available (C. 1183.3 and DOB Priests' Faculties, #23).
- A. When a priest or deacon is asked by the family to officiate at the funeral service and burial of a baptized member of another church, he may do so at the funeral parlor, the home, or graveside. Baptized members of another church or ecclesial community may be buried with funeral rites in the Catholic Church with the permission of the local Ordinary (granted by pagella, #23) and provided that the above two conditions are met.
 - B. As a norm, a baptized non-Catholic will not receive a funeral Mass as part of the funeral rite. However, a funeral Mass can be celebrated if the following conditions are verified:
 - 1. A public celebration of Mass is expressly requested by members of the family, by friends or subjects of the deceased out of a genuine religious motive, and
 - 2. scandal on the part of the faithful is absent.
- In these cases a public Mass can be celebrated but the name of the deceased is not mentioned in the Eucharistic prayer since that would suppose full communion with the Catholic Church (S.C.D.F. June 11, 1976).
- C. Members of other faiths may be buried in a Catholic cemetery and with the clergy of another faith conducting the cemetery rites.
 - D. Members of other faiths may be invited to preach or read from the Scriptures during a funeral service outside the celebration of the Eucharist.
- VII. Cremation: (NCCB, May, 1997 "Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites") [**See also Appendix 1 to this policy**]
- A. The *Order of Christian Funerals* reflects a theology and a tradition in which burial (interment or entombment) of the body has been the principal manner of the body's final disposition. Catholic teaching continues to stress the preference for burial or entombment of the body of the deceased.
 - B. Those who have chosen cremation may receive a Christian Funeral Rite, unless their choice for cremation reflects a denial of the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul or is dictated by anti-Christian motives (OCF 19, C. 1176.3).
 - C. Because the Church prefers the presence of the body for the funeral rites, it is recommended that cremation take place following the funeral liturgy and before the Rite of Committal (OCF 212).
 - D. When circumstances prevent the presence of the body at the funeral liturgy, it is appropriate that the cremated remains be present for the full course of the funeral rites, including the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal. The funeral liturgy should always be celebrated in a church ("Reflections...", p. 10).

E. The cremated remains are to be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains of the body. The cremated remains should be entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium; they may also be buried in a common grave in a cemetery. The practices of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground or keeping cremated remains in a home are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires ("Reflections ...", p. 11).

VIII. Denial of Ecclesiastical Funeral Rites: Unless there is some sign of repentance before death, the following may be denied church funerals: notorious apostates, heretics, schismatics; other manifest sinners to whom a church funeral could not be granted without public scandal to the faithful; and those who chose cremation in opposition to the Christian faith. If there is any doubt, the local Ordinary is to be consulted and his judgment followed (C. 1184).

APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN THE DIOCESE OF BEAUMONT



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February 1, 2016

CREMATION AND THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

From the January 2012 *Newsletter* of the Committee on Divine Worship, USCCB

In April 1997, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments granted an indult for the United States to allow the diocesan bishop to permit the presence of the cremated remains of a body at a Funeral Mass. Later that year, the Congregation confirmed the special texts and ritual directives (Prot. n. 1589/96/L for both indult and texts), which were then published as an appendix to the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Frequently the Secretariat of Divine Worship receives requests for clarification or suggestions for best practices regarding the presence of cremated remains and funerals and their appropriate final disposition or committal.

The practice of cremation has grown and become more commonplace in the United States, and it is often presented as a more affordable alternative to traditional burial. What is often overlooked is the Church's teaching regarding the respect and honor due to the human body. The *Order of Christian Funerals'* Appendix on Cremation states: "Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites" (no. 413).

Ideally, if a family chooses cremation, the cremation would take place at some time after the Funeral Mass, so that there can be an opportunity for the Vigil for the Deceased in the presence of the body (during "visitation" or "viewing" at a church or funeral home). This allows for the appropriate reverence for the sacredness of the body at the Funeral Mass: sprinkling with holy water, the placing of the pall, and honoring it with incense. The Rite of Committal then takes place after cremation (see Appendix, nos. 418-421). Funeral homes offer several options in this case. One is the use of "cremation caskets," which is essentially a rental casket with a cardboard liner that is cremated with the body. Another is a complete casket that is cremated (this casket contains minimal amounts of non-combustible material such as metal handles or latches).

When cremation takes place before the Funeral Mass, and the diocesan bishop permits the presence of cremated remains at the Funeral Mass, the Appendix provides adapted texts for the Sprinkling with Holy Water, the Dismissal for use at the Funeral Mass (or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass), and the Committal of Cremated Remains. The introduction provides further specific details about how the funeral rites are adapted. In all, the rite notes: The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains on the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. (no. 417)

For some families, the choice of cremation is based on financial hardship, so this choice often means also that there is no plan for committal or burial of the cremated remains. As a means of providing pastoral support and an acceptable respectful solution to the problem of uninterred cremated remains, one diocese offered on All Souls' Day in 2011 an opportunity for any family who desired it the interment of cremated remains. The diocese offered a Mass and committal service at one of its Catholic cemeteries and provided, free of charge, a common vault in a mausoleum for the interment of the cremated remains. The names of the deceased interred there were kept on file, though in this case they were not individually inscribed on the vault.

As cremation is chosen more frequently, there will be many who are unaware of the Church's teaching regarding this practice. It is important for bishops and pastors not only to catechize the faithful, but to collaborate with funeral directors in providing helpful and accurate information to families planning the funeral of loved ones. Offering opportunities to family members for the respectful burial of their loved ones, who were not interred after funeral services and cremation, would give effective witness to the importance of Christian burial and our belief in the resurrection. In all, pastors are encouraged to show pastoral sensitivity, especially to those for whom cremation is the only feasible choice (see Appendix, no. 415).