



As Catholics, we are encouraged to plan and arrange for our funeral and burial because of our faith and hope in our own resurrection. It is especially important and advisable to make arrangements early, in advance of potential serious illness or accidental death.

The purpose of this brochure is intended to help with the planning process. This resource may also be helpful to family or friends who are called upon to plan a loved one's funeral. The parish staff, especially priests and deacons, as well as local funeral directors can also offer the guidance necessary prior to or at the time of death. Close coordination with all these entities will help ensure the desires of the family can be met whenever possible.

UNDERSTANDING CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

Death is a real part of our lives and the lives of those we love. Catholic funeral rites are intended to help us pray for the person who has died and give us strength and courage while embracing the reality of death.

Our culture often tries to avoid uncomfortable aspects of life, which at times can result in avoiding some or all of the funeral rites. Moving too quickly to other things can make healthy grieving more difficult. The Catholic rites provide time to grieve privately and with others.

The Church desires that every baptized Catholic receive the Catholic funeral rites, which include the following: Prayers after Death, Prayers when Gathering in the Presence of the Body, and three principal ritual moments: 1) the Vigil or Wake Service, 2) Funeral (Mass), and 3) Committal.

THE RITES

The Catholic Church's funeral rites provide the opportunity to gather together while facing the reality of death and embracing the hope and promise of eternal life in Heaven. Centered in prayer for the deceased, the rites also provide support for those who mourn.

The proper order of the Catholic funeral rites is as follows:

1. Prayers after Death

Upon death, the priest will offer these prayers, if present. He may also pray these prayers when meeting with the family to plan the funeral services.

2. Gathering in the Presence of the Body

This brief prayer service is an optional prayer time which may be offered when the family gathers privately for the first time in the presence of the deceased.

3. Vigil or Wake Service

The prayers offered during the vigil (or wake) service are taken from the Vigil Rite. Drawing our hearts and minds to life eternal, the prayers help us see death through God's eyes, rather than the merely human perspective. The vigil service is also a time to remember and share stories of the deceased loved one. This is the most appropriate time for family and friends to eulogize the deceased.

Other prayers or devotions (such as recitation of the rosary) may be desired. These may not replace the Vigil Rite; however, but are more fittingly placed either before or after the vigil service.

4. Funeral (Mass)

At the heart of the Catholic funeral rites is the Mass which stands as the Church's



ultimate sacrificial offering to God for the deceased and their family and friends. The priest or deacon will remember the faithful departed in the homily. As previously mentioned, eulogies are more properly made at the conclusion of the vigil service.

Music is integral to the funeral rites. Through music, the community is invited to pray together in a way that words alone may not fully convey. Music has the power to console and uplift those who mourn and strengthen the unity of the entire assembly in faith, hope and love. Non-liturgical or secular music, if used, should occur before or after the funeral Mass, and not within the rite itself.

5. Committal

The final ritual moment of the funeral rites is the committal which takes place at the cemetery. It is there that our prayers remind us it is Christ who makes the just Holy, even as we await the resurrection of the body.

FUNERAL SERVICE (OUTSIDE OF MASS)

The Church desires that a funeral Mass be celebrated for all baptized Catholics. This should not be denied the deceased regardless of whether their family are Catholic or actively practice the Faith. However, there are times when circumstances may dictate that a funeral service be held outside of Mass.

