

Funerals

Our deepest sympathies go out to you and your family and friends if you have recently suffered the death of a loved one. We hope the information provided here will assist you and help to comfort you in this difficult time.

Unlike other liturgical celebrations where there normally is time to plan and prepare, the death of a loved one, and the subsequent funeral arrangements, generally leave little time to do so. Because of this, we ask that you take the time to read through this information as we explain the various considerations you need to keep in mind as you plan a suitable, meaningful and relevant funeral liturgy within the Catholic tradition.

Some questions frequently asked by families when preparing the funeral of a loved one include:

- [What type of funeral services are offered by the Catholic Church?](#)
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Q What type of funeral services are offered by the Catholic Church?

A In the Catholic Church, funeral services generally take place using one of the following liturgies (formats):

- A funeral Mass (Requiem Mass), followed by prayers of committal at either a cemetery or crematorium, or
- A funeral prayer service at a church, followed by prayers of committal at either a cemetery or crematorium, or
- Either a funeral Mass or prayer service at a church, which concludes at the church, or
- A funeral prayer service at a crematorium chapel, followed by prayers of committal at either a cemetery or crematorium, or
- A funeral prayer service at the grave, incorporating the prayers of committal.

Q Is cremation permissible in the Catholic Church?

A Yes, cremation is an option available for Catholics.

Q Which funeral liturgy (format) should I/we consider?

A The choice of funeral liturgies, from above, is entirely up to you, or if applicable, to the pre-arranged or expressed wishes of the deceased. If the deceased did not express any particular wishes in relation to their funeral arrangements and you are wondering which liturgy (format) to choose, it may be helpful to bear in mind these simple yet important points to help make that choice:

- The funeral liturgy, which ever is chosen, should reflect and parallel the levels of faith, commitment, observance and understanding that the deceased had in relation to God specifically, and towards the Church community in general.
- Funeral liturgies of whatever format are not only about or for the deceased, but also about those who mourn them as well. They focus on the prayer that God, in his love and mercy and forgiveness, will grant eternal life to the deceased and welcome them into heaven. They also seek from God strength and healing for the family and friends of the deceased.

These points are not intended so as to exclude anyone from a particular funeral liturgy, but simply to make relevant the life and level of faith of the deceased and also to ease any anxieties, unease or discomfort that the family and loved ones of the deceased may have or may experience during a particular funeral liturgy.

Q Who is involved in a funeral liturgy?

A In a Catholic funeral liturgy, and particularly if it is held in a church, a priest or other suitable minister would normally officiate. Family members and friends of the deceased are also encouraged to participate in the liturgy as much as possible, by way of helping to plan the liturgy with the priest or minister, by reading the applicable readings of Scripture and prayers, and at other applicable and appropriate times during the liturgy.

It is quite permissible and expected that family members or friends of the deceased may be asked to read various prayers and readings from Scripture, during the funeral liturgy. However, in considering who to ask, it is relevant to bear in mind the following: because the readings form a central and critical part of the funeral liturgy, and because you have spent some time choosing those that 'speak' about the deceased or about what you are doing, they need to be read both reverently and effectively. Who ever is asked to read should be someone who is both competent and confident to do so. It is particularly helpful to all concerned if the person(s) asked to read is already a reader in their local parish.

Q Who should be involved in planning and organising the funeral liturgy?

A In consultation with the priest/minister who will celebrate the funeral liturgy, the family and/or friends of the deceased will meet with him to organise and arrange the funeral liturgy. It can often be far more helpful and less stressful for all concerned if these preparations are made by 1 or 2 family members or friends only, instead of a larger group of people.

Q Can we make up our own funeral liturgy and prayers etc?

A No! Catholic priests/ministers may perform a funeral liturgy only in accordance with the 'Order of Christian Funerals' for the Catholic Church. This means that the funeral liturgy must follow the formal and accepted liturgy (structure) of Catholic funerals using approved prayers, Scripture readings and appropriate church music.

Q Which priest will officiate at the funeral?

A Normally a priest/minister of St Joseph's Parish would officiate at the funeral liturgy. However, if the family wishes to invite another priest (with formal authorisation) from outside the parish (i.e, a family friend or relative), they are asked to speak to the Parish Priest beforehand, of these intended arrangements.

Q What music can be played for the funeral?

A Since music is an important part of the funeral liturgy, especially when it takes place in a church, it naturally follows that the music would be in keeping with the environment and setting. When organising the funeral liturgy, especially with a priest from St Joseph's Parish, you will be provided with a choice of hymns suitable and appropriate for such an occasion.

The use of popular or secular songs or music would be better suited to the home or where people gather after the funeral liturgy.

Q Do we have to have a Eulogy (Words of Remembrance)?

A No, certainly not! 'Words of Remembrance' are purely an option only. They are NOT compulsory, and sometimes they can only put more pressure on family and friends in an already difficult situation.

However, if you do choose to have the 'Words of Remembrance', here are some guidelines to bear in mind when preparing them.

- The person who is to give them on behalf of the family should speak with the priest presiding at the funeral liturgy prior to the funeral service, preferably whilst preparing the liturgy.
- There should only be one 'Words of Remembrance' during the funeral service. Further opportunities for other stories, anecdotes, poems etc could be after the burial/cremation or when family and friends gather after the funeral liturgy.
- The 'Words of Remembrance' should take no longer then 3-5 minutes to deliver.
- The 'Words of Remembrance' are to be given from the place designated by the presiding priest.

Q What sort of details should be included in the 'Words of Remembrance'?

A The 'Words of Remembrance' should speak honestly about the characteristics and qualities of the deceased, including their life of faith and how these may be of inspiration and comfort to those gathered.

The 'Words of Remembrance' should speak honestly and compassionately, reflecting the circumstances of the life of the deceased. They should focus on how the deceased can be best remembered. They should focus on how our relationship with the deceased is maintained even in death and how we look forward to meeting him/her again.