

CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE  
of  
BALLARAT



Diocesan Liturgical Commission

**GUIDELINES FOR  
PASTORAL CARE  
AND  
FUNERAL MINISTRY**

**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BALLARAT**



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# FOREWORD

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My dear people,

This booklet offers guidelines for the pastoral care of the sick and dying and for funerals and bereavement ministry.

People are at a particularly vulnerable point when they are suffering some illness and especially as their final hour approaches. Family and friends of the sick and dying also need support in what is a difficult time for all. They may look for assistance too in preparing the funeral liturgy and in the time after the funeral as they grieve for the loss of a loved one. As members of a local Christian community we can contribute to this care in various ways.

This booklet provides guidance to those involved in ministry to the dying and the bereaved. I thank those who are serving in this context in parishes all around our diocese. I thank the Diocesan Liturgical Commission for preparing these notes and I commend them to you as a help in this very important ministry.

Through the funeral liturgy, we entrust the departed into the hands of God. We ask the saints to come to meet them and lead them into the presence of the Father of mercies. We also pray that we might comfort one another with assurances of faith in the resurrection and eternal life.

May these guidelines help us as we support one another on our pilgrim way.

God bless you all.

Yours in Christ,

+ Paul Bird CSsR  
Bishop of Ballarat  
June 2021

## **PASTORAL CARE**

From the beginning of the Church, Christians have offered care and support to the sick, the dying and their families. Today, the parish offers this care and support to the dying person and the family and assists the family in preparing the funeral rites. Parish pastoral care may be offered by a Priest, when available, or a Parish Leader or a member of a Funeral Ministry Team. If the dying person is in hospital, a member of the resident Pastoral Care Team may also offer care and support to the dying person and the family. After the funeral, a family may need on-going care and support.

Sacramental care of the sick and dying takes place through the rites of Anointing and Holy Communion. The Sacrament of Anointing, administered by a Priest, is the sacrament for the sick. Those who are sick can also be sustained by the sacrament of Holy Communion. When Holy Communion is brought to someone who is dying, the sacrament is called “Viaticum”. This means literally “with you on the way”. Viaticum is food to support the dying person on their final journey from this life to eternal life.

## **FUNERAL MINISTRY**

Funeral ministry supports parishioners and friends when loved ones die. Where a Parish Funeral Ministry Team is established, a team member visits the bereaved family, offers consolation and support on behalf of the parish and explains the funeral rites to the family. Funerals are a rite of passage which, for Christians, leads to a new life with Christ. Grieving families and friends are encouraged to focus not only on a life which has ended, but on what is to come.

There are three main liturgical funeral rites:

- the Vigil;
- the Funeral Liturgy;
- the Rite of Committal.

For those who prepare and lead funeral liturgies, the aspect of pastoral care is particularly important. There is no such thing as a generic funeral. Each celebration must be prepared keeping in mind the life of the deceased person, the grieving family and their friends.

## **PRESIDING MINISTER**

The Priest is the presiding minister at the Funeral Mass and, where possible, presides at the other funeral rites. When no Priest is available for the funeral rites other than the Funeral Mass, a Deacon or authorised lay-person presides.

## **PREPARING THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL**

### ***BEFORE THE FUNERAL***

The bereaved family contacts the Funeral Director who contacts the Parish Priest or person representing the Parish Priest. Arrangements are then made for appropriate times for the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy or Liturgies. A member or members of the Parish Funeral Ministry Team can then be invited to help the family prepare the Vigil, the Mass or Prayer Service and the Rite of Committal.

The funeral of a Catholic usually takes place in a Catholic church. Other Christians and those who are not baptised can also be buried from a Catholic church.

### ***SYMBOLS USED IN THE FUNERAL LITURGY OR LITURGIES***

Symbols are of two kinds – Sacred/Christian symbols and Life symbols. The significance and use of these symbols should be explained to the bereaved family when preparing for the Funeral Rites.

The Christian symbols of the paschal candle, the pall, water, incense and devotional articles are used according to the ritual during the Funeral Mass and the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass. Also, the paschal candle and devotional articles may be used during the Vigil. Only Christian symbols, apart from flowers, may be placed on the coffin.

### **The Paschal Candle**

The paschal candle reminds us that Christ is our light. It was first lit in the darkness of early Easter as a sign to us that Christ, our Risen Lord, shatters the darkness of death. This symbol of the light of Christ stands before the assembly reminding us that in darkness there is light, in despair there is hope, and in death there is New Life.

## **The Pall**

The pall is a large white covering which recalls the baptismal garments which clothe us in Christ and is “a sign of the Christian dignity of the [deceased] person...a sign of hope, of the resurrection...and also signifies that in the eyes of God all are equal” (Canadian Catholic Bishops, 2006, p.1). At the beginning of the Funeral Mass or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass, the family drapes the pall over the coffin. It may be removed at the end of the final commendation or, where appropriate, it can remain on the coffin until reaching the graveside.

## **Water**

The coffin is sprinkled with Holy Water, recalling our Baptism. In Baptism, a person is declared to be a child of the Living God and is destined to live forever – the birth right of a child of God.

## **Incense**

At the final commendation, the coffin is surrounded with the sweet smell of burning incense and rising smoke. Burning incense is an ancient symbol of our prayer rising to God. We incense the coffin as a sign of our respect for the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In life and in death, our bodies are holy.

## **Life Symbols**

Life symbols such as photographs or mementoes may be placed in an appropriate and dignified place at the front of the Church, usually prior to the Funeral Liturgy and/or the Vigil. For example, a small table may be placed at the front of the Church and to the side of the coffin. Reference to these symbols could be made during the eulogy if one is to be delivered. When a deceased person has undertaken military service, family often wish to drape the national flag over the coffin. For Catholics, the flag does not take the place of the pall. The national flag may be draped over the coffin at the end of the Funeral Mass, just prior to the coffin being carried out of the church.

## ***CHOICE OF SCRIPTURE READINGS, SACRED MUSIC AND PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL FOR THE FUNERAL LITURGY OR LITURGIES***

### **Scripture Readings**

Scripture readings may be chosen by the family with the help of the Funeral Ministry Team. It is important to keep in mind that, for the Funeral Mass, the Priest prepares a homily on the readings. The readings are chosen because they reflect our faith and bring comfort and encouragement to the mourners. The Priest or Deacon proclaims the Gospel. The first and second readings are usually proclaimed by family or friends of the deceased. People should be chosen for their ability to proclaim the Word of God, not only because of their close relationship to the deceased.

### **Sacred Music**

Sacred music plays an integral part in the Funeral Mass or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass and, where appropriate, in the Vigil. The Funeral Ministry Team may guide the bereaved in choosing the music and assists in organising a musician and a cantor/leader who leads the assembly in song.

### **Prayer of the Faithful**

Prayers of the Faithful are usually read by family or friends of the deceased. People should be chosen for their ability to read the prayers clearly and effectively, not only because of their close relationship to the deceased.

### ***EULOGIES OR WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE ARE OPTIONAL***

A eulogy or words of remembrance may be presented at the Vigil or the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy outside Mass. Placement of the eulogy or words of remembrance at the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy outside Mass is after the Greeting. It is recommended that only one person present the eulogy or words of remembrance which should be no more than seven minutes in length. It is also suggested that the text of the presentation be written.



# THE LITURGICAL FUNERAL RITES

## THE VIGIL

The Vigil, if one is to be celebrated, offers an opportunity for the community to gather with the family in prayer, to recall the deceased person's life and to reflect on it in the light of the Gospel. The coffin may be present at the Vigil which may be celebrated in the church, the Funeral Director's chapel or the home. The Vigil should not be excessively long.

The form of the Liturgy allows for the participation of family, friends and members of the Funeral Ministry Team.

The Liturgy includes:

- Proclamation of the Word
- Prayer of the Faithful
- Sacred Music
- Words of Remembrance or a eulogy (optional).

Those planning the Vigil should be sensitive to the appropriateness or otherwise of the Rosary as a form of Vigil prayer. It is recommended that, if the Rosary is to be prayed, it is incorporated into a simple Liturgy with scripture. If the Vigil is to be celebrated with Mass, it should be distinct from the funeral in readings, homily and use of symbols. The Vigil is not a funeral for those who cannot attend the funeral.

## THE FUNERAL LITURGY

The Funeral Liturgy is the "central liturgical celebration " (Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, [www.bne.catholic.net.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=11413](http://www.bne.catholic.net.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=11413)) celebrated in the church. It may be a Mass with the final commendation or a Liturgy of the Word followed by prayers and a final commendation.

"When one of its members dies, the Church encourages the celebration of the Mass. [The bereaved,]...Confident in Jesus' presence among them in the living word, the living sacrifice, the living meal...in union with the whole Church offer prayers and petitions for the deceased, whom they entrust to God's merciful love." (Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship, 1989, #154).

When preparing the Funeral Mass or the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass, the Funeral Ministry Team member assists the bereaved in choosing appropriate Scripture readings, prayers of the faithful and sacred music and also explains the use of Christian symbols in the Liturgy. The placement of life symbols and the inclusion of a eulogy or words of remembrance should also be explained.

## **THE RITE OF COMMITTAL**

“The rite of committal, the conclusion of the funeral rites, is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member. ...Whenever possible, the rite of committal is to be celebrated at the site of committal.” (Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship, 1989, #204).

### **References**

Canadian Catholic Bishops' Conference. (2006). Catholic Funerals and Eulogies, the Pall and the Flag. Ottawa, Canada: Concacan Inc.

Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane. [www.bne.catholic.net.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=11413](http://www.bne.catholic.net.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=11413)

Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship. (1989). Order of Christian Funerals. Sydney: E.J. Dwyer (Australia) Pty. Ltd.

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# RESOURCES

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The following documents are available from the members section of diocesan website to assist with funeral ministry planning [www.ballarat.catholic.org.au](http://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au)

- Eulogy Writing - Quick Tips
- Lectern Set Funeral Readings for Adults
- Sample Christian Funeral Rite at the Graveside - Option 1
- Sample Christian Funeral Rite at the Graveside - Option 2
- Sample Crematorium Committal - The Rite of Christian Farewell
- Sample Crematorium Prayer Service - The Rite of Christian Farewell
- Sample Funeral Prayer Service
- Sample Graveside Prayers for a Child / Infant
- Sample Planning Sheet - Funeral Mass
- Sample Planning Sheet - Funeral Prayer Celebration
- Sample Prayers for the Burial of Ashes
- Sample Prayer of the Faithful for Funerals outside Mass
- Sample Prayer of the Faithful for Funerals within Mass
- Sample Vigil Prayers
- Suggestions for planning in the event of suicide
- The Pall & The Flag



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