

POLICY 2.10.1 Guidelines for Catholic Funerals

SUMMARY

1. A Catholic funeral is made up of three rites: Vigil for the Deceased, Funeral Liturgy, and Rite of Committal. Church teachings and norms of the Archdiocese determine the content, venue and timing of these rites.
2. While cremation is permitted by the Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan, the preferred practice in the Archdiocese is to celebrate the rites in the presence of the body.
3. The priests and churches of the Archdiocese work closely with local funeral homes and the loved ones of the deceased in making funeral arrangements.
4. The norms of the Archdiocese allow for accommodation of local customs and practices for funerals and burials, including taking up a collection and holding an overnight vigil. However, these customs and practices cannot be contrary to Catholic teaching.

FORMS

Template – Agreement for Use of Facility (for overnight vigils)

RELATED POLICIES

Policy 2.1.4 The Use of Catholic Churches and Church Sites for Non-Catholic Services

Policy 3.1.7 Cemetery Fund

Policy 3.5.1 Parish Responsibilities for Collecting and Paying Fees for Pastoral Services

This policy is intended to provide information, direction and guidance to clergy, parish employees and volunteers as they help mourners make funeral and burial arrangements for deceased loved ones.

1. Principal rites of Catholic Funerals

There are three principal rites that comprise a Catholic Funeral: the Vigil for the Deceased; the Funeral Liturgy; and, the Rite of Committal. It is highly preferred that all three rites are celebrated in the presence of the body of the deceased (see 2. Cremation, below, regarding cremated remains.)

In Canada, the *Order of Christian Funerals* (2017), a CCCB publication, is the standard ritual book for Catholic funeral liturgies and is the principal resource for determining the content of those liturgies.

a. Vigil for the Deceased

A Vigil Prayer Service may be held at the home of the deceased, at the local funeral home, at the parish church or at any other suitable place. It is usually held on the evening before the Funeral Liturgy. Following the Liturgy of the Word, other local customs and rituals may be included at this time, such as words of remembrance from those present, prayers and rites of organizations of which the deceased was a member, and video presentations about the deceased. Additional readings and music, sacred or secular, would also be permitted after the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word.

b. Funeral Liturgy

The Funeral Liturgy is the central liturgical celebration for the deceased. In the Archdiocese, celebration of the Funeral Mass is strongly encouraged. The Funeral Liturgy outside Mass should only be used when:

- the funeral Mass is not permitted in Canada (i.e. Sundays, Easter Triduum, etc.);
- there are circumstances that do not make a Mass possible (e.g. a priest is not available);
- for pastoral reasons a Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass is considered more suitable.

The Funeral Liturgy is to be celebrated in the parish church.

The arrangements for the Funeral Liturgy should be made with the involvement of the family and loved ones of the deceased. The CCCB publication, *Sacred Scripture Selections for a Funeral Liturgy*, and the parish hymnal should be the principal guides in making choices for the liturgy. A good rule of thumb to follow is: Anything that is not permitted in a Sunday Mass celebration should not be included in a Funeral Liturgy.

The one addition to the Funeral Liturgy permitted by the Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan is the sharing of “Words of Remembrance” of the deceased, with the following understandings:

- only one person speaks
- a written text is reviewed and given pre-approval by the priest
- the speech will take no more than seven minutes
- *if presented at Mass*: to be given either before the Reception of the Body or immediately following the opening hymn, but before the sign of the cross
- *if presented at the Funeral Liturgy outside Mass*: to be given immediately before the final commendation
- it cannot include any kind of slide presentation, musical accompaniment, or any other non-liturgical element.

Audio-visual presentations, such as power-point, are permissible at the Vigil prayer service, the wake, or the luncheon, but **not during the funeral Mass or Liturgy outside of Mass**.

c. Rite of Committal

The Rite of Committal normally will immediately follow the Funeral Liturgy, unless there are good reasons to delay the committal, such as frozen ground or burial in a distant cemetery. If weather or other circumstances mean that there is no service at the place of committal, then the rite is not done at all.

2. Cremation

As noted above, the preferred practice is to celebrate the principal rites of a Christian funeral in the presence of the body of the deceased. However, the Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan permits the Funeral Liturgy to be celebrated in the presence of the ashes of the deceased if the cremation was not for reasons that go against Catholic teaching. In Canada, the CCCB has published the *Order of Christian Funerals: Supplement for Celebrations with Cremated Remains* (2018). This is the ritual that is to be used in the Archdiocese for these liturgies.

In situations of cremation, the preferred practice in the Archdiocese is for the cremation to take place following the celebration of the Funeral Liturgy. The cremation should take place as soon as possible after the Funeral Liturgy to allow the appropriate celebration of the Rite of Committal. The entirety of the cremated remains of the deceased is to be properly interred, either by burial in a cemetery or placement in a columbarium in a cemetery. The loved ones of the deceased are to be informed that cremated remains of a person are not to be strewn in nature, kept in one's house, or turned into jewelry or other mementoes.

3. Role of funeral homes

a. Funeral arrangements

In the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan, the first point of contact for clergy is usually a local funeral home, which has already taken on responsibility for the body. In many cases, the basic arrangements for funeral services and burials are discussed with a funeral director: date, time, and preferences for types of services.

Priests are encouraged to build a relationship with local funeral directors and to share the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church regarding funeral and burial rites.

b. Fees for services

The funeral home also takes responsibility for collecting all related fees and forwarding the amounts for clergy stipends and use of facilities to the appropriate payees. While maintaining that spiritual benefits cannot be purchased, there are legitimate expenses associated with the conducting of a funeral.

4. Accommodating local cultural practices

The Archdiocese encourages respect for and incorporating community traditions and cultural practices in funeral and burial rites, insofar as they support and do not contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church.

a. Pew collections

In many parishes of our Archdiocese, there has grown up a tradition of a collection being taken up at the funeral Mass or service. Where this is the custom, that collection has been deemed to be payment for the use of the church, the services of the priest or deacon and other ministers. Wherever this has been the custom, it may be retained on the advice of the Parish Pastoral Council. This collection is intended only for the church, and not for any other person or charity or cause. For more information about stipends and fees for funerals, please see Policy 3.5.1.

b. Overnight vigils

It is a revered custom among Indigenous peoples to spend one or two nights in vigil before the funeral of a member of the community. While this practice is not a prescribed element in the Roman liturgy, the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan honours this sacred tradition of the people and supports its celebration when it is asked for, with the following understandings:

- The priest assigned to that community will make every effort to be present for some portion of the vigil, and offer prayers with the people for the soul of the departed.
- The vigil may take place in one of many places. The home of the deceased, or the home of another family member, are suitable venues for such vigils. When the number of those attending the vigil makes the home unsuitable, the family may also choose a community hall. In certain

circumstances, the parish church where the Funeral Liturgy will take place may also be appropriate.

- The suitability of the parish church or hall is dependent on the character of the church buildings. For this reason, there is no policy on this matter that applies to every church in the Archdiocese. **Each priest will have to determine the suitability of the church and/or hall under his care.**

In the case of the use of the church (nave) or parish hall, the family of the deceased will name a contact person. The contact person will make the arrangements for the use of the parish church or hall with the parish priest or his representative. The contact person will be responsible for ensuring that the agreed terms of the arrangement and the following general principles are respected during the vigil:

Principle 1: The Funeral Vigil is a sacred time, meant for prayerful remembrance of the deceased. Boisterous conversation or activities such as card playing and smoking are inappropriate.

Principle 2: No smoking will be permitted inside the church or inside the hall.

Principle 3: If the church nave is being used for the vigil, there should be no food served or eaten in the nave. Coffee, tea or cold drinks (non-alcoholic) may be served and consumed in the nave. Food may be offered and eaten in the hall.

Principle 4: The church and/or hall must be left the way it was found. This pertains especially to the washrooms.

Principle 5: There is no fee for the use of the church or hall **for the vigil**. However, a refundable deposit may be asked by the parish to cover repair of any damage or clean-up that may be required.

Please see the template “Agreement for use of facility”, below, which is designed for parishes. Parish priests or facility managers should adapt the agreement as required, to ensure the particular needs of the family and/or the parish are understood by everyone before it is signed.

Amended by the College of Consultors on 16 February 2011

Amended by the Curia 14 December 2017

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