

# **THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS**

**in the Catholic Parishes and Missions of the Diocese of Helena**

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*Offering worship, praise, and thanksgiving  
to God for the gift of a life returned to God.*

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# Acknowledgements

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✠ Most Reverend George Leo Thomas, Bishop Helena,  
approves the publication and implementation of this document as Particular Law  
in the Catholic Parishes and Missions of the Diocese of Helena.

**THE COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED, November 2, 2015**

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*Father Ed Hislop, Chair, Diocese of Helena Liturgical Commission 406-721-2405*

January 26, 2015



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The death of a Christian is a call for the Catholic Community to gather in faith to proclaim that God has created each person for eternal life. Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death. The parish community gathers in the face of death to proclaim its trust in God's promise, to support the grieving family and friends and to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life returned to God. The Church through its funeral rites commends the dead to God's merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of their sins.

This is the spirit in which this statement of Policy is presented so that all of us in the Catholic Parishes and Missions of the Diocese of Helena can share this common vision and support those who face the loss of a loved one by the light of our shared Catholic faith.

This Policy flows from *The Order of Christian Funerals*, which was approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1985, confirmed by the Apostolic See in 1987, and became mandatory in the Dioceses of the United States on November 2, 1989. This Policy makes the principles of the *Order of Christian Funerals* concrete for celebrations in the Diocese of Helena.

The current document originated as a result of reflection and study by the priests and parish staff members of the Missoula Deanery, and has been in effect on an "*ad experimentum*" basis in that Deanery since the Second Sunday of Easter 2009. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission and the College of Consultors / Presbyteral Council have studied and amended the document as a statement of Policy for the Diocese of Helena.

**I hereby approve and promulgate "*The Order of Christian Funerals in the Catholic Parishes and Missions of the Diocese of Helena*" as Particular Law for the Diocese of Helena.** This Policy may be utilized immediately after publication. This Policy must be fully implemented throughout the Diocese of Helena beginning with the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, **November 2, 2015.**

*May the peace of God which is beyond all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "George Leo Thomas".

Most Reverend George Leo Thomas  
Bishop of Helena



# THE ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS IN THE CATHOLIC PARISHES AND MISSIONS OF THE DIOCESE OF HELENA

*Offering worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God  
for the gift of a life returned to God.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Catholic Parishes of the Diocese of Helena embrace the ministry of burying the dead and caring for the bereaved with the compassion and love of Christ and consider this ministry integral to the life of our parishes. The Catholic Community “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.”<sup>1</sup> Through our ministry at the time of death and beyond we remember the Paschal Mystery of Christ and thus celebrate it in the life and death of the baptized.

“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 of 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.”<sup>2</sup>

The Funeral Rites of the Catholic Church are celebrated “to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God **for the gift of a 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.**”<sup>3</sup>

The Funeral Liturgy “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.”<sup>4</sup>

The Catholic Parishes of the Diocese of Helena embrace and continue to implement **The Order of Christian Funerals.**<sup>5</sup> The Order of Christian Funerals, in its entirety, guides and directs the ministry of the Parishes of the Diocese of Helena at the time of death.

## PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A CATHOLIC FUNERAL

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### Ministry and Participation

Every baptized Christian has the right to Christian burial according to the provisions of canon law. “If one member suffers in the Body of Christ which is the Church, all the members suffer with that member” (1 Cor 12:26). “For this reason, those who are baptized into Christ and nourished at the same table of the Lord are responsible for one another.... when a member of Christ’s Body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love.”<sup>6</sup>

Burying the dead and extending itself in pastoral care to the bereaved is an integral and indispensable ministry of the Catholic Parish and every parishioner. Each member of the parish (parishioner, pastoral care minister, lay ecclesial minister, deacon, religious, priest) is called to be present and to share in this ministry of compassion: “to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn.”<sup>7</sup> To that end each Catholic parish of the Diocese of Helena is responsible to provide the services, ministry and pastoral care necessary at the time of death. It is always up to the

parish, and not the mortuary, to secure the necessary ministers for the funeral rites. The pastor or parish pastoral care minister assures a diversity of ministers for the Funeral Rites and collaborates with the family in making such choices.

## Preparation

The parishes of the Diocese of Helena strive to involve family and friends in the preparation of the funeral rites in accord with the Order of Christian Funerals<sup>8</sup> and other liturgical documents of the Church. This involves the choice of Scripture, texts and rites provided in the ritual book, “the selection of music for the rites” (in accord with liturgical principles) “and in the designation of liturgical ministers.”<sup>9</sup>

At times, adult children or other relatives responsible for preparing the funeral of a deceased loved one are not active in their Catholic faith, they may be members of another faith tradition or may not be part of any faith community. Great care must be taken to sensitively explain to them the meaning of the Catholic Funeral rites, the importance and necessity of a Catholic Funeral for a Catholic and to invite, to the extent possible, their participation in the preparation. This requires a sensitive and caring pastoral spirit.

## The Body of the Deceased.

“Since in baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the temple of the Holy Spirit, [Catholics] respect and honor the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest. Any customs associated with the preparation of the body of the deceased should always be marked with dignity and reverence and never with the despair of those who have no hope. For the final disposition of the body, it is the ancient Christian custom to bury or entomb the bodies of the dead.”<sup>10</sup>

“Cremation is permitted unless it is evident that cremation was chosen for anti-Christian motives.”<sup>11</sup> When cremation is chosen it ordinarily occurs following the Funeral Mass.



*“The embalming of a corpse, the situation of the tomb, the funeral procession, are a consolation to the living rather than assistance to the dead. Yet it does not follow that the bodies of the dead are to be neglected or flung aside, especially not the bodies of holy and faithful persons, since these bodies were once the instruments and vessels used (holily) by these souls to do all their good works. A father’s ring, his robe, or some other belonging is dear to those left behind in proportion to the affection borne toward this parent. The bodies of the dead are not to be uncared for in any way, since these bodies are dearer and nearer to us than any garment. These bodies are not ornaments or aids applied from without; they are of the very nature of human beings. . . . The care bestowed upon the burial of the body is no aid to salvation. It is merely an act of humanity regulated by affection. . . . Thus these duties toward a body, which although dead is destined to rise again and to live throughout eternity, are in a way a testimony of faith in that belief.”*  
Saint Augustine

## THE THREE PRINCIPAL RITES OF A CATHOLIC FUNERAL LITURGY

The Catholic Parishes of the Diocese of Helena seek to provide compassionate support to those who face the reality of death and grief. The harshness of death, seen with the eyes of faith, reveals a share in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

*The rites of the Catholic Funeral Liturgy can best be described as a journey toward entering into a new relationship with the deceased, [the rites] “...envision a journey, or rather, two parallel journeys. The body of the deceased is moving from the place of death to the funeral home, to the church, and then to its final resting place. As the mourners accompany the body physically through all or part of the journey, they are—if the process is allowed to happen—moving inwardly as well. Intellectually, emotionally and spiritually they are step-by-step entering into a new relationship with the deceased, with themselves and one another. In pain and amid tears there is loss and separation, but “Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just.”<sup>12</sup> ...the “crucial moments of that outward and inward journey may be marked by appropriate prayer and the proclamation of faith”.<sup>13</sup>*

## 1. The Vigil for the Deceased.

“The Vigil for the Deceased is the principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy, or if there is no funeral liturgy, before the rite of committal.”<sup>14</sup>

“The vigil may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, in the funeral home or in some other suitable place. IT MAY ALSO BE CELEBRATED IN THE CHURCH, BUT AT A TIME WELL BEFORE THE FUNERAL LITURGY.”<sup>15</sup>

Ordinarily the **Vigil for the Deceased** is celebrated the evening before the Funeral Mass. While, in recent years, there has been a tendency to celebrate the Vigil of the Deceased on the same day as the Funeral Mass (and in some instances just before it) this is not an acceptable practice since it does not reflect the meaning of the Vigil liturgy. Therefore the Vigil is NOT celebrated on the same day as the Funeral Mass. The growing practice of celebrating only the Funeral Mass (without a Vigil) is discouraged since the Vigil for the Deceased is an integral aspect of the Funeral Liturgy. In particular pastoral circumstances, however, the pastoral minister, in consultation with those concerned, may choose “from within these three groups of rites those that best correspond to the particular needs and customs of the mourners.”<sup>16</sup>

“At the vigil the Christian community keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ's presence. IT IS THE FIRST OCCASION AMONG THE FUNERAL RITES FOR THE SOLEMN PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD. In this time of loss the family and community turn to God's word as the source of faith and hope, as light and life in the face of darkness and death. Consoled by the redeeming word of God and by the abiding presence of Christ and his Spirit, the assembly at the vigil calls upon the Father of mercy to receive the deceased into the kingdom of light and peace.”<sup>17</sup>

**“THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE HIGH POINT AND CENTRAL FOCUS OF THE VIGIL.”<sup>18</sup>**  
**The VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED is, therefore, integral to the funeral rites of the Catholic Church.**

**WHEN THE VIGIL LITURGY IS CELEBRATED AT THE MORTUARY, OR IN A PLACE OTHER THAN THE PARISH CHURCH,** the ordinary principles of “full, conscious and active participation” in the liturgy through music, diversity of ministers, various postures, etc. are maintained. These ministers are the ordinary parish liturgical ministers (readers, cantor/musicians, greeters, etc.).

### SHARING OF MEMORIES

At the Vigil for the Deceased opportunity is provided for a person or persons to speak in remembrance of the deceased.<sup>19</sup> This can be either formal or informal. Storytelling or memory sharing done in the context of faith and prayer, assists in the process of bereavement. Great care is taken to assure that this does not become burdensome, repetitive, time-consuming or disrespectful. It is presumed that those who speak have been invited to do so by the family and have reviewed the content of their reflection with the presiding minister.

### THE ROSARY

THE ROSARY DOES NOT REPLACE THE VIGIL SERVICE. However, the rosary is a prayer with deep roots in Catholic tradition and spirituality and as such it holds an important place in the faith and prayer life of many Catholics. It is an appropriate prayer at the time of death, but it is a prayer in its own right. Therefore, for those families who may wish to gather to pray the rosary, a special time should be set aside, *distinct from the time of the Vigil for the Deceased* so that family and friends may gather for this prayer.

## 2. The Funeral Liturgy.

“The Funeral liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased.... At the funeral liturgy the community gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery. Through the Holy Spirit the community is joined together in faith as one Body in Christ to reaffirm in sign and symbol, word and gesture that each believer through baptism shares in Christ's death and resurrection and can look to the day when all the elect will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace.”<sup>20</sup>

“When one of its members dies, the (Catholic) Church encourages the celebration of the Mass.”<sup>21</sup> When for particular reasons (such as the unavailability of a priest) Mass cannot be celebrated the **Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass** is used.<sup>22</sup> (*A funeral Mass is not permitted on the following days: Holy Days of Obligation [January 1, August 15, November 1, December 8]; Holy Thursday; during the Three Days of the Easter Triduum [Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday]; the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter Season.*)<sup>23</sup> The choice to celebrate the Funeral liturgy Outside of Mass may also be made by the Pastor and family for various pastoral reasons.

**National flags or other insignia.** “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.”<sup>24</sup> Ordinarily the funeral pall, a reminder of the garment given at baptism, is placed over the casket. The dignity or honor the deceased person shared is the dignity of being clothed in Christ at baptism, a dignity shared equally by all the baptized.

3. **Rite of Committal / Burial** “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, that is, beside the open grave or place of interment.... In committing the body to its resting place, the community expresses the hope that, with all those who have gone before marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection. The rite of committal is an expression of the communion that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven: the deceased passes with the farewell prayers of the community of believers into the welcoming company of those who need faith no longer but see God face to face.”<sup>25</sup>

“The community continues to show its concern for the mourners by participating in the rite of committal. The rite marks the separation in this life of the mourners from the deceased, and through it the community assists them as they complete their care for the deceased and lay the body to rest. **The act of committal is a stark and powerful expression of this separation. When carried out in the midst of the community of faith, the committal can help the mourners to face the end of one relationship with the deceased and to begin a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude, and the hope of resurrection and reunion.**”<sup>26</sup>

**As a general practice the actual burial or lowering of the casket should occur during the Committal Rites for parishes of the Diocese of Helena. Catholic cemeteries in the Diocese must be well prepared for this procedure.** The deans of the Diocese should be in dialogue with Catholic public, municipal and other cemeteries in their deanery regarding this practice. Family members are always provided the option to choose otherwise. Great care is taken in preparing the family for the Rite of Committal.

It is most appropriate, in keeping with the expectations of **Order of Christian Funerals**, that the burial actually occur at the appropriate time during the rite (Committal).

Having come to bury a loved one, it seems most unfitting to leave the cemetery with the casket (or cremated remains of the body) remaining on the surface of the grave. While actual burial, as noted above, is a “*stark and powerful expression of this separation*,”<sup>27</sup> it is also healing and helps bring to closure this portion of the grieving experience.

**When burial does occur as part of the rite** it is most important that cemetery personnel be prepared for the act of lowering the casket and that cemetery equipment is of good quality to assure the safety and appropriateness of the action.

*Preparations should be made prior to the beginning of the rite.* It is also important that some of the earth be provided in a suitable container so that presider, family members, friends and cemetery personnel, can place some earth in the grave during the committal rite. At times, other gestures, prior to the lowering or after it may be helpful (family touching, kissing the casket before it is lowered, placing of flowers into the grave, etc.).

*“But the Lord Jesus Christ will change our mortal bodies to be like his in glory, for he is risen, the firstborn from the dead.*”

*So let us commend our sister, our brother to the Lord, that the Lord may embrace him/her in peace and raise up his/her body on the last day.”*

Order of Christian Funerals  
Committal Prayer, #406





## FULL, CONSCIOUS AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE FUNERAL RITES.

"...all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, ...have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism. ...the full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else...."<sup>28</sup> This primary principle, which guides all liturgical celebrations of the Church, is particularly important in the preparation and celebration of the Funeral Rites.

"The responsibility for the ministry of consolation rests with the believing community.... Each Christian shares in this ministry according to the various gifts and offices in the Church."<sup>29</sup> "The community's principal involvement in the ministry of consolation is expressed in its active participation in the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the vigil for the deceased, the funeral liturgy, and the rite of committal.... The assembly's participation can be assisted by the preparation of booklets that contain an outline of the rite (s), the texts and songs belonging to the people, and directions for postures, gesture and movement."<sup>30</sup> It is therefore important that a worship aid, or hymnal be provided for each of the rites of the funeral liturgy so that the assembly can participate in both the sung and spoken elements of the liturgy.

The diversity of liturgical ministries is a hallmark of Roman Catholic Liturgy and every effort must be made to assure that this principle is implemented in the Funeral Rites in accord with ordinary liturgical principles. "Family members should be encouraged to take an active part in these ministries, but they should not be asked to assume any role that their grief or sense of loss may make too burdensome."<sup>31</sup> Care must also be taken to assure that those who serve as ministers of the liturgy are able to do so emotionally, physically and spiritually. They must be properly prepared and aware of the significance of such participation. Ordinarily, particularly at the Funeral Mass, liturgical ministers are Catholic, active in their own local parish.

**The selection of liturgical ministers for the Funeral Mass is of particular importance. Readers, for example, should be selected based on the following criteria: They are active baptized Catholics (a pastoral accommodation could be made for persons of other Christian faiths, provided they are active in that faith; Persons of the Jewish faith could proclaim the Old Testament Readings, provided they are active in their Jewish faith); Persons selected to present the gifts of bread and wine, must be active Catholics, since they are presenting the gifts that are to be received; Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, must be active Catholics who serve in this ministry in their own parish. This ministry should ordinarily be reserved to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who serve in the local parish.**

**HOLY COMMUNION AT THE FUNERAL LITURGY.** The Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1996 are the norms for all Eucharistic Liturgies in the Diocese of Helena (these norms are published in all missals/worship aids used throughout the Diocese). The principles expressed in this document should be discussed during the preparation of the funeral rites with the family. It is important to note that the Roman Missal does not provide the option of giving particular instruction to the assembly during the communion rite. Therefore it is not appropriate to instruct people regarding these norms at that time. It is also not appropriate to invite those who "cannot receive Holy Communion" to process forward for a "blessing." The blessing is given to all as part of the Rite of Dismissal. If there is a discerned pastoral need to instruct the assembly, born out of a sense of genuine hospitality (as may often be the case due to the diversity of those present for the funeral liturgy), then before the liturgy begins the assembly may be referred to the norms in the missal, "missalette" or worship aid. That instruction should be brief and given with a sense of genuine and hospitable pastoral care. Such awareness will often help those present who are not Catholic pray with a greater sense of ease.

When a worship aid or booklet is printed at the local parish in the Diocese of Helena the following adapted version of the norms should be provided:

*"In the proclamation of the Scriptures, the saving word of God through the power of the Spirit becomes living and active in the minds and hearts of the community. Having been strengthened at the Table of God's word, the community calls to mind God's saving deeds and offers the Father in the Spirit the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ's Passover from death to life, a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of reconciliation and atonement. Communion nourishes the community and expresses its unity. In communion the participants have a foretaste of the heavenly banquet that awaits them..."*

*Confident in Jesus' presence among them in the living word, the living sacrifice, the living meal, those present in union with the whole Church offer prayers and petitions for the deceased, whom they entrust to God's merciful love."*

Order of Christian Funerals #154





## AT A CATHOLIC MASS WHO MAY RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION?

We believe that the Risen Christ is really present in the bread and wine of communion, so to receive Holy Communion is to eat and drink the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ. It also expresses a deliberate union (communion) with the Catholic Church.

**Active members of the Catholic Church**, that is, those who participate *regularly* in Sunday Mass, in their home parish, receive communion—the Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation.

**Baptized fellow Christians:** Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass) is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship. Members of Christian Churches with whom the Catholic Church is not fully united, *ordinarily* do not receive communion at a Catholic Mass (as Catholics do not receive communion in other Christian Churches). Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances requires permission of the priest.

**For persons of other faiths:** Those of faith traditions other than the Christian faith, do not receive Communion. With them we pray for the peace and unity of the human family.

## NATIVE AND OTHER CULTURAL CUSTOMS IN THE DIOCESE OF HELENA

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**Native customs** surrounding the experience of death are rich and varied. Normally the vigil period occurs over a three day period with various rites, visitations and fellowship. During the “three days” the rosary is prayed, the vigil service is celebrated, memories are shared and prayer is offered both formally and spontaneously. Processions with the body to the Church for the Funeral Mass and to the place of burial are an integral aspect of the Funeral Rite as the community of family, friends and parish “clear a path for the deceased on the journey home.” The native traditions face the reality of death with a spirit of trust, faith and hope, sharing the grief of death and the promise of eternal life as a community of faith rooted in the rich tradition of native culture. Pastors are to remain sensitive to long standing native customs. Many of these traditions integrate well into the spirit of the Catholic Order of Christian Funerals.

**The cultural diversity** of people in the Diocese of Helena continues to grow and expand. Sensitivity to the various cultural traditions surrounding the death of a loved one is a pastoral necessity.

# CREMATION

The appropriate Roman Catholic attitude toward cremation, as noted in the Order of Christian Funerals, is rooted in the long-standing Catholic tradition that the death of a member of the Church is not an isolated event. The body of a deceased loved one is brought to his or her final place of rest in a spirit of love and care with support and pastoral care for those left behind. The body of the loved one is important. The Church has always cared with great attention for the body of the deceased, honoring it as a temple of the Holy Spirit and the embodiment of the sacramental presence of God in the world. Cremation can, at times, create an environment in which the reality of death is avoided or in which the grieving process is either denied or postponed. It can be a short term solution creating long term difficulties. When cremation is desired or has occurred great pastoral care is required in order to assist family members and others deal with the reality and difficulty of death.

When cremation is desired the Order of Christian Funerals indicates that it does not normally occur immediately after death. Instead cremation is understood to take place AFTER THE VARIOUS FUNERAL RITES (except committal). **The procedure envisioned in the Order of Christian Funerals when cremation is to take place is:** The Vigil for the Deceased with the body present; the Funeral Mass (with the body present); and after cremation has occurred, the burial or entombment of the cremated remains of the body.<sup>32</sup>

## WHEN CREMATION TAKES PLACE IMMEDIATELY AFTER DEATH AND BEFORE THE FUNERAL RITES.

Persons or families may not always follow the procedure preferred by the Catholic Order of Christian Funerals. For a variety of reasons, some good, others less than good, some families will choose cremation immediately after death.

When this occurs— especially when it is known ahead of time that it will occur—the following pastoral approach should be taken by pastors and parish pastoral care ministers.

First, before the body leaves the hospital, home, or wherever death occurred, the service of "**GATHERING IN THE PRESENCE OF THE BODY**"<sup>33</sup> should be held for the family and other mourners. There is still the deep need for family members, friends and parishioners to reverence the body so that the reality of death and of faith may be evoked. The rite with its sprinkling of holy water and marking with the sign of the cross meets that need. With this service a sense of the funeral journey's beginning could be experienced.

**When cremation takes place immediately** (even without the rite of "Gathering in the Presence of the Body") **it must never mean a loss of ritual or a loss of the FUNERAL RITES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH as described above. Again, good pastoral care and liturgical preparation is necessary and important.**

**The cremated remains of the body are treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they came. The cremated remains may be present at the Funeral Mass.**<sup>34</sup>

**THE GROWING PRACTICE OF DELAYING THE FUNERAL RITES** for one who has been cremated, out of a sense of convenience, time of the year, ease of travel for family members, etc. ought not to be encouraged. Respect for the cremated remains of the human body includes the manner they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and their final disposition.<sup>35</sup> The need to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery of Christ in the face of the death of loved one is a need that should not be delayed or postponed.

*"We recall that our bodies bear the imprint of the first creation when they were fashioned from the dust; but in faith we remember, too, that by the new creation we also bear the image of Jesus who was raised to glory. Grant your servant a place of rest and peace where the world of dust and ashes has no dominion. Confirm us in our hope that your servant will be created anew..."*

Order of Christian Funerals Committal Prayer for Cremated Remains, adapted



## BURIAL OF THE CREMATED REMAINS OF THE BODY.

The cremated remains of the body are buried and NOT SCATTERED. Burial (or entombment) takes place in the usual way, using the options and prayers for cremated remains of the body found in the Order of Christian Funerals. Like the Body, the cremated remains of the body are actually buried or entombed as part of the committal rite. Preferably, burial or entombment takes place soon after the funeral Mass. **Delay of burial or entombment, or keeping the cremated remains of the body in the home, is not in keeping with Catholic tradition or understanding. "The practices of scattering cremated remains on the sea [or on any body of water], from the air, or on the ground or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires."**<sup>36</sup>

*(Note: Cremated remains of the body are not mixed with other cremains, and/or divided and buried in separate places. The emerging practice of placing a portion of the cremated remains in a pendant or other kind of jewelry does not reflect the Catholic sense of "reverent disposition of the cremated remains").*

*"God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source. Indeed, God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises.*

*"A cry from deep within our being, music is a way for God to lead us to the realm of higher things. As Saint Augustine says, "Singing is for the one who loves." Music is therefore a sign of God's love for us and of our love for God..."*

*Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, #1-2*



## MUSIC FOR THE FUNERAL RITES

"Music is integral to the funeral rites" (the Vigil for the deceased, the Funeral Mass and the Rite of Committal). "It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love. **THE TEXTS OF THE SONGS CHOSEN FOR A PARTICULAR CELEBRATION SHOULD EXPRESS THE PASCHAL MYSTERY OF THE LORD'S SUFFERING, DEATH AND TRIUMPH OVER DEATH AND SHOULD BE RELATED TO THE READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE.**"<sup>37</sup>

"Since music can evoke strong feelings, the music for the celebration of the funeral rites should be chosen with great care. The music at funerals should support, console, and uplift the participants and should help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christians share in that victory."<sup>38</sup>

**ONLY MUSIC WHICH IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE LITURGY IS USED DURING THE FUNERAL RITES.** Music during the liturgy is always "sung prayer" and must therefore express the faith of the Church. **The guidelines and principals for Music in Catholic Worship as outlined in *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*<sup>39</sup> are followed in the parishes of the Diocese of Helena. Appropriate liturgical music is selected in collaboration with the pastor, parish music ministry and the family.** "Music should never be used to memorialize the deceased, but rather to give praise to the Lord, whose paschal sacrifice has freed us from the bonds of death."<sup>40</sup> Instrumentalists, cantors, etc. are normally participants in local parish Music Ministry. All others work through and with the parish music coordinator. It is important to note that preludes and postludes whether choral, vocal or instrumental are selected in accord with the principles of liturgical music.

# THE PLACE OF THE FUNERAL RITES

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“The Vigil [for the Deceased] may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, in the funeral home..., or in some other suitable place. It may also be celebrated in the church, but at a time well before the funeral liturgy.... Adaptations of the vigil will often be suggested by the place in which the celebration occurs.”<sup>41</sup>

While the Vigil for the Deceased may be celebrated in various places depending upon particular circumstances, the Order of Christian Funerals is clear in its expectation that the **Funeral Mass, or a Funeral Outside of Mass, ordinarily occurs in the parish Church**. “Since the [parish] church is the place where the community of faith assembles for worship” and “the place where the Christian life is begotten in baptism [and] nourished in the Eucharist,” it is also the place “where the community gathers to commend one of its deceased members to the Father. The church [building] is at once a symbol of the community and of the heavenly liturgy that the celebration of the liturgy anticipates.”<sup>42</sup> When, in an extraordinary circumstance there is a desire to celebrate the Funeral Mass in a place other than the parish church, permission from the bishop is required.

## MILITARY HONORS

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The honor given by the military to a deceased Catholic member of the armed forces is always done in the context of the Catholic Funeral Liturgy and with the understanding that the primary honor celebrated at the Catholic funeral liturgy is the deceased’s participation in the paschal mystery of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. The symbols of faith, particularly baptismal symbols, are primary and not incidental.

“National flags or the flags or insignia of associations to which the deceased belonged are to be removed from the casket at the entrance of the church. They may be replaced after the casket has been taken from the church.”<sup>43</sup>

Military honors, when desired, ordinarily occur at the cemetery. In such instances the AMERICAN FLAG IS NOT PLACED ON THE CASKET DURING THE VIGIL SERVICE OR DURING THE FUNERAL LITURGY.

Following the Prayer of Final Commendation and the Song of Farewell, the body is taken to the Church doors where the Pall may be removed. The Flag may then be respectfully placed on the casket by members of the military if they are present.

**AT THE CEMETERY, the military honors ordinarily take place first, before the burial rites.** This is particularly important since, in accord with the Order of Christian Funerals, the lowering of the casket or the burial or entombment of the cremated remains of the body ordinarily occurs in the Diocese of Helena as part of the Rite of Burial.

It is expected that military personnel participating in the military honors remain for the burial rites.

## OTHER CIVIC, FRATERNAL AND ECCLESIAL ASSOCIATIONS

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Members of the Christian faithful often belong to a variety of civic, fraternal or ecclesial associations which constitute a meaningful source of friendship, mutual support and solidarity in mission. In death even as in life, they may continue to do so for the family and friends of the deceased. Many of these groups, particularly those associated with our Catholic tradition (e.g., Knights of Columbus, Daughters of Isabella, Ancient Order of Hibernians, and Legion of Mary) have ritual services and traditions whereby they mark the passing of the deceased and acknowledge the camaraderie enabled and sustained by his/her membership. Many of these give credence to Catholic beliefs about life and death.

As schedules permit, these rituals are to be held separately from and not in immediate conjunction with the Vigil for the Deceased, the Funeral Liturgy or the Rite of Committal; nor is any portion of them to be integrated into these respective stations of the Order of Christian Funerals. It should also be noted that *“only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy. Any other symbols, for example insignia of associations, have no place in the funeral liturgy.”*<sup>44</sup>

# PROPER TERMS

## FOR THE FUNERAL RITES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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When describing the various elements of the Catholic Funeral Liturgy it is important for parish pastoral ministers, funeral directors and families to use the proper terms especially in various print publications, internet notices and newspaper obituaries. For Catholic Funerals in the Diocese of Helena the following terms, as described above, will be used in order to promote and maintain consistency in terminology:

1. **VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED** or **VIGIL FOR (*name of deceased*)**;
2. **FUNERAL MASS FOR (*name of deceased*)**;
3. When there is no Mass celebrated: **FUNERAL LITURGY FOR (*name of deceased*)**;
4. When services occur sometime after death (as in the case of cremation, as described below) or after burial the following term is used: **A MASS FOR (*name of the deceased*) WILL BE CELEBRATED.....** (In such cases the term “Funeral Mass” or “Funeral Liturgy” is not used).
5. **BURIAL** or **RITE OF COMMITTAL** (either term may be used).
6. **Cremated remains of the body** (proper term for the cremated remains).



*“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so too we might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”*      *Romans 6:3-5*

## GOOD STEWARDSHIP

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Good stewardship of the life and ministry of the parish entails a willingness on the part of all who are served by the parish and its ministries to help provide the necessary resources for the parish to continue its mission and ministries. There is no fee or set stipend for funerals in the Diocese of Helena. Families of the deceased are invited to make a special offering to the parish consistent with other expenses of the funeral. This offering helps to support the various ministries and services the parishes provide including, when provided, the funeral luncheon ministry. Such an offering reflects the commitment of the family to the ongoing life and ministry of the Church as well as demonstrating their willingness to be a part of the parish's ministry of service. The offering should also reflect a sense of gratitude to God for the life of the deceased and for the faith celebrated in the funeral rites.

**Gifts and Memorials:** Gifts and memorials are an expression of the love and respect family and friends have for the memory of their loved one. The most cherished milestones of a loved one's life; baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage and other significant life events have been celebrated with their faith community. There is no greater way to honor that memory than with a memorial to the parish where they sought and received the sacraments and had their spiritual home. With that in mind, at a Catholic funeral, it is recommended that gifts given in memory of a loved one be directed first to the benefit of the parish and then to other Catholic organizations.

**Music fees.** Music is an integral and necessary dimension of the funeral rites and must always be led by those competent to provide the liturgical music required by the Church. *It is the norm that parish ministers of music provide the liturgical music leadership for the Funeral Rites.* The compensation of parish musicians and cantors reflects both the parish and family commitment to providing just remuneration for services provided.

# CONCLUSION

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“The Church through its funeral rites commends the dead to God’s merciful love and pleads for the forgiveness of their sins. At the funeral rites, especially at the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the Christian community affirms and expresses the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of saints. Though separated from the living, the dead are still at one with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayers and intercession. At the rite of final commendation and farewell, the community acknowledges the reality of separation and commends the deceased to God. In this way it recognizes the spiritual bond that still exists between the living and the dead and proclaims its belief that all the faithful will be raised up and reunited in the new heavens and a new earth, where death will be no more.”<sup>45</sup>

“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.”<sup>46</sup>

## THE CATHOLIC PARISHES AND MISSIONS OF THE DIOCESE OF HELENA

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## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), *Order of Christian Funerals* (Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), #1. (Other publications of the ritual book are also available.)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, #4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, #5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, #7.

<sup>5</sup> ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS (OCF): Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and confirmed by the Apostolic See in 1987.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, #8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, #8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, #16 & 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, #17.



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<sup>10</sup> “Since in baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the temple of the Holy Spirit, Christians respect and honor the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest. Any customs associated with the preparation of the body of the deceased should always be marked with dignity and reverence and never with the despair of those who have no hope. Preparation of the body should include prayer, especially at those intimate moments reserved for family members. For the final disposition of the body, it is the ancient Christian custom to bury or entomb the bodies of the dead; cremation is permitted, unless it is evident that cremation was chosen for ant-Christian motives.” (ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS, #19.)

“THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN BODY. Christians are unequivocally confronted by this mystery of life and death when faced with the presence of the body of one who has died. That body forcefully brings to mind our belief that our human bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, destined for future glory at the resurrection of the dead. In addition, the body that lies in death recalls the personal story of faith, the past relationships, and the continued spiritual presence of the deceased person.

This is the body once washed in baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the bread of life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing.

Our identity and self-consciousness as a human person are expressed in and through the body. Indeed, the body is the “primordial sacrament” that makes the life and love of God present in the world. Thus, the Church’s reverence and care for the body grows out of a reverence and concern for the person whom the Church now commends to God.

The Church’s belief in the sacredness of the human body and the resurrection of the dead has traditionally found expression in the care taken to prepare bodies of the deceased for burial. The prayers and gestures of Catholic funeral rites likewise affirm the Church’s reverence for the bodies of its deceased members.

That reverence is not always shared by the society in which the Church exists. An exaggerated sense of privacy and individualism often prevents family members from providing custody and care of the body that is properly theirs. This same concern with privacy, combined with a denial of the reality of death and human mortality, has resulted in an increasing tendency to shorten the period of mourning the passing of the deceased person. These practices contradict the Church’s emphasis on the indispensable role of the wider community in the dying and death of a Christian.

Catholic tradition urges the Church today to face death with honest rituals that preserve its Christian and human values. Since, in rising to new life, Christ won victory over death for his followers, faith impels the Church to celebrate that victory in its funeral liturgies.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishop, Committee on the Liturgy, *Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix: Cremation with reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996) pp 11, 12.

<sup>11</sup> International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), *Order of Christian Funerals* (Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), #19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, #5.

<sup>13</sup> Reprinted from **Parish Funerals** by Michael Marchal © 1987 Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications. 1-800-933-1800. [www.ltp.org](http://www.ltp.org) All rights reserved. Used with permission. p. 26 f.

<sup>14</sup> OCF, #54.

<sup>15</sup> OCF, #55.

<sup>16</sup> OCF, #50

<sup>17</sup> OCF, #56.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, #59.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, #62. “...before the blessing, or at some other suitable time during the vigil, a member of the family or a friend of the deceased may speak in remembrance of the deceased.”

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, #128-129.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, #128.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, #128.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, #178.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, #132

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, #204, 206.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, #213.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, #213.

<sup>28</sup> Constitution of Sacred Liturgy, #14

<sup>29</sup> OCF #9

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, #11

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, #15

<sup>32</sup> OCF, #212. See also OCF Appendix: Cremation #411-431 (USCCB).

<sup>33</sup> Order of Christian Funerals, Part I, Funeral Rites, #2 Related Rites and Prayers

<sup>34</sup> See OCF Appendix: Cremation #422-431.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and the Catholic Funeral Rites, page 15.

<sup>36</sup> Order of Christian Funerals, Appendix: Cremation, 1996, page 15. See also OCF Appendix, #417.

<sup>37</sup> OCF, #30.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, #31.

<sup>39</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *SING TO THE LORD; Music in Divine Worship*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, #248

<sup>41</sup> OCF, #55.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, #131.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, #132.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, #38

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, #6.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, #6-7.



# The Diocese of Helena

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