Commentary on the

Order of Christian Funerals

and the

Funeral Directives

for the

Diocese of Columbus, Ohio
Funeral Directives
Diocese of Columbus, Ohio
Based on Order of Christian Funerals

The Approved Rite
On August 15, 1989, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) promulgated that, beginning November 2, 1989, the Order of Christian Funerals (OCF) will provide the only approved rituals to be used in all dioceses of the United States of America, superseding all other English versions. Most of the citations in these directives are from that edition, including its appendix on cremation issued in 1997.

“Funeral rites” is a general designation used of all the liturgical celebrations in this book [the OCF]. “Funeral liturgy” is a more particular designation applied to the two forms of liturgical celebration presented under the headings “Funeral Mass” and “Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass”. (See Editorial Note, OCF, p. ix)

The purpose of this commentary is threefold. First, they provide a broad, easily accessed overview of the more comprehensive text of the OCF. Second, they remind the clergy of the importance of adhering to both the defined rituals and the policies set forth by the Diocese of Columbus (CF Protocols: 10/93, 2/96, 12/96, 9/97, 10/97, and 4/99). Third, they provide a simple, easy-to-follow guide for those in parish bereavement ministry who will be ministering to the family of the deceased. Note that these directives do not cover every possible application of the rituals. Rather, they are intended to present the applications most commonly used in the Diocese of Columbus.

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Abbreviations used in the following text:
CF – Clergy File Protocols
DDC – Directives of the Diocese of Columbus (i.e., this document)
GIRM – General Instruction of the Roman Missal
LMT – Liturgical Music Today
MCW – Music in Catholic Worship
OCF – Order of Christian Funerals

Part I: General

1. Meeting with the Family of the Deceased
It is the policy of the Diocese of Columbus that the pastor of a parish or his delegate meet with the family of the deceased to plan the rituals that will take place following a death (CF, Prot. 10/97, #2). The delegate may consist of another priest, a deacon, or a lay person or team trained to assist with such planning. Planning the
rituals should occur as soon as possible following the death, and may take place either at the home of the deceased or a member of the family, or at the parish, whichever is most convenient for the family. The minister should explain to the family the meaning and significance of each of the rituals – the vigil, the funeral liturgy, and the committal (OCF, Nos. 1-13).

The time immediately following death is often one of bewilderment and may involve shock or heartrending grief for the family and close friends. The ministry of the Church at this time is one of gently accompanying the bereaved in their initial adjustment to the fact of death and to the sorrow this entails... The minister helps the bereaved to express their sorrow and to find strength and consolation through faith in Christ and His resurrection to eternal life. The members of the Christian community offer support to the bereaved, especially by praying that the one they have lost may have eternal life. (OCF, No. 52)

The ministry of consolation – that is, offering comfort in the time of grief, loss, and distress – calls for the Church as a whole, and the parish in particular, to recognize its relationship to its members who have died, to hold them in loving memory, and to assist the bereaved in dealing with the loss of a loved one.

2. Scheduling the Funeral Liturgy
It is advisable that the funeral liturgy be scheduled as soon as possible following a death. Normally this scheduling is a coordination of the family, the parish, and the funeral director. The date of the funeral should take into consideration any family and friends who live some distance away to allow for their making travel plans.

The family of the deceased and the funeral director should be made aware that a funeral Mass may not be celebrated on holy days of obligation or certain solemnities (Immaculate Conception, Christmas, Mary–Mother of God, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, St. Joseph, Ascension, Holy Trinity, Body and Blood of Christ, Assumption, All Saints, and Christ the King), nor during the Easter Triduum and the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season (including Pentecost). Under normal circumstances those days can easily be avoided; but if, for a serious reason, a funeral must take place on one of those days, it must follow the rite of the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass (OCF, Nos. 177-202).

Consideration should also be given to the Church’s guidelines regarding the limit to the number of Masses a priest may celebrate on a given day. Coupled with the current priest shortage, the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass (OCF, Nos. 177-202) may be more appropriate.

3. Planning the Vigil and the Liturgy
If pastoral and personal considerations allow, the period prior to death may be an appropriate time to plan the rituals, not only with the family, but also with the person who is dying. In planning the rites, “…pastoral considerations bearing on the deceased, the family, and those attending should rightly be taken into account” (GIRM, 385).

Whenever possible, ministers should involve the family in planning the funeral rites: in the choice of texts and rites provided in the ritual, in the selection of music for the rites, and in the designation of liturgical ministers. (OCF, No. 17)

Planning the funeral before death should be approached with sensitivity and care. It can have the effect of helping the one who is dying and the family face the reality of death with Christian hope. It can also help relieve the family of numerous details after death and may allow them to benefit more fully from the celebration of the funeral rites. (OCF, No. 17)

4. Pre-Planning the Funeral – Workshop and Catechesis
Planning the funeral when death is not imminent is a practical way to ensure that when the time does come, however far in the future, one’s wishes will be known. A good way to accomplish this is for a parish to conduct
a funeral planning workshop for its parishioners. The workshop would allow for proper catechesis so that the parishioners may come to a good understanding of what the funeral rites are all about.

Following the workshop, parishioners would be invited to make an appointment with whoever is involved with pastoral care of the bereaved to establish their funeral plans. The result of such a planning session would be a document that would be placed in a secure file at the person’s current parish. A notation in the parish data system or on the census cards would alert the parish that the document has been placed on file so that it can be quickly retrieved when the time comes. It would be the parishioner’s responsibility to ask for the document when relocating to another parish. The parish could remind the person of the document’s existence when the parish records are changed.

The contents can be revised by the parishioner at any time as circumstances require. A sample form of this document may be found in Appendix A and may be copied as needed.

5. Selection of Readings

It is the policy of the diocese that the family be consulted in the selection of readings for both the vigil and the funeral liturgy (CF, Prot. 10/97, #6).

In every celebration for the dead, the Church attaches great importance to the reading of the Word of God. The readings proclaim to the assembly the Paschal Mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God’s kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. Above all, the readings tell of God’s designs for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called His own. A careful selection and use of readings from Scripture for the funeral rites will provide the family and the community with an opportunity to hear God speak to them in their needs, fears, and hopes. (OCF, No. 22)

There is a selection of readings in the ritual books, but the family is not limited to those. Other readings from Scripture, particularly a favorite of the deceased, may be used if deemed appropriate for the funeral rites. The choice of readings should follow the normal lectionary model for daily Mass, that is, a first reading, a psalm, a second reading (optional), an alleluia, and a Gospel.

When helping the family select the readings, the bereavement minister should determine what the readings mean for them. It may help to ask questions, such as “What in your life brought you close to God?”, or “Were there any significant events in your life that led you to choose this reading?” This serves two purposes. First, it allows the family to connect with the Word of God as it can apply to the deceased. Second, it can help the homilist more effectively draw his message from the readings.

It is the policy of the diocese, in compliance with the ritual book, that only biblical readings are to be used at the funeral liturgy (CF, Prot. 10/97, #6).

In the celebration of the Word at the funeral liturgy, the biblical readings may not be replaced by non-biblical readings. But during prayer services with the family [e.g., the vigil] non-biblical readings may be used in addition to readings from Scripture. (OCF, No. 23)

If there is a particular non-biblical reading that the family wishes to include in addition to the Scripture selections at the vigil, the family should consult with the pastor or his delegate, who may then decide if the reading is appropriate at the vigil, and where it may be placed in the service. Such a reading is often one that held great meaning to the deceased, and should thus be honored if possible. An ideal place for the non-scriptural reading would be in lieu of an opening song.

The family of the deceased is offered the privilege of naming one or more people to read the Scriptures at the vigil and funeral liturgy. It is advised, however, that such persons be properly trained in the proclamation of the Word, or at least have public speaking experience.
6. The Homily

*It is the policy of the diocese* that a brief homily is to follow the proclamation of the Gospel during the funeral liturgy (CF, Prot. 10/97, #7). A homily may also follow the readings at the vigil. In neither case, however, should the homily be a eulogy.

Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God’s compassionate love and on the Paschal Mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God’s love and the mystery of Jesus’ victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. (OCF, No. 27)

7. Eulogy/Remembrance

*It is the policy of the diocese* that the preferred time for a remembrance or eulogy is during the vigil service (CF, Prot. 10/97, #4). It should be brief (no more than three minutes) and delivered by one person who is reasonably adept at public speaking. If the family does not gather prior to the funeral liturgy, a brief remembrance may be given following the Prayer after Communion at Mass, or immediately prior to the Final commendation at a Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass. The text of the remembrance must be submitted to the principle celebrant for approval well in advance.

The distinction between a remembrance and a eulogy should be noted relevant to this directive. A remembrance is an informal talk about how the deceased personally touched the lives of the bereaved, and especially the life of the one speaking. A eulogy, on the other hand, is a formal oration or speech on the life of the deceased. Its content is based solely on the life of the person being honored, particularly on the deceased’s accomplishments during life.

Whether during the vigil service or the funeral liturgy, the remembrance does not take the place of the homily. Neither should the homily take the form of a eulogy (Ref. GIRM, 382).

8. Non-Religious Services at the Vigil, Liturgy, or Committal

When the deceased has been a member of some group or organization (e.g., the military, the Knights of Columbus, firefighter, police officer, etc.), a special service by that group or organization is sometimes held. Traditionally, such services are held either after the vigil or after the commendation and final farewell, but never after the committal. The funeral should end with the committal so that the final action for the deceased is the prayer of the Church (Ref. OCF, No. 204).

**Part II: The Vigil**

1. General

*It is the policy of the diocese* that “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 (CF, Prot. 10/97, #3). It may take the form of either a Liturgy of the Word (OCF, Nos. 69-81, 82-97) or of some part of the Office for the Dead.” (OCF, Nos. 348-396)

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 reading 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. (OCF, No. 56)
Therefore, the vigil service before the funeral liturgy should be from the *Vigil for the Deceased* (OCF, Nos. 51-97) and not a form of popular devotion. Although there is a long-standing tradition of praying the Rosary for the deceased, the Rosary should not be prayed in lieu of the vigil rites (nor within the rites). It should be clearly stated to the family that the vigil is liturgical, the official prayer of the whole community, while the Rosary is a private devotion. If the family wishes to pray the Rosary in conjunction with the vigil, it should follow the vigil (which has primacy over the Rosary or any other form of private devotion). It is ideally led by a person other than the minister of the vigil.

2. **The Location and Time of the Vigil**

Customarily, the vigil takes place at the funeral home the day preceding the funeral liturgy. The viewing hours are set by the family and the funeral director, and the vigil is placed within those hours at a time agreed upon with whoever will preside at the vigil. For particular reasons, such as the expectation of a larger number of people than could comfortably gather at the funeral home, the vigil may take place at the church or another appropriate location.

When deciding on the time of the vigil, consideration should be given to those who are expected to be present, particularly if there may be a significant number of older people who may not travel well after dark, or if many of those attending might have trouble getting off work. This is not always an easy decision, and every circumstance is different.

3. **The Form of the Vigil**

As with all liturgies, the *Vigil for the Deceased* follows a defined pattern which is common to the universal Church while still providing some variation.

The vigil in the form of the Liturgy of the Word consists of the introductory rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the prayer of intercession, and a concluding rite. (OCF, No. 57)

*Introductory Rites (OCF, Nos. 69-72)*

With the greeting, an opening song (ideal, but optional), and an opening prayer, the minister draws those attending into the presence of God, gathering them as a community. The rites provide forty-nine opening prayers, many designed for specific circumstances relative to the life of the deceased (see OCF, Nos. 72 and 398).

*Liturgy of the Word (OCF, Nos. 73-77)*

Following the guidelines for selecting readings and lectors as noted above (DDC, Part I, No. 5), the vigil typically uses a first reading taken from either the Old or the New Testament, a Responsorial Psalm (which may be intoned as at Mass), and a Gospel selection. The “Alleluia” before the Gospel is omitted.

*Prayer of Intercession (Nos. 78-80)*

This prayer includes a brief litany invoking the Lord under various visages, the Lord’s Prayer, and a concluding prayer taken from either OCF, No. 80 or from the selections in OCF, Nos. 398 and 399. This prayer is designed to accommodate various circumstances relevant to the deceased and the bereaved.

*Concluding Rite (OCF, No. 81)*

This part of the vigil rite offers a prayer for the disposition of the soul of the deceased and a blessing for the bereaved.
Part III: The Funeral Liturgy

1. General
The funeral liturgy may take one of two forms: Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass. Since both forms have all aspects in common with the exception of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which is celebrated only at the Funeral Mass, both will be covered in this part of the directives. The celebration of the Funeral Mass is highly encouraged. There are times, however, when it is not possible to celebrate Mass. Such occasions include, but are not limited to, those days on which a Mass is not permitted (DDC, Part I, No. 2); when circumstances prevent the celebration of Mass (e.g., a priest is not available); or for certain pastoral reasons (see OCF, No. 178). Should it be necessary to celebrate the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass, a memorial Mass should be scheduled at a later time convenient for the family (see OCF No. 128 and DDC, Part VII).

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. (More at OCF, No. 129)

2. The Location and Time of the Funeral Liturgy
It is the policy of the diocese that the funeral Mass is always celebrated in a church, preferably in the parish to which the deceased belonged (CF, Prot. 10/93). A Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass, may be celebrated at the funeral home, at the cemetery, or another suitable place with the permission of the ordinary. If it is necessary to celebrate in another parish, appropriate permissions must be obtained, especially if a priest and/or deacon not associated with that parish will be presiding.

The time of the funeral liturgy is often determined by cemetery schedules, particularly on weekends. Typically, funeral liturgies are celebrated on weekday mornings. Parishes that celebrate regular morning Mass, particularly a Mass for which a specific intention has been designated, should not celebrate a funeral Mass in lieu of or combined with that daily Mass.

3. The Form of the Funeral Liturgy
The funeral liturgy, whether it be at Mass or outside Mass, follows the fundamental principles of liturgy as set forth in the GIRM, with certain adaptations needed to effect a proper funeral liturgy. The essential form begins with the reception of the body, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist (at Mass only), and the final commendation and farewell. A procession to the place of committal may follow either type of liturgy (see OCF, No. 130).

Reception at the Church (OCF, Nos. 131-136) typically, the casket is brought to the entrance of the church, ideally in a space large enough to accommodate those who have gathered for the liturgy. The principle celebrant greets the family and others present. He then sprinkles the casket with holy water (a reminder of the deceased’s baptism). The pall is then placed on the casket (a reminder of the baptismal garment that symbolized life in Christ). Another symbol – a crucifix (most common), the Book of the Gospels, or a Bible (especially a family Bible, or one that belonged to the deceased) – may then be placed atop the casket. The procession into the church then takes place in the following order: the principle celebrant and other altar ministers, the casket, then the bereaved.

Since the church is the place where the community of faith assembles for worship, the rite of reception of the body at the church has great significance. The church is the place where the Christian life is begotten in Baptism, nourished in the Eucharist, and where the community gathers to commend one of its deceased members to the Father. The church is at once a symbol of the community and of the heavenly liturgy that the celebration of the liturgy anticipates. (OCF, No. 131)
Whenever possible, an entrance song expressing belief in eternal life and resurrection should accompany the procession.

The Liturgy of the Word (OCF, Nos. 137-142) following the guidelines for selecting readings and lectors as noted above (DDC, Part I, No. 5), the liturgy typically uses a first reading from the Old Testament, a Responsorial Psalm (which should be intoned by a cantor), a second reading from the New Testament, an Alleluia, and a Gospel selection. A brief homily based on the readings follows.

The reading of the Word of God is an essential element of the celebration of the funeral liturgy. The readings proclaim the Paschal Mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God’s kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. Above all, the readings tell of God’s design for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called His own. (OCF, No. 137)

In response to the Word of God, the community prays for the deceased and themselves in the General Intercessions (sometimes referred to as the Prayer of the Faithful, as in the GIRM, or the Petitions). Two versions of the intercessions are provided in the ritual book (Ref. OCF, No. 167 or 193). These may be adapted to meet the circumstances, or new intercessions may be composed (Ref. OCF, No. 142). The family may be consulted for suggested intercessions which may be used with the permission of the principle celebrant (e.g., an intercession for deceased police officers at the funeral of a police officer).

The intercessions should include first, a petition for the needs of the whole Church; second, one for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; third, one for those burdened with difficulties; and fourth, one for the local community (Ref., GIRM, No. 70). These are then followed by two or three petitions in reference to the deceased. In composing the intercessions, the intent is to maintain a sense of generality (hence, the term, “General Intercessions”).

The Liturgy of the Eucharist – at a Funeral Mass only (OCF, Nos.143-144) is celebrated in the usual manner (OCF, No. 168).

It is the policy of the diocese that, if a procession is included in the Preparation of Gifts, it must be kept within the guidelines of the offertory rite (CF, Prot. 10/97, #8). The gifts of bread and wine are brought forward for the Eucharist, along with other appropriate gifts for the needs of the Church and the poor. The gifts may be incensed as usual. A deacon may also incense the principle celebrant and the people. Incensation of the body is done at the Final Commendation and Farewell.

Members or friends of the family are encouraged to bring the gifts forward. Those designated need not be Catholic, but a brief instruction should be given if this is the case.

Approved service music is encouraged during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

At a Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass. Holy Communion should not be distributed from the tabernacle. The General Instruction (no. 85) states that, it is most desirable that the faithful receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.

The Final Commendation (OCF, No. 145-147) usually takes place immediately following the Prayer after Communion, but may be deferred until the time of committal (OCF, No. 145). A member or friend of the family may offer a brief remembrance before the commendation begins (OCF, No. 170).

The Final Commendation is a final farewell by the members of the community, an act of respect for one of their members, whom they entrust to the tender and merciful embrace of God. This act of last farewell also acknowledges the reality of separation and affirms that the community and the deceased, baptized into the one Body, share the same destiny, resurrection on the last
day. On that day, the one Shepherd will call each by name and gather the faithful together into the new and eternal Jerusalem. (OCF, No. 146)

Following the opening words it is important to allow a moment of silence. During this time, those present are enabled to connect their loss with the mystery of death and eternal life in the life of a Christian. Either following the moment of silence or following the Song of Farewell, the principle celebrant may incense the body.

The Song of Farewell is the climax of the final commendation. Ideally it is sung to a simple, easy to follow melody, but may be prayed as invocations. This is followed by the final Prayer of Commendation.

The Rite of Commendation may be celebrated as part of the Rite of Committal if it is not celebrated within the funeral liturgy, or if the funeral liturgy is not celebrated.

Procession to the Place of Committal (OCF, Nos. 148-149) typically, the procession to the place of committal begins immediately following the funeral liturgy. The casket is taken to the entrance of the church (where it was brought in) and the pall and other symbols placed on the casket are removed. During this time, an appropriate song may be sung. The procession may take the form of a motorcade led by the hearse transporting the body, followed by the family and friends of the deceased. The body is taken to the cemetery where it will be interred.

Rite of Committal (OCF, Nos. 204-213) there are two forms of the rite of committal: the Rite of Committal (OCF, Nos. 216-223) and the Rite of Committal with Final Commendation (OCF, Nos. 224-233).

4. Christian Symbols
It is the policy of the diocese that only Christian symbols be used during the funeral liturgy (CF, Prot. 10/97, #5). Non-religious symbols (national flags, flags or insignia of organizations or associations) and memorial personal items (sports attire or gear, hobby items, etc.) have no place in the funeral liturgy and “are to be removed from the casket at the entrance of the church.” (OCF, No. 132 – see also OCF, No. 38) Such non-religious items may be displayed at the funeral home or at the dinner or gathering that often follows the funeral.

Liturgical signs and symbols affirming Christian belief and hope in the Paschal Mystery are abundant in the celebration of the funeral rites, but their undue multiplication or repetition should be avoided. Care must be taken that the choice and use of signs and symbols are in accord with the culture of the people. (OCF, No. 21)

Symbols that are Required in the Diocese of Columbus
The following symbols are used in every funeral liturgy when the body is present: Easter Candle, holy water, and pall.

Easter Candle:
The Easter Candle reminds the faithful of Christ’s undying presence among them, of His victory over sin and death, and of their share in that victory by virtue of our initiation. It recalls the Easter Vigil, the night when the Church awaits the Lord’s resurrection and when the new light for the living and the dead is kindled. During the funeral liturgy and also during the vigil, when celebrated in the church, the Easter Candle is placed beforehand near the position the body will occupy at the conclusion of the procession. (OCF, No. 35)

Customarily, the Easter Candle is placed at the foot of the altar and is lit prior to the entrance procession. The symbolism of the Easter Candle runs deep. As Michael Marchal writes in Parish Funerals (© 1987, Liturgy Training Publications), “The essential element in the candle’s decoration – indeed, what makes it an Easter Candle – is the cross and the five wounds. The year’s date and the Alpha and Omega proclaim that Christ’s
victory of the cross is real now and for eternity.” The casket is brought up to the Easter Candle and positioned perpendicular to the altar with the feet facing the altar for a lay person, away from the altar for clergy. The sense of this positioning is derived from the person’s posture relevant to the altar during Mass.

_Holy Water:_
Blessed or holy water reminds the assembly of the saving waters of Baptism. In the rite of reception of the body at the church, its use calls to mind the deceased’s baptism and initiation into the community of faith. (OCF, No. 36)

During the funeral liturgy, the principle celebrant sprinkles the casket with holy water during the introductory rites (see OCF, Nos. 160 & 185). _NOTE: There is no need to duplicate the rite of sprinkling at any other part of the Mass, or when the casket is placed in the hearse. Holy water is used during signs of farewell only when the principle celebrant hasn’t already used it at the rite of reception (see OCF, No. 173)._  

_Pall:_
A pall…placed over the body when it is received at the church [is a] reminder of the baptismal garment of the deceased…a sign of the Christian dignity of the person. The use of the pall also signifies that all are equal in the eyes of God (see James 2:1-9). (OCF, No. 38)

_It is the policy of the diocese_ that the casket is always draped in the pall at the entrance to the church (CF, Prot. 10/97, #5). The pall may be placed on the casket by members or friends of the family, or by the principle celebrant or attending deacon. It is removed immediately prior to leaving the church.

_Other Christian Symbols That May Be Used_
The following Christian symbols may be used, and are recommended, in the funeral liturgy: incense, fresh flowers, and a symbol representing the faith of the deceased, such as a crucifix (most commonly used), the _Book of the Gospels, or a Bible._

_Incense:_
Incense is used during the funeral rites as a sign of honor to the body of the deceased, which through Baptism became the temple of the Holy Spirit. Incense is also used as a sign of the community’s prayers for the deceased rising to the throne of God and as a sign of farewell. (OCF, No. 37)

The use of incense is highly encouraged because of its significance as just noted. If incense is used, the ritual indicates that the casket should be incensed only once during the funeral liturgy. It is recommended that the incensation take place at the song of farewell rather than at the preparation of gifts because the focus of its use is more at the body than at the gifts.

_Fresh Flowers:_
Fresh flowers, used in moderation, can enhance the setting of the funeral rites. (OCF, No. 38)

There is a long-standing tradition in the Church that flowers are not generally used at funeral liturgies. However, if flowers are used, care should be taken to not place so many displays that they become a distraction from the liturgy. Seasonably appropriate floral displays may be used provided they do not conflict with the message of life, death, and resurrection.
A Crucifix:
A cross [crucifix] may be placed on the body [casket] as a reminder that the Christian is marked by the cross in baptism and through Jesus’ suffering on the cross is brought to the victory of His resurrection. (OCF, No. 38)

The Book of the Gospels or a Bible:
The Book of the Gospels or a Bible may be placed on the body as a sign that Christians live by the word of God and that fidelity to that word leads to eternal life. (OCF, No. 38)

If a crucifix, the Book of the Gospels, or a Bible is used, it is normally placed on the pall, approximately over the heart of the deceased. The object may be placed on the casket by members or friends of the family, or by the principle celebrant or attending deacon. It is removed immediately prior to leaving the church. Generally, only one of these symbols should be placed on the casket. If the Bible or crucifix has been provided by the family or funeral home, it is customarily presented to a member of the family by the principle celebrant following the rite of committal.

Part IV: The Rite of Committal

1. General
The funeral rites conclude with the Rite of Committal. This rite takes one of two forms – Rite of Committal and Rite of Committal with Final Commendation. Because the final commendation is typically celebrated at the end of the funeral liturgy, the first form is most often used. If the final commendation is not celebrated at the end of the funeral liturgy, or if there is no liturgy, the second form is used. Except for certain extenuating circumstances, such as inclement weather, the rite should be celebrated at the actual place of the committal – the open grave, tomb, or columbarium (see OCF, No. 204). Ideally, the casket is lowered into the grave or entombed, or the urn placed in the columbarium, in the presence of those gathered (see OCF, No. 232).

The rite of committal…is the final act of the community of faith in caring for its deceased member. (OCF, No. 204)

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. (OCF, No. 206)

2. The Form of the Rite of Committal
The Rite of Committal (OCF, Nos. 216-223) consists of an invitation, a Scripture verse, a prayer over the place of committal, the words of committal, intercessions, a final praying of the Lord’s Prayer, a concluding prayer, and a prayer over the people.

Following the invitation and Scripture verse, two forms of the prayer over the place of committal are provided – one if the place of committal is to be blessed, one if it has already been blessed. Several forms of the words of committal (OCF, Nos. 219 & 406) and the concluding prayer (OCF, Nos. 222 & 408) are provided.

The prayer over the people concludes with a blessing by either a priest or deacon or an invocation by a lay minister.
The Rite of Committal with Final Commendation (OCF, Nos. 224-233) follows the first form with a few differences. The following are inserted between the prayer over the place of committal and the committal: an invitation to prayer, silent prayer, signs of farewell (e.g., sprinkling and/or incensation), a song of farewell, and a prayer of commendation.

Part V: Music for the Funeral Rites

1. General
The funeral is an act of worship that encompasses the whole faith community and not merely a private gathering for the family and friends of the deceased. The funeral rites, from the vigil to the committal, are expressions of faith and thus demand a selection of music that is suitable to liturgical practice. While music is typically employed at the funeral Mass, its use is encouraged at the vigil and liturgy outside Mass. It is also proper to employ music at the rite of committal.

Music is integral to the funeral rites. 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. (OCF, No. 30)

When selecting music for the funeral, good judgment is important. The text, style, and placement of the music should be appropriate for a funeral, that is, it should help those gathered to pray and express their faith during the difficult time they are experiencing. Each song should express our shared belief in the Paschal Mystery and our hope of eternal life, while at the same time providing consolation to the bereaved.

2. Selecting the Funeral Music
It is the policy of the diocese that only music that is approved for liturgical use may be selected (CF, Prot. 10/97, #9). Music customarily used at Sunday Mass is illustrative of the kind of music appropriate to funerals. Some parish song books list music specifically ordered for funerals.

Secular music and recorded music are not acceptable.

Viz. secular music: “The music selected must express the prayer of those who celebrate, while at the same time guarding against the imposition of private meanings on public rites.” (LMT, No. 12)

Viz. recorded music: “The liturgy is a complexus of signs expressed by living human beings. Music, being preeminent among these signs, ought to be ‘live’.” (LMT, No. 60)

Secular and recorded music take away from the sacred nature of the funeral rites. Such music should be reserved for the gathering time at the funeral home (but not used during the vigil service) or for the family gathering that typically follows the funeral.

As with the readings, the family should be consulted on the selection of music. The bereavement minister should avoid making suggestions up front, but should rather find out what feelings the family wants to express. Favorite songs of the deceased or music requested by the family may be considered, if appropriate for a funeral. If the family wants assistance in choosing songs, the bereavement counselor/team or the parish music director should be able to help.
3. The Musicians

An organist or other instrumentalist, a cantor, and, whenever possible, a choir should be present to assist the congregation in singing the songs, responses, and acclamations of the funeral liturgy. (OCF, No. 153)

Many parishes have formed special choirs, sometimes called “Funeral Choirs” or “Resurrection Choirs”, to assist in leading the music. Funerals typically take place on weekday mornings, which usually limits the availability of many parishioners. To circumvent this problem, many parishes have formed choirs consisting of retired parishioners or others who may be available. (Ref. LMT, 32) Periodic practices give the choir an opportunity to broaden its repertoire, thus avoiding the tendency to become locked into “familiar standards”.

4. The Music During the Liturgy

Music has the power to console. A selection of appropriate music can set the tone for the funeral liturgy, be it during Mass or outside Mass, offering great comfort to the bereaved. While it is the norm to have songs and service music during the liturgy, music is also appropriate at other times. During the vigil music can help the family and friends express their grief. Simple music during the closing of the casket and the transfer of the body to the Church can offer comfort. The place of final rest is another place where music can reach out and console the bereaved.

Prelude

All music played during this time should enable those gathered to attain a state of prayer as they prepare to celebrate the liturgy. As noted above, secular and recorded music are not appropriate for any part of the liturgy, including the prelude.

At the funeral liturgy the community gathers as 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. (OCF, 129)

Entrance Procession

A well-known and easily sung song in verse-refrain-verse-refrain form may be suitable for the procession because this allows those entering the church to participate in the singing without printed music. If a song is desired, instrumental music would be more appropriate to accompany the Procession, followed by a gathering song once people are in the pews where song books are available.

To draw the community together in prayer at the beginning of the funeral liturgy, the procession should be accompanied, whenever possible, by the singing of the entrance song. This song should be a profound expression of belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the dead as well as a prayer of intercession for the deceased. (OCF, 135)

Responsorial Psalm

The responsorial psalm enables the community to respond in faith to the first reading. Through the psalms the community expresses its grief and praise, and acknowledges its Creator and Redeemer as the sure source of trust and hope in times of trial. Since the responsorial psalm is a song, whenever possible, it should be sung… When not sung, the responsorial psalm after the reading should be recited in a manner conducive to meditation on the Word of God. (OCF, 139)
Gospel Acclamation
Special attention should be given to the selection of an appropriate Gospel acclamation verse from the list found in OCF Part III: “Texts of Sacred Scripture” and in the Lectionary (Nos. 792 & 797). The use of other than Alleluia verses during Lent should be respected.

In the Alleluia, or Gospel acclamation, the community welcomes the Lord who is about to speak to it. If the Alleluia is not sung, it is omitted. (OCF, No. 140)

Procession and Preparation of Gifts (Funeral Mass Only)
An offertory song may accompany the procession and preparation of gifts, although it is not always necessary. The proper function of this song is to accompany and celebrate the communal aspect of the procession. The selection need not speak of bread and wine or offering. Organ or other instrumental music is also fitting. The text may be any appropriate song of praise or rejoicing in keeping with the liturgical season… Instrumental interludes can effectively accompany the procession and preparation of gifts and thus keep this part of the Mass in proper perspective relative to the Eucharistic Prayer that follows. (Ref., MCW, No. 71)

Liturgy of the Eucharist (Funeral Mass Only)
Music gives great solemnity to ritual action, thus the singing of the Assembly’s parts of the Eucharistic Prayer is encouraged. This includes the responses to the Preface dialogue, the Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen. To reinforce and to express more fully the unity of the Assembly during the Communion Rite, the people may sing the Lord’s Prayer, the doxology, the Lamb of God, and a song for the Communion procession (Ref. OCF, No. 144). Note that the Lord’s Prayer is a communal prayer and should never be sung as a solo or by the choir alone. The singing of a psalm or a song of praise following Communion is optional.

If the organ is played or the choir sings during the distribution of Communion, a congregational song may well provide a fitting expression of oneness in the Eucharistic Lord. (Ref. MCW, No. 72). However, the time of silence following the distribution of the Eucharist should not be disturbed by the insertion of unnecessary music.

Final Commendation and the Song of Farewell
Where this is customary, the body may be sprinkled with holy water and incensed. The sprinkling is a reminder that through Baptism the person was marked for eternal life and the incensation signifies respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. The song of farewell, which should affirm hope and trust in the Paschal Mystery, is the climax of the rite of final commendation. It should be sung to a melody simple enough for all to sing. It may take the form of a responsory or even a song. When singing is not possible, invocations may be recited by the Assembly. (OCF, No. 147)

Procession to the Place of Final Committal
Especially when accompanied with music and singing, the procession can help reinforce the bond of communion between the participants. Psalms, songs, or liturgical songs may also be sung by the participants as they gather at the place of committal. (OCF, No. 149)

Because the procession from the church to the place of committal is usually distant enough to require a motorcade, the music for the procession more often than not takes the form of what appears to be a recessional song. However, the song chosen for this moment should not have an air of finality to it, but rather express the sense of transition – both from the church to the place of rest and from this life into the next.
Part VI. Cremation

1. General

It is the policy of the diocese to encourage the custom of burying the body of the deceased (CF, Prot. 10/97, #10). If the family of the deceased requests cremation, this policy should be discussed with them in a compassionate manner. A reasonable attempt, without insult to the family, should be made to ensure that the request does not carry with it an intention contrary to Catholic purpose. In all cases, the wishes of the deceased to be cremated, if made known beforehand, should be respected.

Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites. (OCF, No. 413)

2. Disposition of the Cremated Remains

The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, 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.

It is the policy of the diocese that the installation or use of cremation burial niches in parish churches is not permitted (CF, Prot. 2/96).

3. Cremation Following the Funeral Liturgy

The diocese encourages the celebration of the funeral liturgy within a reasonable time after death, preferably prior to cremation. Most funeral homes offer ceremonial caskets for a fee for the viewing at the vigil and for the liturgy that follows. The rites outlined above in Part II: The Vigil and Part III: The Funeral Liturgy would be used in this case. An alternate form of the dismissal is used (OCF, No. 437).

Once the cremation of the body has taken place, the remains are taken to the place of burial or entombment. There, an alternate form of the committal rite specifically worded for cremation is used (OCF, No. 438).

4. Funeral Liturgy in the Presence of the Cremated Remains

Permission is given to all priests of the Diocese of Columbus to celebrate, without recourse to the ordinary, ecclesiastical funeral rites – including the funeral Mass – with the cremated remains present (CF, Prot. 04/99). The vessel containing the remains may be carried in procession and placed on a small table or stand in the place where a casket would normally be placed. Alternatively, the remains may be pre-placed in the church (Ref. OCF, No. 427). Photographs of the deceased, memorabilia, insignia, and other remembrances are not to be placed next to the cremated remains during the funeral liturgy.

If the procession is to take place, another stand or table should be set up at the door of the church where the remains would be initially placed as the people gather. The pall is not used (OCF No. 434). After the “Sprinkling of Holy Water”, the principle celebrant and other ministers precede the bearer of the remains and the mourners into the church.
5. Funeral Liturgy in the Absence of the Cremated Remains

When the body has been cremated and the committal to its resting place has already taken place, the funeral liturgy takes on the form of a memorial Mass or the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass (Ref. DDC, Part VII: Memorial Liturgy Without the Body). In such a case, the Rite of Committal with Final Commendation is omitted, since the remains have already been committed.

When cremation and committal take place before the Funeral Liturgy, the Prayers after Death and the Vigil for the Deceased may be adapted as necessary and appropriate and used before the funeral liturgy. The Rite of Committal with Final Commendation may also be celebrated at that time. The alternate form for the words of committal is used. (OCF, No. 422)

Part VII: Memorial Mass Without the Body

When the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass is celebrated, a memorial Mass should be scheduled at a later date, if possible. All deceased Catholics have a right to have a Mass in which the fullness of the Eucharistic experience is present, because it is in the Eucharist that we come to know the saving act of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. Moreover, it is in His resurrection as celebrated at Mass that Christ holds open for us the promise of our own resurrection and eternal life in the Communion of Saints.

Other occasions may arise when it is not possible for the body to be present for the funeral liturgy, for example, an aircraft disaster over the ocean, a flood, or an avalanche – all instances in which the body cannot be recovered. In such cases, a funeral liturgy (preferably a Mass) as described in these directives would be appropriate, omitting all references to the presence of the body. Care should be taken that the homily and other remarks are compassionate, because closure by the family is usually difficult in such cases.

Part VIII: Mass on the First Anniversary of Death

In some places, it is customary to celebrate a Mass of Remembrance or a memorial Mass on the first anniversary of death. This should not be a regularly scheduled Mass, daily or Sunday, but rather a special Mass celebrated specifically for the deceased – perhaps during the time when funerals are normally scheduled. Eucharistic Prayer III provides for naming the deceased within the prayer. If another Eucharistic Prayer is used, the name of the deceased should instead be mentioned in the homily and/or the general intercessions.

Part IX: Donation for Organ Transplants or Medical Research

Many people make arrangements to donate their organs or the organs of their deceased loved ones to benefit others, or to allow their body to be used for medical research. The Catholic Church is in concert with such noble purposes, but clearly insists that out of respect for the body a proper burial must take place at some appropriate time following the donation or research period. Arrangements for the disposition of the body should be made in advance for both organ donation and medical research, especially for the unlikely event that the expiration of the research period finds no family or other responsible person available.

Organ Donation

Because the ability to use many donated organs diminishes with time, there may be little time for the usual rites to be celebrated. A prayer for the deceased should immediately follow the death. Care should be taken to ensure that the hospital or medical institution handles the body with proper respect, including the proper disposition of the body once the organs have been removed. Upon completion of the surgical procedures, the family should make arrangements for the body to be returned and a funeral liturgy as described in this document should be celebrated as soon as possible.
Medical Research
In the case of donating one’s body for medical research, the body may be held by the medical institution for some time, perhaps even years. As with organ donation, a prayer for the deceased should immediately follow death, and the body should be treated with proper respect. A memorial Mass should follow soon after death (Ref. DDC, Part VII: “Memorial Liturgy Without the Body”). Upon completion of the research needs, an appropriate funeral liturgy should be celebrated.