



A CATHOLIC FUNERAL (GUIDELINES)

DIOCESAN COMMISSION
OF LITURGY AND CULTURE
DIOCESE OF EDMUNDSTON

The Meaning of Death

Death is a passage from this life to the new life promised by Christ. This passage is to be experienced in the light of the Resurrection. In faith, we believe that one day we will all be gathered together by God, the Father, to live with Him eternally.

When a Loved One Dies

The parish office should be contacted as soon as someone dies. The Church responds in compassion to those who mourn and journeys with them during their time of grief. Several stages of support are offered to the bereaved to help them live through their loss with faith and hope.

The Support of the Church

- The person in charge of the Parish (or Pastoral Team) meets with the immediate family to minister to them and to help them prepare the funeral liturgy.
- A prayer may be held for the family at the funeral home.
- A vigil (prayer service) may be celebrated by the community the evening before the main funeral celebration.
- The main funeral liturgy is celebrated in the parish church.
- Prayers of committal take place at the cemetery.

The Vigil

The community gathers the evening before the main funeral liturgy to pray and to keep watch with the family. The Word of God is proclaimed as source of hope in the face of darkness and death. All pray for the deceased, in anticipation of the funeral to be celebrated the next day. Prayers are also offered for the comfort and consolation of the bereaved. This prayer service may take place at the funeral home or at the church. It is a vigil and is meant to be celebrated on the eve of the funeral. If there is to be a eulogy, it is appropriate at the vigil.

The Main Funeral Liturgy

A celebration of the eucharist with the body present is the ideal funeral liturgy. In the eucharist 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 - the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For valid reasons the family may choose a funeral liturgy without a mass - a Liturgy of the Word. This decision should be made in consultation with the person in charge of the Parish.

Importance of the Body

The care taken to prepare the body of the deceased for burial reflects our Christian belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the body. The prayers and gestures of the funeral rites also affirm the Church's reverence for the body

as a temple of the Holy Spirit. The long standing practice of burying the body in a grave or tomb in memory of Jesus, whose own body was placed in a tomb, continues to be encouraged as a sign of Christian faith.

Cremation

The practice of cremation is accepted by the Church as long as the reasons for choosing cremation are not contrary to the Christian way of life. In most cases cremation should take place following the funeral liturgies. These celebrations should take place with the body present. In this way the body can be honored by the community, and the bereaved are allowed the proper time to mourn. Death is the last passage of life and should not be hidden or negated by cremation prior to the funeral celebrations.

In particular circumstances, it may be necessary for cremation to take place prior to the funeral. This liturgy may then be celebrated with the ashes present.

The Ashes

The ashes are the body of the deceased in a changed form. We honor them as we honor the body. They must be reverently buried or entombed in a place reserved for the burial of the dead, as soon after cremation as possible. It is not acceptable to put off this burial, to scatter the ashes, or to keep them in the home.

Commemorative Service

If for some reason the body or the ashes have been buried before the funeral, a commemorative eucharist or liturgy of the word may be celebrated.

Preparing Your Funeral in Advance

You are encouraged to think about your own funeral. With respect for the Church's teaching, outlined in this brochure, and in dialogue with your family, you may want to leave directions as to how you wish your funeral to be celebrated.

May 1998