

*Comfort your family in their loss and sorrow.
Be our refuge and our strength, O Lord.
Prayer for Mourners*

This is a sad time for you and your family. It is hard to lose someone we love. The people of this parish community wish to support and console you in your loss. As you grieve and cope with your loss, we wish to assure you of our prayerful support during this time.

The Funeral Ministry team at the time of a funeral is one aspect of our parish community's support for you. They are there to support you and also to assist you in preparing for the funeral; in leading times of prayer; and liaising with the priest presiding at the funeral Mass.

You will mourn and remember your loved one in different ways – you will have your own quiet private moments, but there will also be more public times for you, as you accompany the body of your loved one from their place of death to their final place of rest.

At the **Reception of the Body at the Church**, usually on the evening before the funeral Mass, you will encounter some of the symbols of our faith, which remind us of what we believe about life and death.

As family members or friends of the dead person, you may be invited to place the pall over the coffin. If a flag or other insignia had been draped over the coffin, it has already been removed as the coffin is brought into the church. The **pall** is a large, white cloth that covers the coffin completely. It is simple in design and unadorned and recalls the white baptismal garment. It reminds us that we are all equal in the sight of God.

A **cross** is placed on the coffin. In baptism we were traced with the sign of the cross, during life we signed ourselves with the sign of the cross, and now at death, we share in Christ's victory over death. A book of the **Gospels** or a **Bible** may be placed on the coffin as a sign that Christians live by the word of God. Again this symbol may be placed on the coffin by family members and friends, or by other members of the community.

The **Paschal Candle** will be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgies. It is symbolic of "Christ our Light" present among us, and his victory over death.

At the **Funeral Mass**, we gather as a community to pray for the one who has died, to comfort and console those who are bereaved, and to proclaim our hope and our belief in Christ's victory over death.

The **Word of God** offers us life and hope, and in this booklet you will find a selection of the Sacred Scripture provided for funerals. This is to give you and us, the family and the community, an opportunity to hear God speak to our needs, sorrows, fears and hopes, as we mourn your loved one.

In the **Prayer of the Faithful**, we, the Christian community, call upon God to comfort the bereaved and to show mercy to the deceased. A selection of prayers of intercession is presented in this booklet. You might wish to adapt these prayers and this can be discussed with your priest as you prepare for the funeral Mass.

At the beginning of the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**, the gifts of bread and wine are offered. They are transformed to become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. These gifts may be brought to the altar by family members or by members of the wider community.

Incense is used during the funeral rite to honour the body of the deceased, because in baptism, this person's body became a temple of the Holy Spirit.

For **the Final Commendation** at the end of the funeral Mass, the book of the Gospels or Bible, the cross and the pall are removed from the coffin. Again members of your family or friends may wish to do this, or members of the parish community will be glad to assist.

Holy Water will have been used at different moments of the funeral rites. Now, during the Final Commendation and at the burial, the coffin is sprinkled with Holy Water, calling to mind the link between our baptism and our dying.

Some families wish to include appropriate personal mementoes, representing different aspects of the person's life, and these are brought to the sanctuary at the beginning of the Mass.

Each funeral Mass celebrates the life of a particular person, with his or her own story and qualities. These sentiments are best included in the homily by the celebrant. Occasionally a family member may wish to say a few words either in the funeral home, or at the beginning of the funeral Mass, or at the graveside. This can be discussed with the funeral team in preparing for the funeral.

Music and song have the power to console us, and to draw us together as a community. As important elements of the liturgy, they express our faith. In preparing for a funeral liturgy, there is a need to plan these elements with the assistance of the music personnel, the funeral team and the priest of the parish.

The **Rite of Committal** is the final farewell as we entrust your deceased to the tender and merciful embrace of God. Celebrated at the grave, this is the conclusion of the funeral rite. If the body of your deceased loved one is to be cremated, the rite of committal takes place at the burial of ashes.

As a Christian community, and as your local parish, we reach out to support and pray with you in your pain of letting go. While members of your family or friends may wish to participate in the liturgy, you need not feel any pressure to undertake any tasks. As a community, we would like to care for you at this time, and so there are Ministers of the Word, Eucharistic Ministers and other ministers available to you. We join with you in entrusting your loved one to God, our Creator and our Saviour.

*In you, we place our trust and hope,
In you, the dead find everlasting peace.
Prayer for the Dead*

Planning your Loved One's Funeral Liturgy.

The Church encourages you to be as fully involved as you can in planning your loved one's funeral liturgy. It is the final journey of your loved one. In the liturgy, we celebrate the life of faith of your loved one; we commend him/her to the Lord, we support and pray for all those who mourn and we seek strength in the promise of the Lord that He will not forget his own. In planning the Liturgy, you will need to:

- Provide your priest with some biographical information about your deceased loved one that will help him in preparing the funeral homily.
- Select the readings for the funeral Mass. Depending on the circumstances, you may decide to have either one or two readings before the gospel reading. You will find a large selection of suitable readings in this booklet. But you are free to choose others. Should you decide to have two readings before the gospel, it is preferable to have a different reader for each.
- Select the responsorial psalm, which comes between the first and second reading. You will find a number of responsorial psalms in this booklet, but again, you are free to choose. In making your choice, you should take into account the Church's recommendation that, if at all possible, the responsorial psalm should be sung.
- Choose or compose the general intercessions/prayers of the faithful which come after the homily. In the general intercessions we pray not only for the deceased and his/her family and friends but also for all the dead and those who mourn them, and the needs of the wider community. One or more family members should read the general intercessions.
- Choose family members or friends of the deceased to bring the gifts of bread and wine to the altar. You should keep in mind, though, that the presentation of the gifts is not the time to carry up personal memorabilia or symbols of the life of the deceased. The best time is at the beginning of the Mass, during the final commendation and farewell.
- Choose the hymns and music for the funeral Mass. They hymns should be selected from those regularly sung during Sunday Mass, and should express our strong belief in the resurrection, which is the basis of Christian hope. They should not include favourite secular songs or music of the deceased, these are not appropriate for a funeral liturgy.
- If you decide to have say a few words in honour of your deceased loved one, there are a number of things to keep in mind. It should be short, no longer than 5 minutes; it should be delivered by a family member or close friend of the deceased; it should contain only words of tribute to the deceased and of thanks to those who have helped or supported the deceased's family during this time; it should take place after communion, before the final commendation and farewell. If possible, it should be written out in full and a copy given to your priest beforehand. It is important to note that many churches do not allow a eulogy to take place in the Mass. If this is the case it could be done at the reception, before the Mass begins or at the grave-side.