

Planning a Catholic Funeral St. Colette Catholic Church

“In Sure and Certain Hope....”

The words below, taken from the “Order of Christian Funerals,” [OCF] expresses the sure and certain hope of St. Colette Parish that God will not abandon us in time of death.

In the face of death, the Church 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. The Church’s liturgical and sacramental life, and proclamation of the Gospel make this mystery present in the life of believers.

At the death of a Christian the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds that forged our 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. 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 Mass, the memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral.

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, 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. The funeral brings hope and consolation to the living. The funeral rites 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. (OCF, #’s 1 – 7)

Pre-Funeral Planning

It is becoming more customary for people to plan their funerals prior to serious illness and approaching death. For many people this pre-planning includes the following: selection of a funeral home and church for services and a cemetery for burial, prepayment of funeral home services with funds placed in a trust account, place for a funeral luncheon, etc. The pre-planning may include the following as well: selection of Scripture Readings and hymns, involvement of family and friends in various parts of the funeral liturgy, pall bearers, etc. Preplanned funeral arrangements save the surviving family members from having to make difficult decisions under extreme emotional stress. Once these specifics for the funeral liturgy are known, the family then is left with arranging for the day of the funeral with the local parish church, funeral home and cemetery.

What to do at the time of death

The circumstances that surround the loss of a loved one and the planning for funeral services may vary widely. Nevertheless, the arrangements typically follow this pattern in whole or in part.

- If a person dies unexpectedly at home, the local public safety department must be called first. If a person is under hospice care or in a hospital, the hospice caregiver and hospital staff will help the family with the subsequent procedures.
- At the time of death the family may contact the parish office that a loved one has died. Since all the sacraments of the Church are for the living, the Anointing of the Sick and/or Eucharist as viaticum cannot be celebrated with someone who has already died. A funeral home which the family has selected should be contacted so arrangements may be made to receive the body of the deceased
- The funeral director will ask the family members to meet at the funeral home at a mutually agreed time to make the necessary arrangements. At this meeting the funeral director will contact the parish office at St. Colette so that, with the family and church, days and times can be scheduled for the various funeral services. These typically include:
 - A vigil service at the funeral home the day prior to the funeral liturgy
 - The funeral liturgy
 - The committal service at the cemetery
- A member of St. Colette parish staff will be available to meet with the family at the parish office for the following:

- To be of service at this difficult time and to try to accommodate the needs and wishes of the family.
- To finalize the details of the funeral services.
- To attain background information regarding the deceased
- To assist the family with planning the funeral services (Scripture Readings, hymns, etc.) and to offer arrangements for the parish's funeral luncheon program (if parish space and volunteers are available).

The Order of Christian Funerals

The Church's ritual for funerals is called an "Order" because there are three stages or parts: the vigil, the liturgy, the committal.

The Vigil Service

It is the ancient practice of the Church that on the day/s before Christian burial, family, friends and the Christian community keep watch at the funeral home with the family of the deceased. This is done by visiting with the family at the funeral home to offer respects and condolences and to spend time with the family in prayer.

The official ritual the Church provides for the Vigil is commonly known as a **Scripture Service** which consists of introductory rites, a Liturgy of the Word, prayers of intercession and a concluding rite. It may also include a homily and the inclusion of music which may be instrumental music or communal singing of hymns. 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, those gathered at the Vigil call upon the God of mercy to receive the deceased into the kingdom of light and peace (OCF #56). The leader of the Vigil Service is a member of the parish's pastoral staff or a deacon or priest.

Since the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council the devotional praying of the **rosary** should not take the place of the Scripture Service. However, if the praying of the rosary is an important part of the devotional life of the surviving family members it may be prayed in place of the Scripture Service. Another option is to schedule a Scripture Service as the Vigil and to pray the rosary at some other time during the visitation. Remember, the purpose of the Vigil Service is to allow family and friends to join in prayer for the deceased and one another. Therefore it should be a form of prayer that allows the participation of everyone present. The reality is that Catholics of a younger age (and non-Catholics) do not know how to pray the rosary as do older Catholics. If that is the case, is the public praying of the rosary at the Vigil Service appropriate? It is for this reason that the Scripture Service is the Church's preference for the Vigil.

The Vigil Service may conclude with remarks by family and/or friends and this is called a **eulogy**. There are many options for the eulogy: reading of a poem in memory of the deceased, reading a biography of the deceased person's life, inviting family and friends to come forward and offer testimonies or memories of the deceased, or any combination of these.

The Funeral Liturgy

The Catholic Church provides two types of funeral liturgies: a **Funeral Mass** and a **Funeral Outside of Mass**. A Funeral Mass is typically celebrated when the majority surviving family members and friends are practicing Catholics who participate at Mass on a regular basis. A Funeral Outside of Mass is typically celebrated when the deceased was non-baptized, when the majority of the surviving family and friends are non-Catholic or non practicing Catholics and on days when a Funeral Mass is prohibited. As with the Vigil Service, the funeral liturgy should be a form of prayer that allows the participation of everyone present. The misconception is that a Funeral Outside of Mass is "less Catholic" and of course this is not the case. A Funeral Outside of Mass may be presided by a priest or deacon.

Funeral liturgies may be celebrated in church almost any day of the week, even on Sundays though this is not customary in our country. There are certain days of the Church's liturgical calendar when a Funeral Mass is not allowed (Holy Thursday, Paschal Triduum, Holydays of Obligation, and others). Funeral liturgies at St. Colette may be celebrated in church at 10:00/10:30 am or 11:30 am/12 Noon depending on the day of the

week. If for pastoral reasons the funeral liturgy is to be celebrated at a funeral home, it must be a Funeral Outside of Mass since Funeral Masses may not be celebrated in a funeral home. A funeral liturgy at a funeral home may be celebrated anytime of the day, even in the afternoon or early evening.

Music plays an integral part in the celebration of a funeral liturgy. 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 (OCF #30). Hymns and psalms selected for a funeral liturgy must be Christian liturgical music and be available to be sung by all present for the funeral liturgy. The parish's director of music ministry provides a music selection sheet for suggestions and assists the family of the deceased in the selection of appropriate music for the liturgy as well as being available (as well as the Resurrection Choir) for the funeral liturgy to lead the singing. Guest musicians must be of professional caliber and be familiar with the musical demands and expectations of Catholic liturgies.

Prior to the beginning of the funeral liturgy in church the family may opt to have **visitation in the chapel**. This allows mourners who could not visit with the family at the funeral home the opportunity to do so before the liturgy begins. Ordinarily the visitation in the chapel is for 30 – 45 minutes. At the end of the visitation family and friends are invited to be seated in church for the beginning of the liturgy.

The **Introductory Rites** for a funeral liturgy begins with the singing of the Entrance Hymn. After a greeting the priest or deacon blesses the body/cremated remains with Holy Water reminiscent of the deceased person's baptism. A pall (a white cloth) is then reverently placed over the casket as a reminder of the white garment the deceased received on the day of baptism. It is appropriate for family and friends to place the pall on the casket.

The liturgy continues with the **Liturgy of the Word** which ordinarily includes three Scripture Readings, a psalm response and the Prayer of the Faithful. When the family meets with a member of the parish staff to discuss funeral arrangements they are given several options for the First and Second Readings and the Prayer of the Faithful. The family may select their choice for the two Readings and the Prayers of the Faithful. Ordinarily the priest or deacon selects the Gospel and the music minister selects the psalm response unless the family has specific requests. For the liturgy the family is asked to select up to three people to proclaim the Readings and read the Prayer of the Faithful. It is usually best when readers are high school age or older and have had some previous experience reading publicly. A brief homily is given by the priest or deacon based on the Scripture Readings, but never any kind of eulogy. With the homily those present should receive the consolation and strength to face the death of a loved one and be reassured of the promise of eternal life.

If a Funeral Mass is celebrated the **Liturgy of the Eucharist** follows. Family and/or friends may be designated to present the gifts of bread and wine. While there are only two items to be presented, any number of persons may participate in the presentation. Holy Communion may be distributed under both forms (consecrated Bread and Wine) If there are Eucharistic ministers among family and friends of the deceased who wish to exercise their ministry at the funeral Mass the parish welcomes their participation. These ministers should be previously trained how to distribute Holy Communion in their home parishes. In accordance with the directives of the Archdiocese of Detroit a eulogy is not allowed during a funeral liturgy. Family and friends may be invited to share such a testimony at the end of the Vigil Service conducted at the funeral home the day before the funeral liturgy or at the luncheon or reception that often follows the funeral.

The funeral liturgy concludes with the **Final Commendation and Farewell** which is the final farewell by the family and friends of the deceased whom they entrust to the merciful embrace of God. After an introduction those gathered are invited to take a few moments of silent prayer for the deceased. If there is a casket incense is used and a Song of Farewell is sung followed by a prayer of commendation and procession to the cemetery (if applicable).

The Committal

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 (OCF #204). The Rite of Committal should be celebrated at the grave or place of interment but in case of serious need it may be celebrated at the cemetery chapel. The Rite begins with an introduction, Scripture verse, and a prayer over the place of committal followed by

intercessions and the Lord's Prayer. It concludes with a prayer over the people, the verse, "Eternal rest...." and a blessing. If family and friends are not going to the cemetery after the funeral liturgy the Rite of Committal may be said as the conclusion of the liturgy.

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Who can be buried from the Church?

All baptized Catholics have the right to be buried from the Church no matter how they practiced their faith. One does not have to be a registered, contributing parishioner to have a funeral at St. Colette Church. Special consideration is given to elderly parishioners who, due to illness, had to move into children's homes, nursing homes, etc., outside the parish. For Catholics who have no formal connection with the parish and live outside the parish's territorial boundaries, the family should contact the Catholic church nearest the deceased person's place of residence. According to Canon Law it is that parish's responsibility to provide funeral services. If, however, that parish cannot or is unwilling to do so, the family may notify St. Colette parish office to see what arrangements can be made. Non-Catholic members of a parishioner's family may be buried from the St. Colette unless it was contrary to their wishes and will during their life. Contrary to popular belief a person who has committed suicide may have his/her funeral in the Catholic Church.

Cremation

With regard to cremation, the Catholic Church continues to stress the preference for burial of the body of the deceased; nevertheless, cremation is permitted as long as it is not an intentional denial of the Church's teaching regarding the resurrection of the body. If there is to be a cremation the preference is that it takes place after the funeral liturgy and not before it. However, when this is not possible, the cremated remains are permitted to be present for the Funeral Mass or Funeral Outside of Mass.

The OCF (#417) clearly states that an appropriate, worthy container such as a classic urn is proper for the cremated remains. The cremated remains are to be properly buried in a cemetery or a columbarium; the practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea or the ground, keeping them in the home, dividing them among people or places and preserving them in mementos, jewelry or other objects is not the reverent disposition that the Church requires.

The Funeral Luncheon

Many families plan a luncheon which immediately follows the funeral liturgy or the Rite of Committal at the cemetery. Such a gathering permits fellowship, hospitality and support at a difficult time.

As a ministry to the families and friends of a parishioner who has died, a family may be interested in the funeral luncheon that is provided by St. Colette Parish. The ability to provide a luncheon in the parish's Activities Center is contingent on the availability of parish facilities, volunteers and the existing parish calendar. There is a cost per person which is dependent on the number of main entrees to be served. Also, the use of an outside catering service is not available nor can any alcohol be served. To inquire about the possibility of scheduling a funeral luncheon provided by St. Colette Parish, please contact the parish office.

If not using the parish's funeral luncheon, a funeral director can provide information on local establishments that can accommodate other arrangements for a funeral luncheon.

-4-

The difference between a Funeral and Memorial Mass or Service

A Funeral Mass or a Funeral Outside of Mass has the body of the deceased or the cremated remains of the deceased present and has all the special prayers attributed to the funeral liturgy. At occasions when the body or cremated remains of the deceased are not available (due to death by drowning or fire) it is called a Memorial. When the funeral liturgy takes place at a distant location where most family and friends are not able to attend, a local Memorial Mass or Service may be celebrated for their convenience.

The term “Mass of Resurrection” should be avoided when describing a funeral liturgy. The only Mass of Resurrection that is celebrated by the Church is on Easter Sunday. A funeral liturgy is not a Mass of Resurrection because the resurrection of the bodies of the faithful will take place at the end of time. The funeral liturgy celebrates the new life of the deceased person’s soul and not of his/her body.

Fees and Stipends

The policy of the Archdiocese of Detroit states there is not a fee charged to be buried from the Church. St. Colette Parish neither requires nor expects a fee or donation for any funeral services aside from the \$125 which is required for the musician at the funeral liturgy.

If the family of the deceased wishes to make a donation to the parish for funeral services, it is always appreciated and accepted with gratitude. Checks should be made payable to St. Colette Parish, whether issued by the family or the funeral home on behalf of the family.

No gift to the priest, deacon or pastoral minister involved in the funeral services is required or expected. If the family of the deceased wishes to give something to the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister, it should be given to him/her directly by the family and not by means of a check issued by the funeral home.

Other Clergy

Ordinarily the person presiding at the funeral liturgy is the pastor or deacon of St. Colette Parish. If the family has a Catholic priest or deacon who is a relative or friend whom they want to participate at the funeral liturgy they should make this known when they set the date for the funeral liturgy. If a priest, he may preside or concelebrate at the liturgy and, if desired by the family, he may be the homilist. If a deacon, he may preside at a Funeral Outside of Mass or deaconate at a Funeral Mass. Again, if desired by the family, he may be the homilist at a Funeral Mass or Funeral Outside of Mass.

Altar Servers

St. Colette Parish does not provide altar servers for a funeral liturgy. If the family has family members or friends who are altar servers here at St. Colette or at another Catholic Church they are welcome to invite them to serve at the funeral liturgy.

Flowers

On the day of the funeral liturgy flower arrangements may be brought from the funeral home to decorate the chapel and/or the church. Ordinarily these flowers are removed after the liturgy. This is especially true during the Season of Lent.

Grief Support

A member of the parish staff, Deacon Gary Pardo, will be happy to meet with members of the family or to provide a referral for additional assistance. Some funeral homes provide grief counseling following a funeral. Angela Hospice in Livonia provides ongoing grief support groups free of charge. For more information, call 866-464-7810.

Praying for the Dead

Our prayers for the dead remind us that we are not separated from them as it strengthens our communion with all the saints. Such prayer is also beneficial to us as we prepare for our own passing from this life to the next. Here are some opportunities available to us to keep the faithful departed in prayer:

- The offering of a Mass intention for the deceased on the anniversary of death, birthday or other days
- The Church’s annual celebration of All Souls Day every November 2 to commemorate all the faithful departed

- Annual parish opportunities during the month of November:
 - Writing the names of deceased loved ones in the “Book of Life” located in the sanctuary near the Baptismal Font.
 - Bringing photos of deceased loved ones and placing them on the window sills of the church.
 - A banner on the back wall of the church listing all who died and were buried from our church during the past year.
 - Making an offering for a memorial mum plant decorating our worship space during November.

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