

The celebration of Christian funerals in the Diocese of Valleyfield

PASTORAL GUIDE

**For all those who believe in you Lord, life is not destroyed, but merely transformed;
and when earth's journey ends, an everlasting home in heaven has already been prepared.**

1. Preamble

Times are changing. New situations arise and mentalities are continuously evolving. In fact, these changes are felt in all aspects of our lives, even in the way we experience the death and bereavement of our loved ones. At Christian funerals, the Church endeavours to take all these factors into account, while never losing sight of the profound meaning of the funeral liturgy.

"As they celebrate the funerals of their brothers and sisters, Christians should be intent on affirming their hope for eternal life. They should not, however, give the impression of either disregard or contempt for the attitudes or practices of their own time and place."¹

Hope in eternal life is founded in Christ and it is therefore rooted in Him.

Thus, the Order of Christian Funerals states: "At the funerals of its children the Church confidently celebrates Christ's paschal mystery. Its intention is that those who by baptism were made one body with the dead and risen Christ may with him pass from death to life. In soul they are to be cleansed and taken up into heaven with the saints and elect; in body they await the blessed hope of Christ's coming and the resurrection of the dead."²

The parish community and its pastor should dutifully accompany families in their grief and prepare, with their help, a meaningful celebration, within the context of the funeral liturgy of the Church. This will entail attentive listening, in a spirit of sympathy and compassion, and a celebration that comprises prayers, readings and hymns, in keeping with the great biblical and liturgical traditions of the Church.

2. What is a Christian funeral?

Most people would reply that it is a Mass celebrated in church. In fact, the celebration of the Mass is the central moment in the rite, which should include in principle a time of prayer at the funeral home as well as a period of final contemplation at the cemetery. The liturgy speaks of the three 'stations' or time periods of a Christian funeral. This appears to be the preferred type of funeral service in this region.

Only a religious rite celebrated in church, in either one of its two forms—a funeral Mass or a Liturgical Celebration of the Word with final commendation—constitutes a Christian funeral in the full and proper sense of the word.

¹ Order of Christian Funerals, Canadian Edition, Concacan Inc., 1990.

² Ibid.

Generally speaking, a funeral service includes a celebration of the Mass. However, it is the responsibility of the priest who welcomes the family or the pastoral team concerned to evaluate the situation with the grieving family in order to choose the most appropriate approach under the circumstances. Whether it takes the form of a funeral Mass celebrated by a priest or a Celebration of the Word without Mass, presided over by a priest or deacon, or even a lay person commissioned to do so, all these elements constitute true Christian funeral services.

If there is no celebration of the Mass, Holy Communion will not be offered, except in rare instances, since this practice is essentially an integral part of the celebration of the memorial of the Lord.

3. Celebrations held in the parish church

It is hoped that funeral homes will continue to recommend that Catholic families hold funeral services in the parish church, whether or not, there is a Eucharistic celebration.

3.1 Link with the parish to be maintained

The funeral of any deceased member of the faithful should normally be celebrated in the church of that person's proper parish. However, any member of the faithful or those in charge of the deceased person's funeral may choose another parish or church.³

Therefore, it is important to contact either church as soon as possible after death occurs in order to determine the availability of the premises as well as that of the parish priest, deacon or other qualified minister.

3.2 Days of celebration

Possible options concerning funeral celebrations on Saturday

In many parishes, Saturday can prove to be a particularly busy time, often taken up by marriage celebrations and anticipated Sunday services. Also, considering that a funeral service in the presence of the ashes can be more easily postponed, the priest and his assistants may determine that in their respective parishes, only funeral services conducted in the presence of the body will be celebrated on Saturday.

It may also be established that when funeral services take place on Saturday, whether in the presence of the body or the ashes, a Celebration of the Word alone will be held (without distribution of Holy Communion).

Observed practice concerning funeral celebrations on Sunday

Priests as well as parish bereavement teams should bear in mind that, in Canada, the custom stipulates that funeral celebrations not be held on Sunday⁴; specific rules also apply for Holy Week.

It should also be noted that most cemeteries do not offer burial services on Sunday.

3.3 Funeral celebrations in the presence of the body or the ashes

Funeral services held in Church may be celebrated either in the presence of the body or the ashes.⁵

³ See Canon 1177, § 1, 2.

⁴ See General Introduction, Order of Christian Funerals (OCF).

⁵ See Canon 1176, § 3

3.3.1 Funeral Rites in their entirety and especially the structure and content of the Rite of Final Commendation show a preference for funeral celebrations to be held in the presence of the body. The underlying principle is that at Baptism, it is the body that becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit and a dwelling place for the Most Holy Trinity, which is why the Rite of Final Commendation honours the body of the deceased.

3.3.2 If cremation is chosen, which is in no way contradictory to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, it is preferable that it take place after the funeral services are held in the church.

3.4 Readings, music and song

Because Christian funerals are celebrated in the church, all readings are to be taken from Holy Scripture and any music or hymns are to be selected from the sacred repertory of liturgical hymns, ancient or modern version; any other readings, music or songs will only be permitted at the start or end of the celebration.

Parish bereavement teams will strive wholeheartedly to help the grieving family, who turns to the Church for a funeral celebration of a loved one, to grasp the rich meaning of the hope-filled message offered in the Sacred Scriptures.

3.5 Testimonials

We will try to limit as much as possible the eulogies, at least in number and duration, and we should endeavour to become aware of their content in advance. Such eulogies should take place preferably at the beginning of the celebration.

4. Celebrations at a funeral home

4.1 Because these celebrations do not constitute Christian funerals as such, no entry will appear in the parish register.

Participation of ordained ministers

4.2 If a family requests that a priest or deacon preside over the Celebration of the Word at the funeral home, it is hoped that the persons in charge of said funeral home will refer the request to the deceased member's respective parish.

4.3 While priority is given to funeral services held in church, if a family requests a Celebration of the Word at a funeral home, priests are to ensure a parish presence by attending personally or delegating a member of the pastoral staff to attend in order to support the grieving family.

4.4 A priest or deacon who does not belong to the diocese either by his incardination or pastoral ministry (if he is a member of a religious institute, for example) is not authorized to preside over any celebration at a funeral home without first having contacted the priest in the parish of the deceased.

4.5 Before presiding over a Celebration of the Word at a funeral home, any deacon belonging to the diocese by his incardination must first contact the priest in the parish of the deceased.

4.6 All priests must also adhere to the same rule when presiding over any celebration at a funeral home.

4.7 In all these cases, the funeral home will remit to the parish of the deceased the fee established for the person presiding at the prayer celebration (priest or deacon); the parish will in turn give the honorarium to the person concerned, as established by diocesan ordinance for that particular ministry.

How the funeral celebration unfolds

The Celebration of the Word at a funeral home should not be an exact duplication of a funeral service held in the church.

- 4.8 When presiding over a Celebration of the Word in a funeral home, priests and deacons should not wear liturgical vestments.
- 4.9 The rite may be structured as such: greeting, liturgy of the Word, spiritual reflection, prayers of thanksgiving and petitions.
- 4.10 When a funeral celebration takes place at a funeral home, the Eucharist is never celebrated and there will be no distribution of Holy Communion.
- 4.11 Even if the celebration takes place at a funeral home, it should not be held on Sunday, which is the same principle that applies in the church, as tradition stipulates that funeral services are not to take place on Sunday.

5. Prayers for the deceased

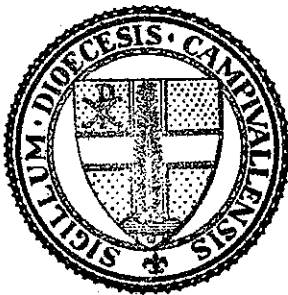
When funeral services are celebrated in church without the Eucharist or even when a Celebration of the Word has taken place at a funeral home, families concerned could be invited to attend a Sunday celebration of the Eucharist at some later date, where everyone can pray publicly for the deceased person.

As well, all families who have experienced the death of a loved one over the course of the year may be invited to a Mass in Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (November 2) or to the annual pilgrimage to the parish cemetery.

DECREE OF APPROVAL

After consulting with members of the Presbyteral Council and having welcomed their observations and suggestions, I hereby authorize and declare approval of the present Pastoral Guide for the celebration of Christian funerals in the Diocese of Valleyfield.

Given at Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, under our hand and bearing the seal of the diocese and countersignature of the Chancellor on this tenth day of August in the year two thousand and nine.



As mandated by the Bishop
AE 074 / 2009

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luc Cyr'.

✠ Luc Cyr
Bishop of Valleyfield

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jean Trudeau'.

(Rev.) Jean Trudeau
Episcopal Vicar and Chancellor