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This Bulletin is primarily pastoral in scope. It is prepared for members of parish liturgy committees, readers, musicians, singers, catechists, teachers, religious, seminarians, clergy, and diocesan liturgical commissions, and for all who are involved in preparing, celebrating, and improving the community’s life of worship and prayer.

Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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This issue contains a commentary on our fine new revised rite of funerals. The reason this liturgy was revised, its new rites and pastoral notes, alternatives and options, as well as content, structure and ministry are discussed in depth.
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Introduction

This issue introduces the Canadian edition of a new liturgical book entitled *Order of Christian Funerals*; it will be published early in 1990. It succeeds the *Catholic Funeral Rite: Ritual and Pastoral Notes* of 1973.

The aim of this issue is to help all who celebrate the funeral liturgies of the Catholic Church understand these rites better and celebrate them sensibly and fruitfully. This Bulletin will address the following issues.

A new edition: Why do we have a new liturgical book for funerals? What is the relationship between the 1973 *Catholic Funeral Rite* and the new *Order of Christian Funerals*?

Understanding the new rites: What is the basic meaning of the Catholic funeral liturgies, as they are set forth in the *Order of Christian Funerals*?

Contents: What individual liturgies make up the Christian funeral rites as a whole, as described in the new *Order of Christian Funerals*? What is the purpose and shape of each?

Celebration: How can funerals be celebrated well, according to this new liturgical book?

Pastoral response: Finally, the new liturgies are evaluated by a pastor who has been using them experimentally for several years, and by a specialist in death, dying, and bereavement.

The best teacher: Because the liturgy itself is our best teacher regarding the meaning of the funeral rites, the *Order of Christian Funerals* will be quoted at length.

An Improved Edition

The Second Vatican Council directed that “The rite of funerals should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions of various regions. This applies also to the liturgical color to be used. The rite for the burial of infants is to be revised and a special Mass for the occasion provided.”

Revised Roman rite: In an attempt to fulfill these directives, the Roman *Ordo Exsequiarum* of 1969 provided three different models or plans for the funeral liturgy. The first had “stations” in the home of the deceased, in the church, and in the cemetery. The second had stations in the cemetery chapel and at

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1 Constitution on the Liturgy, nn. 81-82.
the grave or tomb. In the third plan the entire funeral rite was celebrated in
the home of the deceased. The English translation, Rite of Funerals (1970),
was a direct translation of all three Latin alternatives.

In Canada: Only the first plan presented in the Ordo Exsequiarum reflected
pastoral practice in Canada, and so the Catholic Funeral Rite: Ritual and
Pastoral Notes (1973) omitted the other two plans and expanded somewhat
on the Latin liturgies; pastoral notes were also provided. Other countries
adapted the Latin liturgies less extensively than was done in Canada, or did
so in a different manner.

The Revision Process

Evaluation and revision: In 1977 the International Commission on English in
the Liturgy (ICEL) adopted the policy that it would in due course evaluate
existing English translations of the Church's liturgies in the light of pastoral
experience. Where necessary, it would improve them through a process of
revision. The first liturgy to receive this "second look" was the funeral rite.

Consultation: The process of revision began by consulting approximately
1600 bishops and liturgical specialists throughout the English-speaking
world. They were asked to suggest improvements in the translation of the
Latin texts and regarding the arrangement and presentation of the individual
rites. They were also asked to suggest where additional texts and new rites
would be helpful to meet needs that had not previously been anticipated.
This consultation took place in 1981.

Response: The replies that ICEL received from consultants indicated that
the Rite of Funerals (1970) and its various local adaptations did not meet all
the situations that were actually encountered in pastoral practice, and
hence needed to become broader in scope. In addition, it was clear that
more alternatives and options were desirable in order to meet the special
circumstances of individual funerals, as well as to provide greater variety.
Finally, it was recognized that the language of the liturgical texts could be
more accurate relative to the original Latin texts, and more beautiful.

The revision process: With the results of the consultation before them, the
various subcommittees of ICEL began the process of revision. The sub-
committee on translations and revisions revised or retranslated all of the
liturgical texts. The subcommittee on original texts composed about 40 new
prayers, and the subcommittee on the presentation of texts dealt with mat-
ters of arrangement, layout and rubrics, and provided new pastoral notes.

Approval: After several years of work, the result was approved by ICEL's
Episcopal Board and published in 1985. During late 1985 and 1986 the epis-
copal conferences of the individual English-speaking countries gave their
approval. After requiring certain small changes, Rome gave the required
confirmation, and the final ICEL text was completed in September 1989.

Canadian adaptations: The basic ICEL text of the Order of Christian Fu-
nerals has received further adaptation by the Episcopal Commission on Lit-
urgy and National Liturgical Office in order to reflect Canadian pastoral
practices and to meet special needs of the Canadian church. Thus the

**Improved Presentation**

**Appearance:** The *Order of Christian Funerals* will match the 1987 Canadian edition of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* in appearance. It will be 19 x 26.5 cm (7.5 x 10.5 in) in size, and appear in an attractive and sturdy binding with ribbons; good quality paper will be used. An appropriate graphic will decorate the cover.

**Typography:** Size of type, use of two colors, layout of text on pages, titles at the bottom of pages, and other typographic features, will help to make the new book easy to use.

**Improved Participation**

**People's edition:** In addition to the complete edition, portions of the Canadian edition of the *Order of Christian Funerals* will be published as a separate booklet for use by congregations and by families. This will contain all the people's parts for vigil (wake) services, and will include approximately 20 hymns from the forthcoming Catholic Book of Worship III.

**For families:** As described further below, the *Order of Christian Funerals* includes several liturgies that are intended for use with bereaved families and close friends. The people's edition will also contain whatever is necessary to help families celebrate in these liturgies.

**For churches and funeral homes:** Both parish churches and funeral homes will want to obtain ample copies of the people's edition of the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

**Litanies** are used in many of the different rites of the *Order of Christian Funerals*. This form of prayer promotes participation by all. It is also highly adaptable, as verses can be added or altered according to individual circumstances and pastoral need.

**Improved Texts**

**New translation:** Virtually all of the texts of the *Ordo Exsequiarum* have been newly translated as part of the revision process. This makes the prayers of the *Order of Christian Funerals* more accurate renderings of the Latin texts; it also gives us better access to the depth of meaning and richness of imagery that is present in the Latin prayers.

**More readable and more inclusive:** The revised texts have also been improved so that liturgical texts are easier to proclaim aloud. The language of the *Order of Christian Funerals* is also inclusive with respect to persons. That is, language in the 1973 edition that excluded women has been replaced by language that consciously includes them. The principle that new
liturgical books use inclusive language was adopted by ICEL in 1975, and further principles and guidelines for doing so were published in 1980. These have been endorsed by the Canadian bishops.

Original texts: About forty new prayers have been composed in English for the Order of Christian Funerals. In part these provide alternatives and greater variety. For example, there are now three prayers for “one who died after a long illness” instead of just one. They also provide for situations for which no Latin prayer was provided, for example “One who died by suicide,” “One who died suddenly,” and “One who died accidentally or violently.”

Helpful Additions

Outlines: In accord with recent ICEL practice, outlines of individual liturgies are printed on the page opposite the beginning of each rite. This assists the presider and others to grasp the overall structure of each service, and helps them see the relationship of individual parts of a liturgy to the rite as a whole.

Pastoral notes: Extensive pastoral notes have been provided by ICEL. General principles are placed at the beginning of the Order of Christian Funerals, together with the introduction to the previous edition. Notes pertaining to individual liturgies occur throughout the book, where they will be of greatest use.

New Terminology

Some of the language used to describe or title the funeral rites in the Order of Christian Funerals is different from that used previously. These changes have been made for greater theological or liturgical accuracy, or to reflect contemporary understanding and usage. Confusion may be caused if these changes are not appreciated.

• Order — This term is used as an overall title for a group of separate but related rites or liturgies.

• Funeral rites — This is the general term used to refer to the liturgies of funerals in general.

• Funeral liturgy — This replaces “Service in the church” as the title for the second main communal liturgy of the Order of Christian Funerals. Most often this will be the celebration of the eucharist, the “funeral mass.” One must be very careful to distinguish “funeral liturgy” — the church service, from “funeral rites” — all the liturgies of funerals.

• Vigil — This replaces “wake” as the title of the first main communal liturgy after death. “Wake” may still be retained to refer to the whole period before the church service (“funeral liturgy”), but “vigil” is now used for the communal liturgy celebrated during this period.

• Rite of Committal — This replaces “Prayers at the cemetery” as the title of the third principal communal liturgy.
Terms no longer used: Several terms related to committal are no longer used.

- Burial — This term is not used, as it refers to just one of the several possible means of committal.

- Cemetery — Likewise, the term “cemetery” is not used in the title of any rite, because of the possibility of the dispersal of ashes, burial at sea, or other methods of committal.

- Not yet baptized — The Catholic funeral rites are normally celebrated only for baptized persons. Children who die before baptism are buried with the Church’s rites not simply as unbaptized persons, but as those who in the normal course of events would have been brought for baptism by their parents. Thus these children are described as “children who died before baptism” rather than “unbaptized.”

New Rites

Several liturgies are included in the Order of Christian Funerals that did not exist at all in the Catholic Funeral Rite of 1973, or which were included only in the appendices, or mentioned as possibilities only in the rubrics. These are listed here and described later in this issue.

- Prayers after death
- Gathering in the presence of the body
- Transfer of the body to the church or to the place of committal
- Vigil in the church with reception of the body
- Office for the dead
- Funeral liturgy outside Mass
- Rite of committal with final commendation
- Short rite of committal
- Rite of final commendation for an infant

Canadian adaptations

The Canadian edition of the Order of Christian Funerals contains several adaptations that have been added to the basic ICEL edition. For example, the two vigil liturgies of the ICEL edition have been expanded to nine by using materials provided in ICEL’s appendices. Suggestions have been made for prayers in the funeral home at the end of the day following the vigil and on preceding days. A short rite of committal is provided for inclement weather or other unfavorable conditions. Pastoral notes deal with questions that arise in connection with the practice of cremation.
New Ministers

**The priest** remains the principal local pastoral minister and presider at the funeral liturgies. His role is set forth in detail in the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

**Deacons:** The possibility that deacons may preside at some or all of the funeral rites is also taken into account.

**Lay presiders:** Increasingly, lay persons may be called upon to preside at some or even all of the funeral rites. A church service entitled “Funeral liturgy outside mass” is provided for such eventualities, together with the liturgy of “Holy communion outside mass.” Parts of the *Order of Christian Funerals* that must be carried out by an ordained minister are clearly indicated by the use of “priest” or “deacon” in the rubrics. Parts that may be carried out by a lay person as well are indicated by using the expression “minister.”

**Community:** The pastoral notes of the *Order of Christian Funerals* lay great stress on the role of the local Christian community and of all of its members in the “ministry of consolation.” The community is the primary minister of all of the funeral rites, usually through the participation of as many of its members as possible in the liturgies. When necessary, the community carries out its ministry through the presence of the priest or other pastoral minister and a few of its members.

New Challenge

**Flexibility and sensitivity:** In order to be as sensitive as possible to the great diversity of pastoral needs and circumstances that surround the death of Christians, the revised *Order of Christian Funerals* is very flexible. This sensitivity and flexibility mean that choices will have to be made among the wealth of rites and prayers provided in this new liturgical book. It cannot be used mechanically, or as a “cook book” from which one takes this or that recipe. Alternatives, options, possibilities for adaptations and the composition of new texts, will present a challenge to those who will use the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

**Planning aids:** It is expected that planning aids for both parish ministers and families will be prepared and published in due course. These will be intended to facilitate the process of adaptation to individual circumstances.

*Let us turn to Christ Jesus with confidence and faith in the power of his cross and resurrection:*

*Risen Lord, pattern of our life for ever:*
*Lord, have mercy.*

*Promise and image of what we shall be:*
*Lord, have mercy.*

*Son of God who came to destroy sin and death:*
*Lord, have mercy.*

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Word of God who delivered us from the fear of death:
Lord, have mercy.

Crucified Lord, forsaken in death, raised in glory:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, gentle Shepherd who brings rest to our souls,
give peace to N. for ever:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you bless those who mourn and are in pain.
Bless N.'s family and friends who gather around him/her today:
Lord, have mercy.
— Litany of Intercession

Selected Reading

Of special importance:


Commentaries on the Order of Christian Funerals:


Historical studies:

Philippe Aries, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1974)


E. Friestedt, *Altchristliche Totengedachtinstage und ihre Beziehung zum Jenseits-glauben und Totenbulten der Antike* (Munster 1928)

P.-M. Gy, “Les funérailles d’après le rituel 1614,” La Maison-Dieu 44 (1955)


“Le mystère de la mort et sa célébration,” (Lex Orandi 12) (Paris 1956)


Henri Rene Phillippeau, “Textes et rubriques des Agenda Mortuorum,” Archiv fur Liturgie Wissenschaft 4 (1955) 52-72


Johannes Quasten, “‘Vetus supersitio et nova religio.’ The problem of refrigerium in the ancient church of North Africa,” Harvard Theological Review 33 (1940) 253-266


Alfred C. Rush, Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity (Washington: Catholic University of America Press 1941)

Damien Sicard, La Liturgie de la mort dans l’eglise Latine des origines à la réforme carolingienne (Munster: Aschendorff 1978)

Modern Studies: Liturgical

Henry Ashworth, “The prayers for the dead in the missal of Pope Paul VI,” Ephemerides Liturgicae 85 (1971) 2-15


James Dallen, The Funeral Liturgy (Glendale: Pastoral Arts Associates 1980)

J. Massyingbaerde Ford, The Silver Lining. 11 Personalized Scriptural Wake Services (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications 1987)

*Funeral Liturgies for Children* (Buffalo: Diocese of Buffalo, N.Y.)


Robert Hovda, “Old age, ministry to dying persons, planning for death and funerals,” *Living Worship*, vol 8, no. 9 (November 1972)


*Now and at the Hour of Our Death. Instructions Concerning My Death and Funeral* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 1989)

“On death and dying,” *Assembly*, vol 5, no. 5 (March 1979 issue)


“The Rites of Death,” *Assembly*, vol. 10, no. 3 (February 1984 issue)

“The Parish Funeral,” *Pastoral Music* (February-March 1980 issue)


*Modern Studies: General*

Pierre Benoit and Roland Murphy, eds., *Immortality and Resurrection* (Concilium 60) (New York: Herder and Herder 1970)

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"Blessed are those who mourn. . . .," *PMC. Practice of Ministry in Canada* (September 1989 issue)


Mary Jane Linn, Dennis Linn, Matthew Linn, *Healing the Dying. Releasing People to Die* (New York: Paulist Press 1979)


The Christian Funeral

A kind of journey: Even an observer who does not share our Christian faith would conclude that the Catholic funeral liturgy takes the form of a journey. There is a succession of individual liturgical celebrations within the funeral as a whole, and they take place in different locations: the home of the deceased, the funeral home, the church, the cemetery, and possibly others. The body of the deceased, the mourners, the ministers of the Church, and members of the parish move from one place to another, sometimes informally and sometimes in liturgical procession. The funeral is clearly a kind of journey.

Within a larger journey: The Christian knows that the funeral journey is situated within a larger journey, one that begins with baptism and includes the whole of the Christian life. Death and new life following death are no surprise to Christians, therefore, for they speak and sing of these in their liturgical celebrations on a regular basis.

A study of the meaning of the Christian funeral does not begin with the Order of Christian Funerals, therefore, but with the liturgies of baptism and eucharist and the church year.

Baptism, Eucharist and Easter

Paschal mystery: All of Catholic worship is focused and founded upon the mystery of the death and resurrection — rising to new life — of Jesus Christ. This is constantly proclaimed and celebrated. We ourselves enter into this mystery of death and new life in our sacramental celebrations, especially baptism and eucharist. Furthermore we profess that death ultimately has no power over us because of Christ's death and resurrection; though we will die physically, we will continue to live in a new way.

Buried with Christ: The first prayer over the water in our baptismal liturgy says, for example, "May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life." When we are invited to renew our baptismal promises during the Easter Vigil the presider says, "through the paschal mystery we have been buried with Christ in baptism so that we may rise again with him to a new life."

The death of Christ: The Sunday eucharist, together with the Easter Three Days, are the most profound teachers about death and new life. First, we speak of the historic death of Jesus Christ. "He . . . was crucified, died, and
was buried. He descended to the dead."1 "Before he was given up to death, a
death he freely accepted ..."2 "You [God] did not abandon him to the power
of death ... ."3 "In fulfillment of your will he gave himself up to death ... ."4

In the memorial acclamations we sing of Christ’s death and of his resurrection. "Christ has died, Christ is risen ..." "We proclaim your death ... ."

Christ’s death proclaimed: In the anamnesis section of the eucharistic
prayer, Christ’s death is always proclaimed: "We recall his passion,"5 "in
memory of his death and resurrection,"6 "calling to mind the death your
[God’s] Son endured for our salvation,"7 "we recall Christ’s death, his
descent among the dead ... ."8

Victory over death: The consequences of Christ’s death and resurrection for
our human death are also clearly stated in our eucharistic liturgies. "Dying
you [Christ] destroyed our death, rising you restored our life."9 "He [Christ]
freed us from sin and death,"10 "he freed us from unending death;"11 "he put
an end to death."12

Life everlasting: Our eucharistic liturgy goes on to speak frequently of our
life after death. "We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life ever-
lasting."13 "We pray to God, "admit us to your presence,"14 and "bring us to
everlasting life."15 "We proclaim that "he [Christ] gave us eternal life"16 and
"we rise to everlasting life."17 This future life is also mentioned frequently in
the prayers after communion.

Mary and the saints: The connection between Christ’s death and new life
and the death and new life of individual Christians is further developed
through reference to Mary and the saints in all of the eucharistic prayers and
indeed, through all the feasts of the saints of the liturgical calendar. The
saints are persons who lived outstanding Christian lives on earth, who have
died, and whom we now believe to be living new lives in the presence of God;
they maintain bonds with us as well. Traditionally, the day of a saints’ human
death is called his or her “birthday” into eternal life. The whole idea of
“saints” depends on human death and new life afterwards.

1 Apostles’ Creed
2 Eucharistic Prayer 2
3 Eucharistic Prayer 4
4 Eucharistic Prayer 4
5 Eucharistic Prayer 1
6 Eucharistic Prayer 2
7 Eucharistic Prayer 3
8 Eucharistic Prayer 4
9 Eucharistic Prayers. Memorial Acclamation
10 Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time 1
11 Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time 2
12 Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time 2
13 Apostles’ Creed
14 Order of Mass. Blessing of Water
15 Order of Mass. Penitential Rite
16 Preface for Sundays of Ordinary Time 2
17 Preface of Sundays of Ordinary Time 4
Remembering the dead: The death of other humans is mentioned in the eucharistic prayers as well. We think of those near to us or those who have died recently. “Remember, Lord, those who have died;”18 “Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again;”19 “Welcome into your kingdom our departed brothers and sisters;”20 “Remember those who have died in the peace of Christ.”21

Good Friday: Within the cycle of the liturgical year the question of death and new life reaches a climax in the Three Days of Easter. In an opening prayer for Good Friday we pray, “Lord, by the suffering of Christ your Son you have saved us all from the death we inherited from sinful Adam ...” We also proclaim, “you [God] have restored us to life by the triumphant death and resurrection of Christ.”22

Easter Vigil: The presider’s opening address at the Easter Vigil states, “If we honor the memory of [Christ’s] death and resurrection ... then we may be confident that we shall share his victory over death and live with him for ever in God.” We read Romans 6: 3-11, which speaks movingly of our dying and rising with Christ in baptism. To give but one more example, the opening prayer for Easter Day says, “by raising Christ your Son you conquered the power of death and opened for us the way to eternal life.”

Sunday after Sunday, Easter after Easter, we speak of death and new life: Christ’s death and resurrection and our own human death leading to new life.

Death is confronted: It is said that death is concealed, avoided or trivialized in our culture. That may be so. But the Christian liturgy does not do so. It should be difficult for a Christian who celebrates the liturgy of the Church regularly and attentively to adopt this cultural attitude.

A unity: Funerals constitute a continuum with all the liturgies of the Church, starting with baptism. They are intimately related to the celebration of baptism, eucharist, Easter and the entire liturgical year.

Viaticum

Rites for the dying: Funerals are also closely related to the liturgies for the dying, though the latter are in a separate liturgical book, Pastoral Care of the Sick. Rites of Anointing and Viaticum. The rites for the dying include viaticum, commendation of the dying, prayers for the dead, as well as penance and in exceptional circumstances, Christian initiation for the dying.

Viaticum is described as eucharistic “food for the passage through death to eternal life.” It is the sacrament proper to the dying Christian. This holy meal “is the completion and crown of the Christian life on this earth, signifying that the Christian follows the Lord to eternal glory and the banquet of the

18 Eucharistic Prayer 1
19 Eucharistic Prayer 2
20 Eucharistic Prayer 3
21 Eucharistic Prayer 4
22 Good Friday. Prayer after communion
heavenly kingdom."23 "As an indication that the reception of the eucharist by the dying Christian is a pledge of resurrection and food for the passage through death, the special words proper to viaticum are added: 'May the Lord Jesus Christ protect you and lead you to eternal life.'"24

Prayers of commendation said as death approaches say, "Go forth, Christian soul . . . . May your [new] home be with God in Zion,"25 and "May you return to [God]. May holy Mary . . . come to meet you as you go forth from this life. May Christ . . . admit you into his garden of paradise."26

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The Funeral Journey

A continuing journey: The funeral continues to use the language of journey. It is never seen as the end of a journey, but as yet another stage in one that is continuing. The movement does not come to an end; instead, there is a sense of continuation, of moving ever onward. Even as the body of the dead person is interred, the Order of Christian Funerals says "in the sight of this world he/she is now dead; in your sight may he/she live forever."

Several journeys: In the funeral liturgy several distinct journeys can be distinguished: the journey of the deceased, the journey of the mourners, the journey of the Christian community, and — encompassing all of these — the journey of Jesus Christ.

Journey of the Deceased

The body: At one level the funeral is a journey of the body of the dead person. It is taken from the place of death to the home and/or funeral home, to the church, and then to the cemetery or other place of committal.

Temple of the Spirit: Though the person is no longer present, the body is still treated with great respect. "Since in baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the temple of the Holy Spirit, Christians respect and honor the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest. Any customs associated with the preparation of the body of the deceased should always be marked with dignity and reverence and never with the despair of those who have no hope. Preparation of the body should include prayers, especially at those intimate moments reserved for family members."

"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."

23 Pastoral Care, n. 175
24 Pastoral Care, n. 181
25 Pastoral Care, n. 220A
26 Pastoral Care, n. 220B
Reverence for the body: “In prayer and gesture those present [at the rite of gathering in the presence of the body] show reverence for the body of the deceased as a temple of the life-giving Spirit and ask, in that same Spirit, for the eternal life promised to the faithful.”

The several processions with the body of the deceased are part of the separation of the deceased from the family and close friends that occurs at the time of death. The physical movement and separation expresses and mirrors the emotional and relational separation that occurs. “The procession to the church is a rite of initial separation of the mourners from the deceased; the procession to the place of committal is the journey to the place of final separation of the mourners from the deceased.”

Pilgrimage: “At the conclusion of the funeral liturgy, the procession is formed and the body is accompanied to the place of committal. This final procession of the funeral rite mirrors the journey of human life as a pilgrimage to God’s kingdom of peace and light, the new and eternal Jerusalem.”

Caring for the body: Finally, the rite of committal is celebrated at the grave, tomb, crematorium or elsewhere. It “is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of its deceased member.”

The Life of the Deceased

The whole Christian life: The funeral also recapitulates the entire life of the deceased. It focuses on his or her life in Christ, and therefore speaks of baptism, eucharist, and the word of God. Human weakness is not glossed over, however. At another level, prayers may refer to the circumstances of the individual’s death. In a more personal way, those close to the person who has died may speak about him or her at appropriate moments in the liturgy, especially at the vigil.

Baptism is referred to in many prayers of the Order of Christian Funerals. It has already been stated that a principal reason for the respect and honor that Christians give to the bodies of the dead is the fact that “in baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became the temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Sprinkling with water: There are a number of occasions when the body may be sprinkled with 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.”

“The Easter candle, which may be placed near the coffin, 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 their initiation.”

The word of God is a prominent part of the funeral rites, reminding us that the dead person was a hearer and doer of the word.

The funeral Mass usually is the center and high point of the funeral rites as a whole. This in itself recalls that the life of the deceased was nourished by the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This is also referred to in various litanies.

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○ Our brother/sister N. was nourished at the table of the Savior. Welcome him/her into the halls of the heavenly banquet.

○ For our brother/sister who ate the body of Christ, the bread of life, that he/she may be raised up on the last day.

○ He/she was nourished with your body and blood; grant him/her a place at the table in your heavenly kingdom.

**A sinner:** We also recognize that the person who died was a sinner, though one who is redeemed by Jesus Christ. We pray, “Forgive N. his/her sins; forgive the sins of all who sleep in Christ; cleanse them of their sins; forgive whatever sins he/she committed through human weakness.”

**Verbs of journey:** Finally, the idea of journey is indicated by the verbs that are used throughout the *Order of Christian Funerals*. “Bring N. to heaven; carry N. home; enter into eternal life; gather them to yourself; lead N. to your kingdom; open the gates of heaven; pass from death to life; receive N. into the mansions; take N. to the holy city; welcome N. into paradise; be welcomed into heaven; be taken into paradise; be carried safely home to heaven.”

### Journey of the Mourners

**The second journey** that occurs within the funeral rites is that of the family and close friends, whom the liturgy usually refers to as “the mourners.”

**Loss and grief:** At first, the mourners “begin to face their loss.” When they gather to view the body they “confront in the most immediate way the fact of their loss and the mystery of death.” Later, the vigil speaks of “this time of loss,” of their having to “face darkness and death,” and of “the difficult circumstances following death.”

**Support and comfort:** The vigil addresses the mourners in their bereavement. It is an occasion to “turn to God’s word as the source of faith and hope, as light and life.” Concern, support and comfort are shown to the mourners, and the community “keeps watch with the family in prayer to the God of mercy and finds strength in Christ’s presence;” it also “expresses its grief and its praise of God.” God is asked to “enliven faith and affirm hope.”

**Separation:** The transfer of the body to the church or place of committal is an “initial separation of the mourners from the deceased” and “may be an occasion of great emotion.”

**Praise and thanks:** The funeral liturgy in the church is a time “to give praise and thanks; to commend the deceased to God’s mercy; to seek strength; and to express grief and praise.” We pray for “trust and hope in times of trial.” Through the homily “members of the family . . . should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members.”

**Trust and hope:** The final commendation and farewell is a time to “entrust [the deceased] to the tender and merciful embrace of God, to acknowledge the reality of separation: to hope in God’s abundant mercy; to hope and trust in the paschal mystery; to call upon God’s mercy; and to commend the deceased into God’s hands.” “Feelings of loss and grief” are acknowledged.
**A new relationship:** The rite of committal is a time to "express hope and promise." It is "the separation in this life of the mourners from the deceased" and the time when "they complete their care for the body and lay the body to rest." The mourners "face the end of one relationship with the deceased and begin a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude, and the hope of resurrection and reunion."

**Spiritual and psychological needs:** In order places the *Order of Christian Funerals* speaks of the mourners as those who "suffer the loss of the one they love" and of "the grief of those present." Finally, ministers "should take into consideration the spiritual and psychological needs of the family and friends of the deceased to express grief and their sense of loss, to accept the reality of death, and to comfort one another."

**Journey of the Church**

**The parish mourns:** The funeral rites also constitute a journey for the local Christian community. It journeys with the body of the dead person; it accompanies the journey of the mourners as well. Usually, the person who is being buried is a member of that parish, and so will some or many of the mourners. The categories of "mourner" and "local church" overlap.

**A new relationship:** In addition, the community has a journey of its own to travel during the rites of Christian burial. With the loss of one of its members it has changed, and it needs to adjust to that fact. The community now establishes a new relationship with its former member, as he or she lives in a new way. The person who has died will now be remembered at each Sunday eucharist and on All Saints and All Souls Days.

**Profession of faith:** In the funeral rites the local Church community professes its faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and all that the paschal mystery signifies. It witnesses to this faith in a special way in the course of a funeral, both for its own benefit and for that of others. It is also a time of evangelism, of reaching out to inactive members and to non-members. In its celebration and its ministry to the bereaved, the parish community says who it is.

**The Church's journey** during the funeral rites is described primarily as a "ministry of consolation."

**Mutual love:** "Those who are baptized into Christ and nourished at the same table of the Lord are responsible for one another. When Christians are sick, their brothers and sisters share a ministry of mutual charity and do all that they can to help the sick return to health, by showing love for the sick, and by celebrating the sacraments with them." So too when a member of Christ's Body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. Christian consolation is rooted in that hope that comes from faith in the saving death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian hope faces the reality of death and the anguish of grief but trusts confidently that the power of sin and death has been vanquished by the risen Lord. The Church calls each member of
Christ's Body — priest, deacon, layperson — to participate in the ministry of consolation: to care for the dying, to pray for the dead, to comfort those who mourn.

"The responsibility for the ministry of consolation rests with the believing community, which heeds the words and example of the Lord Jesus: 'Blessed are they who mourn; they shall be consoled' (Matthew 5:3). Each Christian shares in this ministry according to the various gifts and offices in the Church. As part of the pastoral ministry, parish priests and other ministers should instruct the parish community on the Christian meaning of death and on the purpose and significance of the Church's liturgical rites for the dead. Information on how the parish community assists families in preparing for funerals should also be provided.

Support and strength: "By giving instruction, parish priests should lead the community to a deeper appreciation of its role in the ministry of consolation and to a fuller understanding of the significance of the death of a fellow Christian. Often the community must respond to the anguish voiced by Martha, the sister of Lazarus: 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died' (John 11:21) and must console those who mourn, as Jesus himself consoled Martha: 'Your brother will rise again ... I am the resurrection and the life: those who believe in me, though they should die, will come to life; and those who are alive and believe in me will never die' (John 11:25-26). The faith of the Christian community in the resurrection of the dead brings support and strength to those who suffer the loss of those whom they love.

Acts of kindness: "Members of the community should console the mourners with words of faith and support and with acts of kindness, for example, assisting them with some of the routine tasks of daily living. Such assistance may allow members of the family to devote time to planning the funeral rites with the priest and other ministers and may also give the family time for prayer and mutual comfort.

Liturgical celebration: "The community's principal involvement in the ministry of consolation is expressed in its active participation in the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the vigil for the deceased, the funeral liturgy, and the rite of committal. For this reason these rites should be scheduled at times that permit as many of the community as possible to be present. The assembly's participation can be assisted by the preparation of booklets that contain an outline of the rite, the texts and songs belonging to the people, and directions for posture, gesture, and movement.

Accompanying the mourners: "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 mourners in their initial adjustment to the fact of death and to the sorrow this entails. Through a careful use of the rites ..., the minister helps the mourners 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 mourners, especially by praying that the one they have lost may have eternal life.

Showing concern: "Members of the local parish community should be encouraged to participate in the vigil as a sign of concern and support for
the mourners. In many circumstances the vigil will be the first opportunity for friends, neighbors, and members of the local parish community to show their concern for the family of the deceased by gathering for prayer. The vigil may also serve as an opportunity for participation in the funeral by those who, because of work or other reasons, cannot be present for the funeral liturgy or the rite of committal.

Reassurance: "Because the transfer of the body may be an occasion of great emotion for the mourners, the minister and other members of the community should make every effort to be present to support them. Reverent celebration of the rite can help reassure the mourners and create an atmosphere of calm preparation before the procession.

Proclaiming the paschal mystery: "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. Through the Holy Spirit the community is joined together in faith as one Body in Christ to reaffirm in sign and symbol, word and gesture, that each believer through baptism shares in Christ’s death and resurrection and can look to the day when all the elect will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace.

One bread, one body: "At the funeral Mass, the community, having been spiritually renewed at the table of God’s word, turns for spiritual nourishment to the table of the eucharist. The community with the priest offers to the Father the sacrifice of the New Covenant and shares in the one bread and the one cup. In partaking of the body of Christ, all are given a foretaste of eternal life in Christ and are united with Christ, with each other and with all the faithful, living and dead: 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (1 Corinthians 10: 17).

The same destiny: "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 in the new and eternal Jerusalem.

An expression of communion: "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. 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.

"The community continues to show its concern for the mourners by participating in the rite of committal. The rite marks the separation in this life of the mourners from the deceased, and through it the community assists them as they complete their care for the deceased and lay the body to rest. The act of
committal is a stark and powerful expression of this separation. When carried out in the midst of the community of faith, the committal can help the mourners to face the end of one relationship with the deceased and to begin a new one based on prayerful remembrance, gratitude, and the hope of resurrection and reunion.

"By their presence and prayer members of the community signify their intention to continue to support the mourners in the time following the funeral."

Journey of Jesus Christ

Finally, the funeral journey is that of Jesus Christ as well. The person who has died is through baptism Christ's sister or brother, disciple and friend, coheir to the reign of God. So are all or many of the mourners, and the local church community. In the funeral journey, Christ accompanies the person who has died, the mourners, and the parish community.

The modes of Christ's presence in the liturgy and in daily life, as enunciated by the contemporary Church,27 are applicable to the funeral. In all the liturgies of the Order of Christian Funerals Christ is present in the liturgical assembly — large or small, in the Church's minister, in the word of God proclaimed and preached, and in the eucharistic bread and wine.

In the daily life of the community in which a death has occurred, Christ is also present:

- in the Church at prayer;
- in the Church performing works of mercy;
- in the pilgrim Church filled with faith, eschatological hope and love.

A second approach takes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the starting place — his own journey from earthly life through death to new life. Christ is the firstborn from the dead, his resurrection the true victory over death. When a Christian dies he or she follows Christ's own journey, or accompanies Christ on his journey from life to new life.

The Church's tradition has associated Jesus Christ with many of the Old Testament images of death. One is the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22; read at the Easter Vigil). The images here express the confidence that nothing can undo or invalidate the promise of God, not even God. And the promise of God is that the last word is not death but life.

A related image is that of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37). The dying person and the mourners — and Christ in his passion — feels as desolate and hopeless as the valley of dry bones. But death is not to have the last word. God causes flesh to come upon the bones and God breathes the spirit into them as God did to Adam at the beginning of the world.

A central image is that of the Exodus, especially the passage through the Red Sea (read at the Easter Vigil). Christ in his passion is associated with the people of God fleeing Egypt: if God could lead the whole chosen people

27 Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 7; Pope Paul VI's Mysterium Fidei, nn. 35-39; General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 7
through the watery chaos to the other side, surely God can be counted on for deliverance at the time of an individual's death.

The image of Christ the good shepherd also echoes that of the shepherd in psalm 22: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

In confronting the mystery of death we are comforted that Christ has been there before us — and conquered. He is with us now as well.

Purpose of the Funeral Rites

The several purposes of the funeral rites are clearly enunciated by the Order of Christian Funerals.

• to offer worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just;
• to commend the dead to God's merciful love and plead for the forgiveness of their sins;
• to affirm and express the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in the one great communion of saints. Though separated from the living, the dead are still in union with the community of believers on earth and benefit from their prayers and intercessions;
• to acknowledge the reality of separation and commend the deceased to God. In this way the community recognizes the spiritual bond that still exists between the living and the dead and proclaims its belief that all the faithful will be raised up and reunited in the new heaven and the new earth, where death will be no more;
• to bring hope and consolation to the living;
• to recall to all who take part in them God's mercy and judgment and meet the human need to turn always to God in time of crisis.

Images of Life after Death

The journey from life to death leads, Christians firmly believe, to a new way of living. What this is like we cannot experience and so cannot describe in a literal way. Christian hope, however, has led believers through the centuries to envision and imagine what the new life must be like. This process has resulted in a rich and diverse set of images of the afterlife; these are expressed in the language of poetry, imagination and vision.

More images: The Order of Christian Funerals expresses a richer treasury of images of the afterlife than the previous funeral liturgy. The process of re-translation and the composition of new prayers has revealed a broader vocabulary than before. To allow us to feel the scope of the Church's tradition, images from the Order of Christian Funerals are listed below. Prayer texts that use them are then quoted. Because the quotations come from different types of liturgical texts, grammatical constructions vary; most are from prayers and hence are addressed to God.
Heaven: Bring our brother/sister to the joys of heaven; join him/her to the angels in heaven; let them praise you for ever in the joy of heaven. May N. be carried safely home to heaven; and welcomed into the sanctuary of heaven.

Kingdom: Lead him/her to your kingdom of light and peace; gather them to the eternal kingdom of peace; or in the joy of [Christ's] kingdom; grant them a place in your kingdom; raise him/her up with the saints to inherit your eternal kingdom. You clothe them with the glory of your kingdom.

Paradise: Make him/her worthy to share the joys of paradise; open the gates of paradise to your servant; welcome him/her into paradise; may the angels lead you into paradise.

Home: May N. be carried safely home to heaven; grant them an everlasting home with your Son.

Mansion: Receive him/her into the mansions of the saints; may they live in the mansions you have prepared for him/her in heaven.

Courts: Count him/her among all holy men and women who sing in your courts.

New Jerusalem: May the martyrs come to welcome you and take you to the holy city, the new and eternal Jerusalem.

Banquet: Grant him/her a place at the table in your heavenly kingdom; welcome them into the halls of the heavenly banquet; and to the table of God's children in heaven. Bring them to the table where the saints feast together in your heavenly home.

Saints: Our brother/sister will not be alone, but will dwell with the blessed in light; will be admitted to the company of the saints; be raised up in glory with all your saints. Count him/her among the saints in glory; admit him/her to the joyful company of your saints; give him/her fellowship with all your saints. Count him/her among all holy men and women who sing in your courts.

Angels: God will join him/her to the angels in heaven; may the angels lead you into paradise; may choirs of angels welcome you and lead you to the bosom of Abraham.

Abraham: Command the soul of your servant N. to dwell with Abraham, your friend. May choirs of angels welcome you and lead you to the bosom of Abraham.

Peace: N. has gone to his/her rest in the peace of Christ; bring him/her to everlasting peace and rest; lead him/her to your kingdom of light and peace; grant him/her everlasting peace; give N. peace for ever; embrace him/her in peace.

Rest: Henceforth may they rest from their labors; bring him/her to everlasting peace and rest; and bid him/her eternal rest; may he/she rest in peace; and find eternal rest where Lazarus is poor no longer; eternal rest grant unto him/her.

Light: Let perpetual light shine upon him/her; may he/she enjoy eternal light and peace. In your light N. will see light and know the splendor of God.
Happiness: Grant him/her a place of happiness, light and peace in the kingdom of your glory for ever.

Refreshment: Give refreshment, light and peace to N.

Joy: Bring our brother/sister to the joys of heaven; let them praise you for ever in the joy of heaven; gather N. into the joy of [Christ's] kingdom; make him/her worthy to share the joys of paradise. Grand N. to rejoice in your presence for ever; and enjoy the fullness of peace and joy.

Glory: May N. be raised up in glory with all your saints; and be raised up at the last day to share the glory of the risen Christ; may he/she share with [Christ] eternal glory. You clothe them with the glory of your kingdom; count him/her among the saints in glory; and awaken him/her to glory.

Life: Welcome N. into eternal life; may you pass from death to life; and may Christ bring him/her to eternal life. You call him/her to eternal life.

Praise: You [Christ] call him/her to praise your Father for ever; let them praise you for ever in the joy of heaven; all the just who sleep in your peace will rise and sing the glory of God.

Presence of God: He/she will see [Christ] (or see God) face to face; bring (or welcome) him/her into your presence; receive N. into the arms of your mercy. We ask God to gather N. to himself, to rejoice in your presence for ever.

Mercy: Show your mercy; receive N. into the arms of your mercy. You will show him/her your mercy in the day of your coming.

Kindness: Grant to the soul of your servant N. a kindly welcome; look kindly upon N.

Protection: You protect the soul of N. by the power of your cross.

Safety: May N. be carried safely home to heaven; accept N. into your safekeeping.

Welcome: Welcome him/her into your presence; into paradise; into the halls of the heavenly banquet; to the table of God's children in heaven; into eternal life. May the martyrs welcome you; may the choirs of angels welcome you; may N. be welcomed into the sanctuary of heaven.

Share: May he/she share with [Christ] eternal glory, share in Christ's victory; and share the glory of the risen Christ. Make him/her worthy to share the joys of paradise; and to share in the glory of the resurrection.

Receive: Receive N. into the arms of your mercy; receive his/her soul and present him/her to God; receive him/her into the mansions of the saints.

Forgiveness: O God, in whom sinners find mercy, forgive N. his/her sins; his/her sins and failings; or whatever sins he/she committed through human weakness. Relieve him/her from the bonds of sins; and do not count his/her deeds against him/her. Forgive the sins of all who sleep in Christ; and of those who have died in Christ; cleanse them of their sins.

Judgment: On the day of judgment raise him/her up; may you be raised at last on the great day of judgment. Accept N. into your safekeeping and on the great day of judgment...
Reward: May they have the reward of their goodness; reward his/her patience and forebearance.

Raise: Raise up his/her body on the last day; on the day of judgment raise him/her up; he/she will be created anew on the day when you will raise him/her up in glory; grant him/her peace and tranquillity until that day when he/she will be raised up to the glory of new life.

Victory: Grant him/her the fullness of Christ's victory; may he/she now share in Christ's victory over death.

Eternal: The community's prayer refers to eternal glory, eternal life, eternal rest, the eternal kingdom and eternal kingdom of peace, eternal light and peace, eternal reward, everlasting peace and everlasting peace and rest, an everlasting home, and perpetual light. May he/she live for ever; give peace to N. for ever; and grant him/her a place of happiness, light and peace in the kingdom of your glory for ever.

God of endless ages,
through disobedience to your law
we fell from grace
and death entered the world;
but through the obedience and resurrection of your Son
you revealed to us a new life.
You granted Abraham, our father in faith,
a burial place in the promised land;
you prompted Joseph of Arimathaea
to offer his own tomb for the burial of the Lord.
In a spirit of repentance
we earnestly ask you
to look upon this grave and bless it,
so that, while we commit to the earth
the body of your servant N.
his/her soul may be taken into paradise.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
— Prayer over the Place of Committal
The Funeral Rites

Many funeral rites: The *Order of Christian Funerals* includes a number of individual liturgies. Some are celebrated by the bereaved family, perhaps with a few close friends; others are intended for the entire community. Some are of central importance; others less so. Some of the liturgies are presented as models, to be adapted as the needs and gifts of those present suggest; others are prescribed in form and content. There are alternatives and options.

Understanding the rites: To make the best use of the riches of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, it is necessary to have an understanding of the purpose, time and place, structure, options, and ministries of each of the individual liturgies. It is also necessary to appreciate the place of each liturgy in the funeral rites as a whole.

O God,
in whom sinners find mercy and the saints find joy,
we pray to you for our brother/sister N.,
whose body we honor with Christian burial,
that he/she may be delivered from the bonds of death.
Admit him/her to the joyful company of your saints
and raise him/her on the last day
to rejoice in your presence for ever.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
— Prayers for the Dead

Prayers after Death

Pastoral Care

For the dying: The Church provides a variety of liturgies for the period immediately before and after death. These are divided between two liturgical books, *Pastoral Care. Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* and *Order of Christian Funerals*.

Viaticum: The most important liturgy for the dying is viaticum, which is intended to be a public and communal celebration. "Every effort should be made to involve the dying person, family, friends, and members of the local community in the planning and celebration."\(^1\) The sacrament of penance is also encouraged.

\(^1\) *Pastoral Care*, nn. 178, 186
Commendation of the dying: Other liturgies provided in *Pastoral Care* may involve the dying person, the Church's ministers, and perhaps family and close friends; or, after death, the minister alone or with the family. Thus in the rite of commendation of the dying, the priest, deacon or lay minister leads the dying person "in prayer for God's mercy and for confidence in Christ." It is envisioned that other persons will also be present, "and, following death, [the minister] should lead those present in the prayers after death."³

"These texts are intended to help the dying person, if still conscious, to face the natural human anxiety about death by imitating Christ in his patient suffering and dying. The Christian will be helped to surmount his or her fear in the hope of heavenly life and resurrection through the power of Christ, who destroyed the power of death by his own death.

"Even if the dying person is not conscious, those who are present will draw consolation from these prayers and come to a better understanding of the paschal character of Christian death."⁴

*Short scripture texts*, longer biblical readings, the litany of the saints, and prayers of commendation precede death; afterward, there are prayers for the dead person and prayers for the family and close friends.

*Another liturgy*, called prayers for the dead, consists of prayers for use by a minister who is called to attend a person who is already dead. It is envisioned that the family of the person who has died will be present.

> *Praised be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
> *the Father of mercies,*
> *and the God of all consolation!*
> *He comforts us in all our afflictions*
> *and thus enables us to comfort those who grieve*
> *with the same consolation*
> *we have received from him.*
> — *Invitation to Prayer*

Order of Christian Funerals

*Model liturgies*: The new *Order of Christian Funerals* includes several additional liturgies with the family, perhaps close friends as well, and of course the Church's minister. These are optional, to be used as seems best according to individual circumstances. Furthermore, they are model liturgies, to be adapted to fit individual needs. They are described as "signs of the concern of the Christian community for the family and close friends of the deceased. The compassionate presence of the minister and others and the familiar elements of these simple rites can have the effect of reassuring the mourners".

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² *Pastoral Care*, n. 213  
³ *Pastoral Care*, n. 213  
⁴ *Pastoral Care*, n. 215
and of providing a consoling and hopeful situation in which to pray and to express their grief."

**Prayers after death:** The model liturgy entitled prayers after death usually takes place in the home, when the minister first meets with the family following death. It "can be the principal part of the first pastoral visit of the minister."

**Response to death:** Alternatively, "this rite can be used as a quiet and prayerful response to the death ... [if] the minister is present with the family at the time death occurs." In this case it provides an alternative to the prayers after death found in *Pastoral Care.*

**Comfort the mourners:** Through the presence of the Church’s minister and the use of familiar prayers, this rite is intended to comfort the mourners as they begin to face their loss and to be "the first tangible expression of the community's support for the mourners."

**Structure:** The model liturgy consists of an invitation to prayer, a biblical reading, the Lord's Prayer, a prayer for the deceased person and one for the mourners, and a concluding blessing.

*Father of mercies and God of all consolation,*

*you pursue us with untiring love*

*and dispel the shadow of death*

*with the bright dawn of life.*

*Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*by dying has destroyed our death,*

*and by rising, restored our life.*

*Enable us therefore to press on toward him,*

*so that, after our earthly course is run,*

*he may reunite us with those we love,*

*when every tear will be wiped away.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

— **Prayer for the Mourners.**

**Gathering in the Presence of the Body**

**The second “family liturgy”** is called gathering in the presence of the body. This is envisioned for use when the family first comes together in the presence of the body, whether this is before or after the body is prepared for burial.

**Mystery of death:** When the family members assemble in the presence of the body, they "confront in the most immediate way the fact of their loss and the mystery of death."

**The purpose** of this liturgy is "to be with the mourners in their need and to provide an atmosphere of sensitive concern and confident faith."

**The model liturgy** provided consists of the sign of the cross, brief scripture passage, sprinkling of the body with holy water, a psalm, Lord's Prayer, concluding prayer, and final blessing.
God of faithfulness,  
in your wisdom you have called your servant N.  
out of this world;  
release him/her from the bonds of sin,  
and welcome him/her into your presence,  
so that he/she may enjoy eternal light and peace  
and be raised up in glory with all your saints.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
— Concluding Prayer

Transfer of the Body

The third “family liturgy” is entitled transfer of the body to the church or to the place of committal. It is to be used, if desired, “for prayer with the family and close friends as they prepare to accompany the body of the deceased in the procession to the church or to the place of committal.” It will be considered further below, with other processions.

Prayers in the Evening

The Canadian edition of the Order of Christian Funerals will also contain the suggestion that the family gather for brief prayers following the vigil liturgy. A selection of suitable prayers will be provided.

Penance

The pastoral notes of the Order of Christian Funerals also suggest that some of the family may wish to celebrate the sacrament of penance either before or after the funeral takes place; an opportunity should be provided for this.

God of all consolation,  
open our hearts to your word,  
so that, listening to it, we may comfort one another,  
finding light in time of darkness  
and faith in time of doubt.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
— Concluding Prayer

Vigil for the Deceased

The word “vigil,” of Latin origin, has replaced the Anglo-Saxon “wake” in our new liturgical books. Both words convey the meaning of being awake, watchful, not sleeping, sitting up with someone or for something.
The vigil for the deceased is "the principal rite celebrated by the Christian community in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy [that is, the church service] or if there is no funeral liturgy, before the rite of commitment."

The purpose of the vigil is described as follows. "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."

My brothers and sisters, we believe that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death.

Confident that God always remembers the good we have done and forgives our sins, let us pray, asking God to gather N. to himself:

— Invitation to Prayer

Place: The vigil may be celebrated in the home of the deceased, in the funeral home, in the church, or in some other suitable place.

Two types of vigil liturgy are provided. One is a liturgy of the word, the second is the liturgy of the hours (morning and evening prayer). The Canadian edition of the Order of Christian Funerals has arranged the wide variety of materials provided for vigils in the ICEL edition into twelve alternative vigil liturgies. Nine of these are liturgies of the word, two are evening prayer, and one is morning prayer.

The word of God is of central importance at vigil liturgies. The scripture readings have been arranged to provide the following "themes" for eight of the vigils in the Canadian edition. (Of course, the primary "theme" is always the death and resurrection of Christ.)

- Our eternal homeland
- I am the light of the world
- Hope of glory
- God is faithful
- Life is changed, not ended
- Promise of resurrection
- Victory over death
- In tragedy

Lord our God,
the death of our brother/sister N.
recalls our human condition
and the brevity of our lives on earth.
But for those who believe in your love
death is not the end,
nor does it destroy the bonds
that you forge in our lives.
We share the faith of your Son's disciples
and the hope of the children of God.
Bring the light of Christ's resurrection
to this time of testing and pain
as we pray for N. and for those who love him/her,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.
— Opening Prayer

Processions

Different locations: The individual rites of the Christian funeral are celebrated in different physical locations, for example, hospital, home, funeral home, church, cemetery. The body of the dead person, the mourners, the ministers of the Church and the worshipping community therefore move from one place to the next. Some of these processions are or may be liturgical in character. In the Order of Christian Funerals some of the several liturgical processions are printed at the beginning or end of another liturgy (vigil, funeral liturgy in the church, rite of committal); others stand on their own as independent liturgies.

In order to identify these liturgical processions clearly and respect their importance, they are all described together in this section.

The Lord guards our coming in and our going out.
May God be with us today
as we make this last journey with our brother/sister.
— Invitation to the Procession

Transfer of the Body

An option: One of the new, optional liturgies of the Order of Christian Funerals is the separate rite entitled "Transfer of the body to the church or to the place of committal." The starting place may be the home, but usually it would be the funeral home. In Canada the destination usually will be the church. As the title itself indicates, if for some reason there is to be no funeral liturgy in the church, the destination will be the place of committal (cemetery or equivalent).

Rite of separation: This optional rite recognizes that "the procession to the church is a rite of initial separation of the mourners from the deceased" and that "the transfer of the body may be an occasion of great emotion for the mourners." Under these circumstances, "the ministers and other members of the community should make every effort to be present to support them. Reverent celebration of the rite can help reassure the mourners and create an atmosphere of calm preparation before the procession."
Structure: The first part of the rite of transfer consists of prayers with the family and friends as they prepare for the procession. There is a greeting, scripture verse or longer reading, litany of intercession, the Lord’s Prayer, concluding collect, and period of silent prayer.

The procession itself begins with an invitation. “During the procession, psalms and other suitable songs may be sung. If this is not possible, a psalm is sung or recited either before or after the procession” (or both).

Dear friends in Christ, in the name of Jesus and of his Church, we gather to pray for N., that God may bring him/her to everlasting peace and rest.

We share the pain of loss, but the promise of eternal life gives us hope. Let us comfort one another with these words:
— Invitation

Reception of the Body at the Church

Whenever the body of the dead person arrives at the church, the rite of reception is celebrated. Three possible situations are envisioned.

• At the beginning of the vigil. If the vigil is celebrated in the church instead of the home or funeral home, the rite of reception may be celebrated at the beginning of this liturgy. One alternative vigil liturgy provides for this situation, but if preferred, the rite of reception may precede any of the vigil liturgies given.

• At the beginning of the funeral liturgy. Most frequently, reception will be celebrated at the start of the funeral liturgy in the church. Thus the rite of reception is printed in place at the beginning of both the funeral mass and the funeral liturgy outside mass.

• Between the vigil and the funeral liturgy. It is also possible for the body to be received at the church after the vigil is celebrated, but some appreciable time before the celebration of the funeral mass or funeral liturgy outside mass. This is still considered a liturgical occasion, even if a large congregation is not present. The ministers and if possible the mourners and close friends should be present.

Because this last situation is uncommon, a completely independent rite of reception is not printed in full in the Order of Christian Funerals. Instead, it is directed that the vigil for the deceased with reception at the church be adapted for this purpose. Thus this rite might consist of a greeting, reception prayer, a collect (the opening or concluding prayer of the vigil), the Lord’s Prayer, and a concluding blessing.

The message: The rite of reception of the body at the church is an important part of the funeral rites of the Church. It proclaims a message about the meaning of the church building and the church community. It also speaks about the dead person as one who is baptized.

“The church is the place where the community of faith assembles for worship,” 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 [funeral] liturgy anticipates.”

**Baptism:** The rite of reception is explicitly baptismal in nature. It mirrors the beginning of the rite of acceptance into the catechumenate and of the rite of baptism for children. “In the act of receiving the body, the members of the community acknowledge the deceased as one of their own, as one who was welcomed in baptism and who held a place in the community. Through the use of various baptismal symbols the community shows the reverence due to the body, the temple of the Spirit.”

**Reception** begins at the entrance of the church (that is, the back of the nave) with the informal greeting of the family, followed by a formal greeting exchanged with the entire congregation.

The first baptismal symbol is water: “the minister sprinkles the coffin with holy water in remembrance of the deceased person’s initiation and first acceptance into the community of faith.”

The second symbol is the large white cloth known as the pall. It is “a reminder of the garment given in baptism and therefore signifying life in Christ.” Its use depends on local custom, and it may “be placed on the coffin by family members, friends, or the minister.” This is done in silence.

The third symbol is the Easter (paschal) candle, which “may be placed beforehand near the position the coffin will occupy at the conclusion of the procession” at the front of the nave.

**Entrance song:** During the procession from the back to the front of the nave, the entrance song should be sung, “whenever possible.”

**Procession to the Place of Committal**

**The final procession,** usually, is from the church to the cemetery or other place of committal. Ideally, “at the conclusion of the funeral liturgy, the procession is formed and the body is accompanied to the place of committal. This final procession of the funeral rite mirrors the journey of human life as a pilgrimage to God’s kingdom of peace and light, the new and eternal Jerusalem.”

**Three phases:** In practice, this procession may be considered to have three phases, two of which may be celebrated liturgically.

- **Within the church.** “In situations where a solemn procession on foot from the church to the place of committal is not possible, an antiphon or song may be sung as the body is being taken [from the front of the nave] to the entrance of the church.”
- **Between the church and the place of committal.** Formal liturgical prayer is not practical if the body, mourners and members of the community are traveling to the cemetery or other place of committal by automobile. Private prayer, certainly, is encouraged.
• Within the cemetery. “Psalms, hymns, or liturgical songs may also be sung by the participants as they gather at the place of committal. In some situations it may be possible to process from the entrance of the cemetery to the grave itself.”

**Psalms and song:** The *Order of Christian Funerals* suggests several alternative antiphons and/or psalms to be sung during the procession to the entrance to the church. In addition, “the singing may continue during the journey to the place of committal.”

*May the angels lead you into paradise; may the martyrs come to welcome you and take you to the holy city, the new and eternal Jerusalem.*

*May choirs of angels welcome you and lead you to the bosom of Abraham; and where Lazarus is poor no longer may you find eternal rest.*
— *Antiphons for the Procession*

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**Funeral Liturgy**

**The funeral liturgy** — the church service — usually is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. It may take two forms:

• Funeral Mass
• Funeral liturgy outside Mass.

**The funeral Mass,** the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, is strongly encouraged. Sometimes, however, the celebration of the eucharist is not appropriate or possible, and in its place a liturgy of the word called the funeral liturgy outside mass is celebrated.

“**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. Through the Holy Spirit the community is joined together in faith as one Body in Christ to reaffirm in sign and symbol, word and gesture that each believer through baptism shares in Christ’s death and resurrection and can look to the day when all the elect will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace.”

**The core of the eucharistic celebration** follows the usual shape. However, the beginning and the end of the funeral mass have a special character.
Reception: The funeral liturgy frequently will begin with the rite of reception of the body at the church; this has already been considered. When this occurs, reception replaces the penitential rite of the Mass.

At the conclusion of Mass, the rite of final commendation (see below) follows the prayer after communion.

Word of God: "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."

God of loving kindness, listen favorably to our prayers: strengthen our belief that your Son has risen from the dead and our hope that your servant N. will also rise again. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . . — Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the eucharist: "The community, having been spiritually renewed at the table of God’s word, turns for spiritual nourishment to the table of the eucharist. The community with the priest offers to the Father the sacrifice of the New Covenant and shares in the one bread and the one cup. In partaking of the body of Christ, all are given a foretaste of eternal life in Christ and are united with Christ, with each other, and with all the faithful, living and dead."

O God, glory of believers and life of the just, by the death and resurrection of your Son, we are redeemed: have mercy on your servant N., and make him/her worthy to share the joys of paradise, for he/she believed in the resurrection of the dead. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. — Prayer for the Dead

Final commendation: This part of the funeral rites usually is celebrated at the conclusion of the funeral liturgy in the church. If more appropriate, however, it may instead be celebrated later at the place of committal.

Before we go our separate ways, let us take leave of our brother/sister. May our farewell express our affection for him/her; may it ease our sadness and strengthen our hope. One day we shall joyfully greet him/her again when the love of Christ, which conquers all things, destroys even death itself. — Invitation to Prayer

A final farewell: "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 in the new and eternal Jerusalem."

Following an invitation and a moment of silent prayer, the coffin may be
sprinkled with holy water and incensed, and then the song of farewell is
sung. This song, "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. When singing is not possible, invocations may
be recited by the assembly." A prayer of commendation follows, and then
the procession to the place of committal is begun.

Saints of God, come to his/her aid!
Hasten to meet him/her, angels of the Lord!

R. Receive his/her soul and present him/her to God the Most High.

May Christ, who called you, take you to himself;
may angels lead you to the bosom of Abraham. R.

Eternal rest grant unto him/her, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon him/her. R.
— Song of Farewell

Rite of Committal

A conclusion: "The rite of committal is the conclusion of the funeral rites
[and] the final act of the community in caring for the body of its deceased
member. In committing the body to its resting place, the community ex­
presses the hope that, with all 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."

Our brother/sister N. has gone to his/her rest in the peace of Christ.
May the Lord now welcome him/her to the table of God's children in
heaven. With faith and hope in eternal life, let us assist him/her with our
prayers.

Let us pray to the Lord also for ourselves. May we who mourn be
reunited one day with our brother/sister; together may we meet Christ
Jesus when he who is our life appears in glory.
— Invitation

Place: The rite of committal may be celebrated at the grave, tomb, or cre­
matorium, and may be used for burial at sea. Three forms of the rite of com­
mittal are presented:
The committal rite begins with an invitation, scripture verse, and a prayer over the place of committal. The several alternatives for the prayer over the place of committal take into account whether the grave, tomb, or resting place has already been blessed, and situations in which the final disposition of the body will actually take place at a later time.

Lord Jesus Christ,
by your own three days in the tomb,
you hallowed the graves of all who believe in you
and so made the grave a sign of hope
that promises resurrection
even as it claims our mortal bodies.

Grant that our brother/sister may sleep here in peace
until you awaken him/her to glory,
for you are the resurrection and the life.
Then he/she will see you face to face
and in your light will see light
and know the splendor of God,
— Prayer Over the Place of Committal

The rite continues with the words of committal, intercessions, and the Lord's Prayer. Finally, the act of committal (e.g., lowering the coffin into the grave) takes place in silence. "Through this act the community of faith proclaims that the grave or place of interment, once a sign of futility and despair, has been transformed by means of Christ's own death and resurrection into a sign of hope and promise."

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ,
we commend to Almighty God our brother/sister N.,
and we commit his/her body to the ground
(or to the deep or the elements or its resting place):
earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

The Lord bless him/her and keep him/her,
the Lord make his face to shine upon him/her
and be gracious to him/her,
the Lord lift up his countenance upon him/her
and give him/her peace.
— Committal

Conclusion: The rite of committal concludes with a prayer over the people, and a blessing. Depending on local custom, a song may then be sung and a gesture of final leave-taking may be made, for example, placing flowers or soil on the coffin.
Funeral Rites for Children

Part II of the Order of Christian Funerals presents funeral rites for children. One vigil service is given, as well as the funeral mass and funeral liturgy outside mass. In addition to the several forms of the rite of committal already described, there is a rite of final commendation for an infant. These rites take the same form as the corresponding liturgies for adults, but the texts are more appropriate for small children and their parents. It is intended that the adult forms of the prayers after death, gathering in the presence of the body, etc., be adapted as needed for use in a funeral of a child.

Purpose: “In the celebration of the funeral of a child the Church offers worship to God, the author of life, commends the child to God’s love, and prays for the consolation of the family and close friends.”

Not yet baptized: “In the case of funeral rites for children who died before baptism, the Christian community entrusts the child to God’s all-embracing love and finds strength in this love and in Jesus’ affirmation that the kingdom of God belongs to little children.”

The prayers are worded with great care. The community expresses its firm belief that the baptized child is now with God. In the case of the child who died before baptism, the community expresses its hope that this is so.

Lord God,  
from whom human sadness is never hidden,  
you know the burden of grief  
that we feel at the loss of this child.

As we mourn his/her passing from this life,  
comfort us with the knowledge  
that N. lives now in your loving embrace.  
We make our prayer . . . .  
— Opening Prayer: Baptized Child

God of all consolation,  
searcher of mind and heart,  
the faith of these parents is known to you.

Comfort them with the knowledge  
that the child for whom they grieve  
is entrusted now to your loving care.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
— Opening Prayer: Child Who Died Before Baptism

Sensitivity and flexibility: The Order of Christian Funerals is even more sensitive to the needs of the mourners and the circumstances of individual situations in the case of the death of children than it is for adults. Great flexibility is allowed, and it is up to the minister, in consultation with family and close friends, to chose the rites and texts that are most appropriate.

The life which this child N. received from his/her parents is not destroyed by death. God has taken him/her into eternal life.
As we commit his/her body to the earth/elements, let us comfort each other in our sorrow with the assurance of our faith, that one day we will be reunited with N.
— Invitation

Pastoral notes: The following sections of the pastoral notes for funeral rites for children speak for themselves.

A challenge: “In its pastoral ministry to the bereaved the Christian community is challenged in a particular way by the death of an infant or child. The bewilderment and pain that death causes can be overwhelming in this situation, especially for the parents and the brothers and sisters of the deceased child. The community seeks to offer support and consolation to the family during and after the time of the funeral rites.

Hope in Christ: “Through prayer and words of comfort the minister and others can help the mourners to understand that their child has gone before them into the kingdom of the Lord and that one day they will all be reunited there in joy. The participation of the community in the funeral rites is a sign of the compassionate presence of Christ, who embraced little children, wept at the death of a friend and endured the pain and separation of death in order to render it powerless over those he loves. Christ still sorrows with those who sorrow and longs with them for the fulfillment of the Father's plan in a new creation where tears and death will have no place.

Consolation: “The minister should invite members of the community to use their individual gifts in this ministry of consolation. Those who have lost children of their own may be able in a special way to help the family as they struggle to accept the death of the child.

Planning: “Those involved in planning the funeral rites for a deceased child should take into account the age of the child, the circumstances of death, the grief of the family, and the needs and customs of those taking part in the rites."

Participation of children: “Special consideration should be given to any sisters, brothers, friends, or classmates of the deceased child who may be present at the funeral rites. Children will be better able to take part in the celebration if the various elements are planned and selected with them in mind: texts, readings, music, gesture, processions, silence. The minister may wish to offer brief remarks for the children's benefit at suitable points during the celebration . . . .”

Lord of all gentleness,
surround us with your care
and comfort us in our sorrow,
for we grieve at the loss of this child.

As you washed N. in the waters of baptism
and welcomed him/her into the life of heaven,
so call us one day
to be united with him/her
and share for ever the joy of your kingdom.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
— Concluding Prayer: Baptized Child
Lord Jesus,  
whose Mother stood grieving at the foot of the cross,  
look kindly on these parents  
who have suffered the loss of their child.  

Listen to the prayers of Mary on their behalf,  
that their faith may be strong like hers  
and find its promised reward,  
— Concluding Prayer: Child Who Died Before Baptism

Other Rites and Prayers

The appendices of the Order of Christian Funerals contain a wealth of additional prayers that take into account the circumstances of individual funerals. They also provide suggestions for dealing with questions that arise in connection with the practice of cremation.

Lord God,  
by the power of your Word  
you stilled the chaos of the primeval seas,  
you made the raging waters of the Flood subside,  
and calmed the storm on the sea of Galilee.  

As we commit the body of our brother/sister N. to the deep,  
grant him/her peace and tranquility  
until that day when he/she and all who believe in you  
will be raised to the glory of new life  
promised in the waters of baptism.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
— Committal: Burial at Sea
The Order of Christian Funerals provides a treasure of rich texts and moving rites on the occasion of the death of a Christian. It is up to pastoral ministers in parishes across the land to use this liturgical book well in order to achieve the potential that is held out to us. Careful planning is called for, and special attention needs to be paid to the word of God, music, nonverbal elements, ministry, and hospitality. Only an introduction to these important topics can be provided here.

Planning

Funerals always present challenges to effective and fruitful celebration. The circumstances of death, the emotional state of the mourners, the short time there is for planning, difficulty in assembling ministers on weekdays — especially sufficient musicians, the tenuous relationship some families have with the parish or the distance they have to travel, small congregations at some funerals and the large number of ecumenical guests at others: all these and other factors stretch the resources of priest, other ministers and parish as a whole to celebrate well. To all this is now added the Order of Christian Funerals itself, for its flexibility and sensitivity require a deeper understanding and more decisions than many other rites of the Church.

The first requisite for good celebration is a sound understanding of the Order of Christian Funerals and its component parts. This provides a basis for choosing from the rites and texts that are provided those that are both faithful to the best theology of the Church and sensitive to the deep needs of the mourners and community. This matter has already been considered above.

Word of God

Readings from scripture: Most of the rites of the Order of Christian Funerals include at least a short passage from scripture. At the vigil for the deceased and the funeral liturgy itself the word of God is of central importance.

Careful selection of readings: "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, sorrows, fears, and hopes."

**The vigil for the deceased** "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." The assembly is "consoled by the redeeming word of God and by the abiding presence of Christ and his Spirit." "The proclamation of the word of God is the high point and central focus of the vigil." Finally, "in the selection of readings the needs of the mourners and the circumstances of the death should be kept in mind."

**The funeral liturgy:** As for the vigil, the proclamation of the word of God is both essential and central to the funeral liturgy, whether it be the celebration of the eucharist or the funeral liturgy outside mass. A rich selection of readings is provided in the lectionary.

**Supplementary scripture readings:** The Worship Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati has prepared a list of additional scripture readings which are found in the Lectionary and which may be used to supplement those readings provided in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. (The numbers in parentheses refer to their numbering in the Lectionary.)

**Old Testament**
- Proverbs 31: 10-13, 30-31 (#158)
- Ecclesiastes 3: 1-11 (# 453)
- Song of Songs 2: 8-14 (# 198)
- Song of Songs 8: 6-7 (# 731)
- Sirach 44: 1, 10-15 (# 606)
- Sirach 51: 8-12 (# 922-2)
- Isaiah 35: 1-6, 10 (# 7)
- Isaiah 41: 8-10, 13-14 (# 821-3)
- Isaiah 57: 15-19 (# 831-3)
- Isaiah 65: 1-3 (# 719-6)
- Ezekiel 34: 11-16 (# 173)
- Ezekiel 37: 12-14 (# 34)
- Micah 6: 6-8 (# 737-17)
- Zephaniah 3: 16-20 (# 811-4)

**New Testament**
- Matthew 6: 19-23 (# 369)
- Luke 1: 67-79 (# 201)
- John 3: 13-17 (# 638)
Readers: The importance given to the proclamation of the word of God implies that those who read the lessons be well-trained and effective readers. Though members of the family should not be excluded, untrained and unprepared relatives should be dissuaded from attempting this ministry. Readers should practise ahead of time, using the book, ambo and microphone.

Relative formality: Though the word of God is equally important at the vigil for the deceased and the funeral liturgy in the church, the vigil is a less formal liturgy and the manner in which the readings is carried out may reflect this fact.

Preaching: Preaching is called for both at the vigil and at the funeral liturgy, though it is required only in the latter case. The pastoral notes describe the role of the homily. "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. Through the homily members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God."

Selected Resources for Preaching

Ian Bunting, *Preaching at Funerals* (Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship No. 62) (Bramcote: Grove Books 1978)


Richard J. Dillon, "The unavoidable discomforts of preaching about death," *Worship* 57 (1983) 486-496


Music

**A high priority:** In addition to effective proclamation and preaching of the word of God, the musical celebration of the funeral rites is given high priority in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Thus "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."

**Great care:** "Since music can evoke strong feelings, the music for the celebration of the funeral rites should be chosen with great care. The music at funerals should support, console, and uplift the participants and should help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christian's share in that victory."

**Vigil for the deceased:** "The opening song or entrance 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 dead."

"**Music is integral** . . . to the vigil for the deceased. In the difficult circumstances following death, well-chosen music can touch the mourners and others present at levels of human need that words alone often fail to reach. Such music can enliven the faith of the community gathered to support the family and to affirm hope in the resurrection."

**Priorities:** "In the choice of music for the vigil, preference should be given to the singing of the opening song and the responsorial psalm. The litany, the Lord's Prayer, and a closing song may also be sung."

**Funeral liturgy:** "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 ought to 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."

"**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 hymn."
Priorities: “In the choice of music for the funeral Mass, preference should be given to the singing of the acclamations, the responsorial psalm, the entrance and communion songs, and especially the song of farewell at the final commendation.”

Rite of committal: “Depending on local custom, a song may be sung” at the conclusion of the rite of committal. “The singing of well-chosen music at the rite of committal can help the mourners as they face the reality of the separation. A hymn or liturgical song that affirms hope in God’s mercy and in the resurrection of the dead is desirable at the conclusion of the rite.”

Song of farewell: “Saints of God” (CBW II, no. 58) and “I know that my redeemer lives” (CBW II, no. 56) are often used.

The following songs from CBW II may be appropriate at one or another of the funeral rites:

518 O Holy Spirit by whose breath
529 O God almighty Father
536 Alleluia sing to Jesus
545 Lift high the cross
560 Word of God, from Mary’s womb
569 I am the bread of life
590 On this day the first of days
600 May flight of angels
601 Jerusalem, my happy home
617 For all the saints
635 For you are my God
638 Tell out my soul
640 God, our help in ages past
650 Praise my soul
660 Sing a new song
665 Though the mountains
686 Come back to me
689 The Lord’s my shepherd
692 Like a shepherd
701 Only in God
705 Now the silence
706 You are near
714 Be not afraid
726 Day is done

Ministry: It is clear that music ministers — cantor/song leader, instrumentalist, and choir have an extremely important role to play at funerals. Some parishes have formed funeral choirs of persons who are available during the week to help the assembled worshippers participate musically. Musicians also need to be involved in the planning of the funeral rites, but this is often difficult to achieve in practice.

Thanks to Mrs Kim Aldi, Sr Dorothy Levandosky, Sr Loretta Manzara, and Mrs Margaret O’Connell for their advice and assistance regarding music at funerals.
Other Elements

Nonverbal Dimensions

**Important messages** about death and Christian hope are communicated nonverbally as well as through the texts themselves. The care with which the ministers and community treat the family and other mourners, the underlying spirit of the liturgies, the hospitality that is expressed to guests and visitors — all these speak volumes.

**Baptismal symbols:** Care also needs to be taken to allow the baptismal symbols used in the funeral rites to speak their message. The use of water, signing with the cross, the pall, greeting the body and the mourners at the door of the church, all remind the assembly that the deceased was baptized and so is of great worth. It also bases Christian hope and joy in baptism.

Ministry

**The assembly:** As with most other liturgies of the contemporary church, good celebration of the funeral rites requires the participation of a variety of ministers. The entire assembly, of course, is the primary minister, and the full, conscious and active participation of all present is the goal here as with the Sunday eucharist.

**Many ministries:** Readers, musicians, ministers of hospitality, ministers of communion, ministers of environment and beauty, and others are required at the funeral liturgies, the vigil no less than the funeral liturgy.

**Presiders:** Priests, deacons and lay persons may preside at the funeral liturgies of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, and it may happen that different persons may preside at the family liturgies, vigil, funeral liturgy, and rite of committal. If this does happen, great care needs to be taken lest there be confusion or lack of continuity.

Hospitality

**The community needs** first of all to be hospitable to the family and other mourners. They should be allowed to be themselves, to express their grief and loss, to seek comfort from their friends. Members of the family who live elsewhere should also be shown true Christian hospitality and kindness.

**Guests** at the various funeral rites, also need to be welcomed, made to feel at home, and helped to participate in the liturgies as fully as they are comfortable doing.

**Many parishes** have the commendable custom of providing luncheon for the family, guests, and congregation following the funeral rites.
Challenge for the Future

Parish ministers will have to spend time absorbing both the spirit and the letter of the Order of Christian Funerals when it becomes available. In the light of it, they will then want to reexamine their present funeral practices, and take advantage of the improvements and new challenges it provides in order to better serve the needs of the mourners and entire Christian community.

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
FOR DIRECTORS OF CHURCH MUSIC

The third International Congress for Directors of Church Music will be held in Rome, February 8-15, 1990.

The purpose of the Congress is to promote an understanding of Latin and Gregorian music and its impact on our society today. Participants will have an opportunity to witness other choirs singing during the eucharist in St. Peter’s Basilica and St. Ignatius Church in Rome. Ample time will be provided for sight-seeing in the eternal city.

Choirs wishing to participate in the Congress may contact Peter’s Way, Inc.: 516—944-3055.
Pastoral Response

How will the Order of Christian Funerals work in practice? Is it really an improvement compared to the previous funeral rite? The following articles deal with these questions. The first is by an experienced pastor and liturgist who has been using the new Order of Christian Funerals experimentally for three years. He tells of his experiences with it in his parish. The second is by a specialist on death, dying and grief, who was asked to examine the new liturgical book critically from that perspective.

Come, Sing the New Song

Regis Halloran

The rectory phone rings! The doorbell sounds! It is eleven ten in the morning and the day is progressing according to plan; it is three in the morning and the hours of sleep are restful ones; it is five in the afternoon and supper is being prepared. The pastor wonders — what does this call bring? What parish happening will be reported? What troubled parishioner will need a listening ear? What disaster or news of death will be related by the distressed caller? Am I ready to come to terms with another crisis today? As ever, the compassion of the good shepherd urges one forth.

- And then with halting and sad voice, these words are spoken. "Father, your friend Martha, eighty-eight years of age, struck down by cancer over a year ago, died a peaceful death in the early morning hours." The strong faith of this good lady was expressed in a life of care and service to others. Friend, confidant and helper to many, her going home to God will be mourned and lamented by many in the parish and community, especially the elders and seniors who leaned on her for caring leadership and Christian wisdom.

- It is eleven ten in the morning; an accident has been reported on local radio. Shortly following this newsflash the parish phone rings. It is RCMP Office Corks. Janet, twenty-six years of age, who lost a leg to cancer at twelve years of age, has been in a fatal accident. She was loving wife to Charles and mother of Ryan, three years, and Patrick, one year. "Will you come to the home of Charles' uncle? It will be arranged for Charles to go there to be informed of Janet's death."

The Rev. Regis Halloran, former director of the National Liturgical Office, is now pastor of St. Joseph's parish in Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia.
Howard, a quadriplegic for four years, has been in hospital for a number of weeks suffering from pneumonia. His strength appears to be returned, but this was in appearance only. On the evening prior to his death he and his wife Ellen prayed together for the gentleman in the next bed who was suffering grievously from a terminal illness. Death came as a sudden visitor to Howard. In hope loved ones believed, “Howard has now gone home to God.”

Joan, a popular high school student, respected and accepted by her many friends, and bonded in love to her family, drives to a lonely road and takes her life by her own hand through a drug overdose. She is found by her father who was among the many searchers. Question follows question; puzzlement and shock, both in word and gesture, etches the faces of the young. Why? Why?

The mystery of death — at times its suddenness, at other times its slow arrival — sets in motion a chain of reactions in the lives of family and friends. Some reactions are predictable, others not. Some questions will bring forth reflections arising out of faith and the lived experience of this faith; other questions will be unanswerable at least for the moment and perhaps for a lifetime.

The pastor stands at center stage in the drama of death. Again and again he is called to confront the mystery of death in his own life and faith. He confronts the same mystery in the lives of parishioners who have myriad experiences of life, suffering, and pain. Some bring experiences of previous deaths of loved ones to a new announcement of death. There flashes before the consciousness of the pastor the memory of loved ones and parishioners who in faith and hope have come to the fullness of the Easter Mystery.

Now once more it is time, using the imagery of St Augustine, to offer the bandage of consolation and compassion to those in sorrow and grief. This is no ordinary medicine. It is the actualization for the mourners of the truth of these words: “If one member suffers, grieves and mourns,” all the members “suffer, grieve and mourn with him/her.”

To be authentic shepherds at the time of death is to identify intimately with those who sorrow and appear to have no hope; who grieve as if there is no tomorrow. It is to be to the family the loving, caring, supporting presence of Christ and the parish community.

Often, this presence will be embodied as well in others who serve the parish community: the bereavement committee, the choir leaders, the pastoral assistant, and so on. The pastor alone or with others will respond from the beginning. When news of death is first received, the Holy Spirit is invoked for wisdom, understanding and strength. One asks for help, despite one’s weakness and feet of clay, to comfort the sorrowing and hope with the bewildered. If time allows, one returns to the Word of God for inspiration. For example, Jeremiah 18: 1-6: the father petitions the shepherd to bring reconciliation once again to brokenness. Or Psalm 123, which praises the goodness of God. Or Psalm 129, which acknowledges the all-knowing and ever-present God.
Visit to the Family

Upon hearing of the death of a parishioner or shortly thereafter, one goes to visit the family. In most cases, just the family and a few close friends will be gathered. The coming of the pastor is an expression of the deep concern of the parish family for those who grieve and mourn the loss of a beloved one. On arriving at the home, one often finds that the normal routine of living is disrupted and in disarray. Tears of sorrow mixed with those of joy flood forth from eyes etched with loss. A rapid succession of questions comes out, and stories are told of the last days and hours of life. For some it is a time of bewildering, confusion, total loss, emptiness.

Upon entering the home, the minister extends a greeting of peace and consolation. Frequently words do not come, but an embrace of sorrow and support is called forth. At this time, flexibility is called for. However a short liturgy, in which all present are invited to participate, is extremely important. It should contain a prayer for the deceased such as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{May songs of the angels welcome you,} \\
\text{and guide you along the way.} \\
\text{May the smiles of the martyrs greet your own} \\
\text{as darkness turns into day.} \\
\text{Ev’ry fear will be undone} \\
\text{and death will be no more,} \\
\text{as songs of the angels bring you home,} \\
\text{before the face of God.}
\end{align*}
\]

Songs of the Angels by Bob Dufford is from the collection *The Steadfast Love* by the St. Louis Jesuits available from NALR, 10802 N. 23rd Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona 85029 USA, in album and cassette. Used with permission.

As well, the mourners are prayed for, and a blessing extended to all present places the seal of God upon the days ahead. Prayers familiar to the family are especially valued. In addition to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, *Pastoral Care* and the *Book of Blessings*, contain appropriate texts.

Remote Preparation for Other Funeral Rites

If the deceased has indicated preferences for scriptural readings, hymns, readers, etc., these should be considered on this occasion. Other aspects of planning for the celebration of the various funeral rites may also be initiated. How this is realized will depend in large measure upon the pastoral situation unfolding before the parish minister(s).

As soon as possible, still sensitive to the situation, a representative of the parish arranges another time to gather with the family or some members of the family to begin the preparation for the various funeral rites.

Ideally, at least in medium or large parishes, a parish bereavement committee should be in place. Serving on this group may be the pastor, pastoral workers, representatives of the pastoral ministry group, choir, altar servers, and so on. The function of this group is twofold: to help prepare the various rites for the celebration of the funeral ritual, and to provide pastoral care as required.
The Funeral Mass

In planning, first consideration is given to the selection of the readings for the Mass; these are found in the lectionary. On occasion, the lectionary readings for the given day or feast may be more satisfactory. Failing this other readings found in the lectionary may be selected. Usually the family will need some time to select suitable readings; sometimes they will require a further consultation with the pastoral minister.

The process of selecting readings is the beginning of the process of preparing the homily for the funeral Mass. The scripture readings will focus the homily and will keep one from the all too frequent temptation of giving a eulogy. As the homilist meditates upon and allows the Word of God to be active in his life during the entire time of the vigil, the Spirit of God will give wisdom and fortitude to clearly proclaim the healing word. The Word must first fill the life of the homilist to become in turn the Word broken for the bereaved; the Word of joyful hope, consolation and comfort to the sorrowing and saddened loved ones.

Liturgical music, the proper parts as well as hymns, are to be selected according to good liturgical principles. Each parish should have a "Resurrection Choir" responsible for liturgical music at funerals. Frequently, the family will request a favourite hymn of the deceased; on occasion such requests will have little or no reference to the liturgy. However, alternative suggestions offered by the choir leader often touch the inner feelings of the family; in such a way the family is assisted in accepting hymns other than requested ones.

The use of instruments such as the violin, trumpet, and bagpipes (preferably at the cemetery) at the funeral liturgy is acceptable. Again the selections played are to respect sound liturgical principles. Some music of ethnic derivation may help the grieving and mourning worshippers face the realities of death with faith and to celebrate the Paschal Mystery as the new hope for the journey of life which continues onwards.

Special attention is given to music for the rite of final commendation and farewell. The song of farewell, often omitted or recited, is to be sung. Again, many suggestions are found in the Order of Christian Funerals.

Discussion with the family should also consider the general intercessions, the placement of Christian symbols at or near the casket, floral arrangements and flower bearers where this custom is observed, ministers of hospitality, communion ministers, etc.

Having these details near finalization prior to the vigil lets the family experience the fullness of the vigil without the concern of planning the liturgy. It also allows those taking part in the ministries ample time for preparation and any rehearsal that may be necessary.

Gathering in the Presence of the Body

As family members gather to stand in the presence of the body, they are brought face to face with the great mystery of the death of their loved one. It is important that the pastor make every effort to be with them at this time to
bring comfort and the solidarity of the parish family to this critical moment. Failing the presence of the pastor, a member of the bereavement committee should be present.

Ritual gestures such as sprinkling with blessed water; the making of the sign of the cross; a blessing extended over the body of the deceased by family members; a short reading of scripture are valuable. Family prayer will mark the beginning of the celebration of keeping vigil or watch.

Vigil for the Deceased

During the time of the wake at least one vigil service is to be celebrated. A designated time for this celebration should be indicated; in cases where the wake extends over two evenings, the second evening appears preferable. Again, the pastor or member of the parish bereavement team should plan this service in consultation with the family. The models for these services provided in the *Order of Christian Funerals* may be used and/or adopted for the vigil celebration. Special efforts should be made to have cantor, instrumentalist and readers present for these celebrations. A lay leader of prayer may well preside at this service.

Prayers by parish groups such as the Knights of Columbus and Catholic Women's League may take place on the first evening of the vigil when it extends over two days; or during the day when the wake lasts for one day. Such prayer services should never replace the vigil service celebrated by the parish. When the rosary is requested by the family, a prayer leader or a family member may lead this devotion, again at a time other than the time designated for the vigil service.

It is important, if requested, to have a friend or family member give a testimonial to the deceased at some point during the vigil rather than during the funeral liturgy in the church. At the conclusion of each day of the wake, it is an appropriate way to mark closure of the vigil for that day, by short prayers by the pastor, leaders of prayer or family member. Unless this happens, families sometimes are uncertain when to leave the funeral home and return to their homes.

Closing of the Casket. It is customary in many places to have prayers for the closing of the casket. A leader of prayer, family member or funeral director may lead short prayers such as the Lord's Prayer, "Eternal rest . . . ," along with the sign of the cross at this time. The *Order of Christian Funerals* has made many suggestions in this regard.

Procession

In most places, it is normal practice for the funeral party to process to the church for the funeral liturgy, usually Mass. The *Order of Christian Funerals* gives clear guidance for such processions.

In some cases a memorial service may be held at the funeral home for a deceased parishioner. In these circumstances, especially if there are few family members present, parishioners should be encouraged to attend. A
good celebration of the liturgy of the Word with liturgical music, readers and so forth is called for in these circumstances.

As the funeral procession arrives at the church, it is important for the presider to greet the mourners personally, especially members of the immediate family. This greeting may be done in word, gesture, or silence. Such a greeting begins to call the mourners to celebrate with joyful faith and uplifted lives the great Easter Mystery, the Eucharist.

Final Commendation and Farewell. This means “God be with you.” The parish family says “Goodby, farewell” before the body is taken for burial. Central to this is the song of farewell; it is most important for this to become part of every parish funeral. In peace, farewell is extended to our sister/brother in the faith.

The Rite of Committal

To celebrate this rite to its fullness often taxes the ingenuity of pastors and liturgy planners. Weather and highway conditions, the age of mourners, distances to be travelled to places of burial, the availability of receiving vaults in stormy weather, labour regulations are among reasons for not celebrating it fully.

However, the goal to be sought is the full celebration of this rite or some meaningful adaptation made to meet pastoral circumstances. The Order of Christian Funerals provides several options to help the mourners in this final step of the celebration of Christian funerals. These are not to be omitted, for the rite of committal sees the grave or place of interment as a sign of hope and resurrection because of the dying and rising of Christ.

During the committal rites, family members frequently place flowers on the coffin. In addition, the presider and family members, using a small shovel, may place real earth on the coffin. This is a richer symbol than sprinkling sand from a vial provided by the funeral director. At the time of committal of veterans, the Legion has prayers and rites; the presider should have mourners remain until these rituals are completed.

Further Considerations

The pastor or a member of the bereavement team should visit the family during the period of the funeral liturgies, at a time other than the liturgies. This gives individuals the opportunity to celebrate the rite of reconciliation, if they so desire, or to seek spiritual comfort from the minister of the church.

Some funeral homes have a practice of making available prayer cards. One should judge whether the images, artwork and prayers that appear on these cards are in the spirit of the Order of Christian Funerals. From experience, many are not!

It is important for pastors and parish leaders to remain in touch with those who grieve and seek comfort through regular home visitation, pastoral care, ritual prayer and gesture. It is important to recall “the norm of our ritual (prior to, during and following Christian burial) is God’s invitation to us to
share in divine life — the ultimate fulfillment of every human need. The symbols, images, language, structure and form of our rite emerge from the scriptures and tradition of those who share faith in this divine invitation."

Reflections

After reading this narrative highlighting the experience of one parish with the *Order of Christian Funerals* during the past three years, these questions may arise. Does it work? Is it possible for any parish to give this type of pastoral care and ritual celebration to families and friends who experience the death of loved ones? The answer to both questions is YES. This ministry brings the priest face to face with his own dying and rising in Christ. As is proclaimed in Eucharistic Prayer II, "All life, all holiness . . . ."

To travel this journey with its many ritual stops and expressions of pastoral care is to travel homeward to the new Jerusalem; it is to celebrate the sacrament of Resurrection; it is to participate in the kingdom life of the living and the dead.

This narrative is intended to open the doors to the riches contained in the revised rite of the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Will the ritual meet all the needs on the pastoral horizon? Not likely! But it will be a true companion for those who travel the great spiritual journey of life, the Easter Mystery, the sacrament of Resurrection.

Resources are many. The greatest resource is Christ calling us to a new celebration, the Paschal Mystery. The song inside us waiting to break forth is "Alleluia. Christ has died, Christ is risen. Christ has come again."

The following Easter reflection is dedicated to those who made this narrative; those mentioned and those too numerous to mention but equally central to the story of the new city spoken of in the Book of Revelation (21: 1-5a, 6b-7).

*Children of the Resurrection*

Arise, O children of the resurrection!
Let your alleluias burst forth from redeemed earth
to the glorious heavens.
Christ the savior is risen as he said.

The pathway of the cross,
crooked, windy, narrow
trod by the solitary suffering servant
led onward to the tomb of peaceful recline.
Stone closing the entrance became stone rolled away.
Forth from the coffin of death came Christ,
came Christ to new life as promised.
Tearful, fearful friends of the savior,
vision clouded, hopes darkened,
in wonder struck: "Where is the master?"

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1 *Assembly* (Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy), vol 15, no. 5, June 1989
Linen dropped on the ground,  
tomb empty, friends dazed.  
Symbols all — new life, new light, new love.  
Christ, the life, flickering flame,  
flowing water, soothing oil, freshly made bread broken,  
crushed grapes turned to wine poured out,  
for a people thirsty, hungry, downtrodden.  
Recognized in the breaking of the bread  
on the Emmaus highway,  
now recognized in and by this gathering of believers,  
with gifts offered in love for the poor,  
the poor who crawl and stumble by side and by hand  
with the rich and seemingly mighty in this earthly habitat.

Alleluia! He is risen! Sing the resurrection song!  
O children of the resurrection, sing alleluia.  
Now and always and forever.

PASSION NARRATIVES  
FOR HOLY WEEK

At the request of the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy, the  
National Liturgical Office prepared in 1987 a new edition of the Passion Narratives for Holy Week. The texts are divided for three or more readers, and are presented in senselines. Good pastoral notes help parishes as they prepare to proclaim and hear the passion narratives on Passion (Palm) Sunday and Good Friday. Practical suggestions, diagrams, helpful reading, and a pronunciation guide of proper names and difficult words assist both readers and planners. Times for pausing for a community acclamation are indicated, and positive suggestions are made for suitable texts and tunes from Catholic Book of Worship II.

Available in two editions, soft cover (for preparation and study by readers, choir leaders, liturgy committees, preachers) and hard cover (for proclamation in Holy Week ceremonies). The pages are identical in both editions for greater convenience.

- 88 pages, 22 x 28 cm (8½ x 11 inches), red and black, four black and white illustrations, pastoral notes, gospel texts, in two editions:
  - Hard cover: Red cover, stamped in gold: $8.95 each.
  - Soft cover: Mayfair cover, saddle stitched, identical contents and layout: $4.50 each.

STILL AVAILABLE from Publications Service,  
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Dying and Grieving in the Order of Christian Funerals

Leo Klug

The following comments on several aspects of the Order of Christian Funerals come mainly from the perspective of one involved in teaching courses on death, dying and grieving. It is tempting to suggest that many of the improvements seen in the Order of Christian Funerals are in part a spin-off of such courses, which typically involve an attempt to heighten students’ awareness of their thoughts, feelings and beliefs about death, as well as provide opportunities for experiential contact with the dying and grieving and exploring the implications this has for the participants.

Be that as it may, the countless thousands of Canadians who have taken formal courses in thanatology since 1973 (when the Catholic Funeral Rite was introduced) will deeply appreciate the progress that has been made, as reflected in the new Order of Christian Funerals. They will be especially grateful for its sensitive tone, as well as for the options and flexibility it allows. Clearly, Catholic lay people will be increasingly involved in planning and conducting funeral services in Canada in the near future. The Order of Christian Funerals will be of considerable help to them in a ministry that is quickly becoming de-clericalized, and otherwise de-institutionalized.

The General Introduction

The first seven paragraphs of this introduction will not be read (much less understood) by a dozen people in all of Canada. The material is arcane, a gesture in the direction of doctrinal orthodoxy and at best should be relegated to an appendix. The opening part of this introduction is one reason why courses on death, dying and grieving, taught from social scientific perspectives, are so popular among so many Christians. People of faith are thirsting for a deeper understanding and appreciation of Christian insights into the mysteries surrounding death, and they are constantly put off by theological obfuscation and by funeral rites that further befuddle them. If these few paragraphs were replaced with jargon-free insights into the Christian understanding of the resurrection of Jesus, it would be of incredible help to the readers.1

In stark contrast, paragraphs eight to fifteen of the introduction are an excellent discussion of the “ministry of consolation”, which is central to the

Dr Klug is Director of Patient Counselling Services at Misericordia Hospital, Edmonton, Alberta. He also teaches at Newman Theological College.

Dr. Klug's critique is offered from the point of view of modern thanatology, and not from a theological or liturgical perspective. His references are to the ICEl editor of Order of Christian Funerals, whose paragraph numbering will sometimes differ from that in the Canadian edition.

A fine example is provided by Herbert McCabe’s “A sermon for Low Sunday,” published in New Blackfriars (May 1989), pp. 212-215.
Christian celebration of funeral rites. The language is clear, the suggestions are practical and obviously reflect the realities of typical funerals in Canadian parishes at the present time. The flavor of this whole section explicitly and implicitly reinforces the communal nature of Christian funeral rites. It also acknowledges and addresses what has been the most common criticism of the 1973 Catholic Funeral Rites: their failure to recognize the profound reality of grief, and the tendency to prematurely introduce the theme of Easter joy.

Paragraph sixteen of the introduction, with its admonition to “keep in mind the life of the deceased”, should be memorized by every homilist who dares to preach at a Christian funeral. The following subsection on the deceased is full of practical information and reflects great sensitivity for diverse customs and practices, including ecumenical issues.

The reference in paragraph twenty-one to funeral music that is “at the same time simple and easily sung” needs to be strongly emphasized among leaders of song and others involved in the ministry of music. Students in thanatology courses, who routinely attend and critique funerals as part of their course requirements, constantly remark on the poor quality of the singing at Catholic funerals. A funeral is clearly not the time to try new and difficult melodies, no matter how boring and repetitious the standard pieces are for the professional musicians.

The major section entitled Vigil and Related Rites and Prayers signifies definite progress vis-a-vis one of the major problems in celebrating funeral rites, the problem of the wake. In other words, what should be the aim of the celebrations preceding the funeral itself? In thanatology courses it is a frequent occurrence to have students begin term papers on pre-funeral rites, but never finish them. They quickly become frustrated and confused at the lack of clear purpose evident in such rites.

Obviously there is great diversity of practice among Canadian Catholics, and about the only thing they have in common is that most people find such services to be unsatisfactory. In many cases, depending on the nature of a given death, the participants are still in a state of deep shock and numbness. Psychologically they are not ready to hear about the joys and wonders of heaven. Some of the poorest theology and psychology in the world tend to be expounded during vigil services. The secret here is to focus on a ministry of presence, or as it is put in paragraph fifty-two, it is a time of gently accompanying the mourners in their initial adjustment to the fact of death and the sorrow that entails.

The critical thing to be avoided is to leave people with the impression that they have no faith, since they are so bewildered, confused and angry. People need to hear, clearly and non-judgmentally, that everything they are experiencing in their grief is normal and can be a sign of the great love they had for the deceased.

The reference (paragraph sixty-eight) to the use of well-chosen music in vigil services is an excellent one. It is the experience of music therapists, working with people with blocked grief, that there is nothing more effective than music in initiating healthy grief.
Scripture readings with a homily are part of the suggested vigil services. There is great potential here. The homily would be the perfect occasion to "publicly recognize" (to ritualize) the state people are in, thus freeing them to continue their faltering steps in the normal process of grief. What would be very helpful here would be several sample homilies, in outline form. Most preachers dread (and those who don't, should) funeral homilies, and it is a rare person who would prepare an effective vigil homily. The temptation would be to reuse a funeral homily, instead of addressing the specific grief needs of a vigil service congregation.

The responsorial nature of the litany provided for the vigil services is good and recognizes people's need to be involved. However, the actual statements of the litany are weak and could easily be improved. They are too brief and do not adequately tap the various feeling states people are typically in. Such feelings could be clearly recognized and at the same time be Christ centered. The findings of some of the good empirical research on grief would be of great help in re-working the litany.

Paragraphs ninety-eight to one hundred twenty-seven make up a section of the Introduction called Related Rites and Prayers. These are to be used immediately following a death and/or when first meeting with the family of the deceased. There are some very fine suggestions here, but two major caveats must be noted. The first is the danger of excessive wordiness. People need, in varying degrees, time and periods of silence to get in touch with their own feelings and beliefs; the words used by a minister on such occasions should be aimed at facilitating a normal process already under-way.

The second is that no reference is made to the role of extemporaneous prayer, on the part of the minister or the grievers. If several outline models of such prayers were given most people could learn to use them effectively. One spin-off effect of having the grievers pray could be to provide the minister with good insights for the more formal rites to follow.

There are many similarities between the Introductions to the old and new funeral rites. Some portions of the 1973 introduction, now printed in smaller type at the beginning of the Order of Christian Funerals, are still worth careful study. For example, the 1973 introduction strongly affirms the primacy of hoping for eternal life, while at the same time being fully part of the struggles of our time and culture. We are also encouraged to avoid pomp and materialism in our approach to funeral rites, an admonition that is still badly needed.

We are also reminded that the intent of Vatican II in revising funeral rites was that they more clearly proclaim the Paschal character of Christian death. This fundamental principle should not be lost sight of. Clearly, it has been misunderstood, and in many cases a triumphalistic attitude has resulted. Eternal life is a promise, not a premise. It is too easy to focus on the latter instead of the former, where Christian faith should be centered. Not a little of the preaching one hears at Christian funerals is pure animism, or some other type of heresy. As noted earlier, abundant feedback (formal and informal) from Catholics participating in our funeral rites during the past fifteen years keeps reminding us of this problem.
The Funeral Liturgy

The section in the *Order of Christian Funerals* on the funeral itself is not significantly different from the old one. Some of the information is clearer and more timely. The importance of planning the liturgy and involving the congregation fully are values that are clearly spelled out. The theme of pilgrimage or journey is repeatedly referred to. An example (paragraphs 148, 149) is the reference made to a procession to the cemetery. It is recognized that a procession to the cemetery on foot is, and will remain, a rare event in most of Canada. However, much could be said and done about processions within cemetery grounds themselves. In many cases such a procession could be several blocks long and could become a real experience of “jour­ney”. The funeral and cemetery industries are well-known for their willingness to help us celebrate meaningful funeral rites. In fact the former is increasingly taking over areas where we have abdicated our responsibilities. With a bit of planning and experimentation, meaningful processions within cemetery grounds could be arranged.

Prayers

Speaking generally, the *Order of Christian Funerals* contains more and better prayers. Many of them are more understandable and more tuned in to what typical funeral participants tend to experience. Some of the new additions, such as the prayer for a stillborn child, are beautiful and welcomed. It is the experience of many hospital chaplains that more and more parents who have had an infant death are very open to being fully involved in the burial rites of such babies. Prayers and other suggestions that are theologically sound but not overly religious are badly needed.

In paragraph 72 we find two sample prayers that can be used in a vigil service. The first is very good and the second very poor. The former is good because it recognizes the inner space of most people at such times and contains an invitation to become involved in the service. The second prayer is archaic and would turn off most of the gathering right from the start.2

Section 96 provides two samples of concluding prayers. The first is centered on the deceased and the second on the mourners. The latter is clearly a better prayer for such occasions, although it could be strengthened if it were expanded to better fit the mindset of the typical griever; the conclusions of some of the better empirical research on bereavement would be quite helpful here.

To reiterate, the *Order of Christian Funerals* has provided a wider selection of better death-related prayers. But much more could be done. Prayers making a greater appeal to nature symbols and to the whole normal gambit of human fears and hopes are needed. It would be wonderful to commission a female theologian-poet to prepare a series of prayers for such occasions! As was noted earlier, Catholics especially need to practice and use extemporaneous prayer more than they do. The practice of what has been dubbed

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2 Editor: Though Dr Klug did not know the origins of these prayers, it is interesting to note that the one he favors is a contemporary English-language composition; the other is a translation of a medieval Latin text.
"incarnational prayer" is common among Catholic hospital chaplains. In essence, this approach consists of being with people in a quiet and respectful way, and then summing up and verbally placing before the Lord the needs and fears and hopes one has heard expressed. The impact of such praying can be much more powerful, and make a greater contribution to stirring up the faith of people, than having a nervous minister fumble through a book to read "canned" prayers.

Preaching

Paragraph 27 of the Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals states that a homily at funeral rites is mandatory, and adds that "there is never to be a eulogy". These are standard Catholic admonitions, but are neither helpful to homilists nor illuminating for the puzzled laity. The issue raised here is the long-standing dilemma about how personal one should get in a funeral homily. On the one hand one is to deal with the scriptural texts that have been proclaimed; on the other, one is to avoid the artificial cataloguing of virtues typical of funeral preaching among some Christians.

But this is clearly not an either/or issue. The best way of truly expanding on the message of God's loving action, as proclaimed in the scripture texts, is to reveal how that loving action was manifested in the life of the deceased. Whatever the realities of a given person's life might be, one can see the finger of God at work; and when this is pointed out, the congregation can readily identify with and be in awe of such a wondrous mystery. Such a homily is always a unique effort, and can't be just a general statement with a few names and details changed. Most preachers at Catholic funerals are themselves unclear about what a good funeral homily should be.

Ironically, the 1973 Catholic Funeral Rite has more and better things to say about the funeral homily than the new Order of Christian Funerals. If Krieg's model of the essential ingredients of a Catholic funeral homily were included in the Order of Christian Funerals it could revolutionize our approach to funeral preaching. If the introduction to McCarthy's excellent book Funeral Liturgies were incorporated into the Order of Christian Funerals it would be of inestimable help to those arranging funeral rites.

Conclusion

The new Order of Christian Funerals is a significant step forward in a very difficult area of church life. Those who have produced it are to be congratulated. It is hard to conceive of a liturgical setting that has more potential for stirring up the faith than a funeral. Priests and other ministers regularly involved in such rites desperately need all the help they can get.

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4 Flor McCarthy, Funeral Liturgies (Costello Publishing Co. 1987). See also other resources given above in the section on Good Liturgical Celebration.
5 Editor: Dr. Klug does not dispute the traditional Catholic position regarding eulogies. He does not favor preaching that is too impersonal, however.
After consultation with the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the National Council for Liturgy, these topics are planned for volume 23 of the National Bulletin on Liturgy in 1990:

**Baptism for Children:** Bulletin 120, March. This issue is a companion to the new Canadian edition of the rite of baptism for children. It will consider the meaning of the rite itself, including the role of the parents and godparents and the community as a whole. Preparation of parents for baptism, and reminders of baptism in liturgical rites for persons of all ages, will also be discussed.

**Children and the Liturgy:** Bulletin 121, June. One of the greatest liturgical challenges today is to facilitate the full participation of children in the liturgies of the Church, without diminishing the participation of anyone else. This issue will consider both Sunday and school liturgies, children as liturgical ministers, new resources for the liturgy of the word, liturgical music for children, and the importance of story and symbol.

**Christmas Season:** Bulletin 122, September. The two weeks between Christmas Day and Epiphany is a time when we are encouraged to dwell on the meaning of Christmas and prolong its celebration. Yet in practice Christmas often ends on December 26. This issue will consider the importance of the Christmas season and its many special feasts, especially Epiphany. It will discuss practical ways to celebrate the Christmas season even in the midst of the distractions of seasonal sales, New Year’s parties, and sports.

**Liturgical Spirituality:** Bulletin 123: December. “Spirituality” is of great concern today, and a wealth of individual schools of spirituality flourish. Basic to all of them, however, is the spirituality that is expressed and celebrated in the liturgy of the Church. The basic elements of a liturgical spirituality will be identified, and their implications for the daily as well as Sunday lives of Christians will be drawn out.

This collection of 18 stories, based on Jesus' healing miracles, is offered to illustrate four aspects of the healing process: acknowledging the need, reaching out for help, the healer's credentials, the healer's therapy.

The insights shared in the reflections following each story will be helpful to all who are in need of healing and those who minister to the sick. Recommended.


A collection of thought-provoking essays on issues facing current liturgical renewal. The author discusses topics such as the language of prayer and the use of ritual symbols in the context of both liturgical theology and the culture of the worshipping community. Recommended for those who wish to critically reflect on the current experience of worship.


This book provides clearly written and succinct overviews of the evolution and theological background of the seven sacramental actions of the Church. In addition, a glossary of over 100 terms used in sacramental theology is given. Though the overview of the sacraments is somewhat uneven in places, this small book will be helpful for catechists and sponsors of catechumens.


This study guide was prepared by a committee of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches in the United States. Each of the five chapters provides commentary on a section of the Nicene Creed and a series of discussion questions. This study guide is ideal for ecumenical groups and adults preparing for initiation into the Church. Highly recommended.


This book is written out of the conviction that children learn the basic human and Christian values in the context of family rituals. The author provides an excellent introduction to meaning of ritual and the elements of home rituals. She also offers a wealth of ritual suggestions for the seasons of the year which have been tried and successfully used by families. Recommended.

This Is Our Mass, by Tom Coyle (1989, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT 06355) 160 pages, $5.95.

This book is a revised and enlarged version of the 1982 book of the same name. It is a clearly written presentation of the elements and structure of the Mass. The author's style and the wealth of insights he offers will make this book welcome and valuable reading for young people and adults alike. Highly recommended.

The author provides an overview of the stages of the conversion experience. He then proceeds to relate 16 gospel stories of conversion in a creative and imaginative way. Each story is followed by a reflection on a particular aspect of transition leading to conversion. Recommended for personal reflection — and enjoyment, this book will also be a valuable resource for RCIA teams and catechumens.


The author traces the development of the Passover feast from its beginnings through to modern times. He points out several misconceptions about the Last Supper, and attempts to outline its shape in light of the historical background. This book is recommended for the valuable historical information which is provided in a very readable format.


This book is a collection of essays which examine the roles of the pastor, presider and preacher in the RCIA. The authors reflect upon the particular needs of catechumens and provide thoughtful suggestions for determining the shape of the pastor’s, presider’s and preacher’s ministry. A valuable resource for clergy and parish RCIA teams. Recommended.


A series of articles are offered in this volume to show that the restored order of initiation in the Church — baptism, confirmation, eucharist — is expected and possible. The reports from American dioceses and from Salford, England provide readers with both hope for a restored order of the initiation sacraments and critical questions which will need to be addressed in view of a revised practice. Highly recommended.


A collection of brief and insightful essays on the celebration of the liturgical year and the seasons of human life. This book is designed for catechumens, the newly baptized and all Christians who wish to deepen their participation in the liturgical, spiritual and social life of the Church. This book will prove to be a treasure not just for the information it contains, but for the spiritual growth it will stimulate. Highly recommended.


In the introduction to this work, the author states that liturgists must remain faithful to the Roman rite, but at the same time adapt them to the resources and experiences of real-life worshipping communities. He then goes on to say that liturgists must stretch and bend a bit, omit and reshuffle and rewrite — without losing sight of their responsibility to maintain our rich tradition and the integrity of the Gospel message. The collection of "unofficial" rites which are presented in this book tend to represent departures from the Roman rites rather than adaptation based on respect for the tradition and sound, consistent liturgical principles. Some of the original prayers in this book may be useful for celebration with small groups, but not during the official rites of the Church.