

Music for Catholic Funerals: Reflections



*Prepared by
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Diocese of Salt Lake City*

The Diocesan Liturgical Music Committee offers the following suggestions in the hope that pastors, bereavement teams, liturgy preparation teams, and the faithful will find them helpful for preparing and celebrating the three principal funeral rites of the Church.

We hope that all those responsible for liturgical leadership will be encouraged to make every effort to provide music that expresses the paschal mystery and empowers the full participation of the assembly at each of these three rites.

The following quotations have been compiled to support the material in this pamphlet.

They can be found in the following resources:

OCF *Order of Christian Funerals*
STL *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*

“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.” OCF #30

“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...” OCF #11

“Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy and, whenever possible, for the funeral processions and the rite of committal...” OCF #32

“An organist or other instrumentalist, a cantor and, whenever possible, even a choir should assist the assembly’s full participation in singing the songs, responses, and acclamations of these rites.” OCF #33



Introduction

In 1963, Vatican Council II directed that the Catholic funeral rites be revised in such a way that they more clearly express the paschal character of the Christian's death. In the light of this directive the current funeral rites, known as the *Order of Christian Funerals*, were developed and, after approval of the NCCB and confirmation by the Apostolic See, became mandatory for use in the dioceses of the United States. These funeral rites, which have been in effect since 1989, have three main parts:

The Vigil: This is the principal celebration of the Christian community during the time before the Funeral Liturgy. It is a service of song, psalmody, Scripture reading, and prayer. Evening Prayer from the Office of the Dead may also be celebrated. It is usually held in the presence of the body at the family's home, funeral home, or church, on the eve of the Funeral Liturgy.

The Funeral Liturgy: This is usually the Funeral Mass, but sometimes, for special reasons, is a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass (Liturgy of the Word without Liturgy of the Eucharist.)

Rite of Committal: This concludes the funeral rites. It is celebrated at the grave, tomb, or columbarium and is the final act of the community of faith in caring for the body of the deceased member.

Music is integral to the funeral rites. The Vigil includes an opening song, a responsorial psalm that should be sung (STL #156), and may conclude with a song. The Funeral Mass should include hymns, if possible, singing of the responsorial psalm, Gospel acclamation, service music, like at any other Mass, and the song of farewell. The Rite of Committal may conclude with a song.



Vigil for the Deceased

“Music is integral to any vigil, especially 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 affirm hope in the resurrection.

Whenever possible, an instrumentalist and cantor or leader of song should assist the assembly’s full participation in the singing.

In the choice of music for the vigil, preference should be given the singing of the opening song, and the responsorial psalm. the litany, the Lord’s Prayer, and a closing song may also be sung.”
OCF #68

Funeral Liturgy

“The funeral liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased...” OCF #128

“ 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.” OCF #129

“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.” OCF #135

“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.” OCF #157

“The psalms are given pride of place in the funeral rites because ‘they powerfully express the suffering and pain, the hope and trust of people of every age and culture. Above all the psalms sing of faith in God, of revelation and redemption’(OCF #25). Effective catechesis will allow communities to understand the significance of the psalms used in the funeral rites.” STL #245.

“Sacred music has an integral role in the funeral rites, since it can console and uplift mourners while, at the same time, uniting the assembly in faith and love. Funeral music should express the paschal mystery and the Christian’s share in it. Since music can evoke strong feelings, it should be chosen with care. It should console the participants and ‘help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ’s victory over death and in the Christian’s share in that victory’ (OCF #31). Secular music, even though it may reflect on the background, character, interests, or personal preferences of the deceased or mourners, is not appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy.” STL #246.

“Music should never be used to memorialize the deceased, but rather to give praise to the Lord, whose Paschal Sacrifice has freed us from the bonds of death.” STL #248

“The practice of developing funeral choirs within parish communities should be encouraged. The funeral choir is commonly made up of individuals who tend to be available on weekday mornings and who gather to lend their collective voice in support of the assembly song at the funeral Mass.” STL #257

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.” OCF #214



1.

*What music is appropriate for the three principal rites
for Catholic Funerals?*

A good place to begin choosing appropriate music is the regular parish Sunday repertoire, especially music used during November and the Easter season. Music for Catholic funeral rites should express the paschal mystery and encourage full participation by the assembly. It should also meet the standards of the three judgments explained in Sing to the Lord #126. The three judgments - liturgical judgment pastoral judgment and musical judgment - help focus the music planning for the three funeral rites.

“The role of music is to serve the needs of the Liturgy and not to dominate it, seek to entertain, or draw attention to itself or the musicians. However, there are instances when the praise and adoration of God leads to music taking on a far greater dimension. At other times, simplicity is the most appropriate response. The primary role of music in the Liturgy is to help the members of the gathered assembly to join themselves with the action of Christ and to give voice to the gift of faith.” STL #125.

2.

*What is meant by the term “paschal mystery”
and why is it important that the
Catholic funeral rites express this mystery?*

The term paschal mystery refers to the mystery of the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the essential aspects of Christian redemption. It is through Christ’s dying that our death is destroyed, and through his rising that our life is restored. We are immersed into this paschal mystery through the sacraments, especially through baptism and Eucharist. Every Christian liturgy is a celebration of the paschal mystery and the Catholic funeral rites are part of the liturgy of the Church. It is through the paschal mystery that we are saved, and it is our salvation in Christ that we celebrate in the funeral liturgy.

3.

Explain the "three musical judgments".

As explained in *Sing to the Lord* 126 - 136, the threefold judgment (liturgical, pastoral, and musical) should be used to determine the value of a given musical element in a liturgical celebration.

The *liturgical judgment* is made by taking into consideration the nature of the liturgy itself. Consideration needs to be given to choosing music that is properly suited to the meaning and the structure of the ritual, that it is textually sound, and that it contributes to the overall rhythm of the liturgical action.

Pastoral judgment is also needed to choose music that will enable the people of a particular worshipping community to meaningfully express their faith in the concrete circumstances of the time and place. Planning the funeral rites with a grieving family takes great care and empathy. The liturgical minister must be pastoral in his or her approach. To be pastoral means to lead the family in choosing dignified liturgical music, while catechizing them about the liturgical rites of the funeral. Pastoral does not equal the use of secular music, poetry, etc. Reverent, dignified, well-planned, and well-executed liturgy is pastoral by its very nature.

"The pastoral judgment takes into consideration the actual community gathered to celebrate in a particular place at a particular time. Does a musical composition promote the sanctification of the members of the liturgical assembly by drawing them closer to the holy mysteries being celebrated? Does it strengthen their formation in faith by opening their hearts to the mystery being celebrated on this occasion or in this season? Is it capable of expressing the faith that God has planted in their hearts and summoned them to celebrate?" STL #130

To make the *musical judgment*, one needs to take into consideration the quality of the piece. Is it technically, aesthetically, and expressively good? Music chosen for the each rite should be simple, beautiful, and accessible to the congregation. Music that is not artistically sound is not appropriate for use in the liturgy. Secular music is never allowed in liturgy.

4.

Who should plan the funeral music?

Parishes usually have pastoral musicians and liturgy preparation teams in place that will work with the pastor and the family to provide appropriate music for the principal funeral rites. The diocesan Office of Liturgy is also available to help answer questions.

5.

Where can we find lists or suggestions for appropriate funeral music?

Many publishing companies provide lists and suggestions for appropriate funeral music. Many hymnals and missals also have sections dedicated to funeral hymns. The diocesan list of suggested titles might also be helpful.

6.

Since the Vigil is not a Mass may all kinds of music be used?

The Vigil for the deceased is one of the principal rites of the church, and therefore the music should follow the same guidelines as in other liturgical celebrations. Since all liturgies are centered in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the music chosen for use in this and any other liturgical rite must be reflective of this central mystery of our faith. The ritual for the Vigil calls for an opening song and a responsorial psalm. It also states that a closing song is optional.

If celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours (Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer), the proper psalms (spoken or sung) should be used. The hymn at the beginning of each hour should reflect the time of day and compliment the particular hour that is prayed.

7.

When "Ave Maria" is requested, what is the most fitting placement?

A musical setting of the *Ave Maria* would best be placed before or after the Vigil, during the wake or viewing, as prelude music, or at some other time when meditative music is appropriate. *Ave Maria* is not appropriate music during the liturgical processions.

8.

Is it appropriate to have the Lord's Prayer sung as a solo during the Funeral Liturgy?

In the liturgical reforms called for by Vatican Council II, it is emphasized that full and active participation by all the people is the aim that is to be considered before all else. Therefore, all in the assembly are encouraged to join in the Lord's Prayer whenever it occurs in the liturgy.

9.

Is it appropriate to sing favorite secular songs at Communion?

The Communion song is meant to express the unity of the Body of Christ and be sung by the assembly. As stated in item #1, our liturgical music must always express the paschal mystery and draw us deeper into the heart of Christ (STL #246). Secular songs are not appropriate at this time. All liturgical music publishers list suggested Communion songs.



10.

When may favorite secular music be used?

There are a number of options for the appropriate placement of family favorites that are non-liturgical, such as:

1. Anytime during the wake or the viewing (not as part of the Vigil Service).
2. Before or after the Vigil Service.
3. At the gravesite after the conclusion of the Committal Rite.
4. During the funeral luncheon.

11.

May recorded music be used during any of the funeral rites?

In STL #93 the United States bishops remind us that *“Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. While recorded music might be used advantageously outside the Liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy.”*

The voices and instruments of the gathered assembly are never to be replaced by recorded music. Again, the aim of fostering full, active and conscious participation by all the people is to be considered before all else.

12.

Should there be music at the Committal Rite?

The Committal is one of the principal rites of the Church and therefore, the music should follow the same liturgical guidelines as above.



Contact the Diocesan Office of Liturgy for a list of suggested music or for information regarding the funeral rites. The Office of Liturgy also provides training/formation for liturgical and bereavement ministers who aid families in planning liturgies.

Resources

Ritual for Funeral Rites

ICEL Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences,
Order of Christian Funerals, © 1989, Liturgy Training
Publications, Chicago.

Liturgy Documents

Smith, Margaret. *Facing Death Together Parish Funerals*.
Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Sing to the Lord:
Music In Divine Worship*, 2007.

Vatican II *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum
Concilium)*, 1963.

Appendix

Liturgy Planning Sheet for the Order of Christian Funerals

Vigil for the Deceased *(at the family's home or funeral home)¹*

Introductory Rites

Greeting

Opening Song _____

Invitation to Prayer

Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading _____

Responsorial Psalm _____

Gospel _____

Homily

Prayer of Intercession

Litany _____

The Lord's Prayer _____

Concluding Prayer

[Words of Remembrance]

Concluding Rites

Blessing

[Closing Song] _____

¹ See Order of Christian Funerals, §69.

Vigil for the Deceased
with Reception of the Body at the Church
(at the Church)²

Introductory Rites

Greeting

Sprinkling with Holy Water

[Placing of the Pall]

Entrance Procession/Opening Song _____

[Placing of Christian Symbols]

Invitation to Prayer

Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading _____

Responsorial Psalm _____

Gospel _____

Homily

Prayer of Intercession

Litany

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

[Words of Remembrance]

Concluding Rites

Blessing

[Closing Song] _____

² See Order of Christian Funerals, §82.

Vigil for the Deceased:
Evening Prayer
*(at the family's home or funeral home)*³

Introductory Verse

Hymn _____

Psalmody

Psalm 121

Psalm 130

Philippians 2:6-11

Reading _____

[Homily]

Responsory _____

Canticle of Mary

Intercessions

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

[Words of Remembrance]

Dismissal

Greeting

Blessing

Dismissal

³ See Order of Christian Funerals, §385.

Vigil for the Deceased
with Reception of the Body: Evening Prayer
(at the Church)

Introductory Rites

Greeting

Sprinkling with Holy Water

[Placing of the Pall]

Entrance Procession/Opening Song _____

[Placing of Christian Symbols]

Psalmody

Psalm 121

Psalm 130

Philippians 2:6-11

Reading _____

[Homily]

Responsory _____

Canticle of Mary

Intercessions

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

[Words of Remembrance]

Dismissal

Greeting

Blessing

Dismissal

Funeral Mass with Reception of the Body⁴

Introductory Rites

Greeting

Sprinkling with Holy Water

[Placing of the Pall]

Entrance Procession _____

[Placing of Christian Symbols]

Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading _____

Responsorial Psalm _____

[Second Reading] _____

Gospel Acclamation _____

Gospel _____

Homily

General Intercessions

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Gifts _____

Service Music of the

Eucharistic Prayer:

Holy, Holy _____

Memorial Acclamation _____

Great Amen _____

Lamb of God _____

Communion Song _____

⁴ See Order of Christian Funerals, §158.

Final Commendation

Invitation to Prayer

Silence

[Signs of Farewell]

Song of Farewell _____

Prayer of Commendation

Procession to the Place of Committal

Music during the Procession _____

¹ See Order of Christian Funerals, §158.

Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass⁵

(When there is no Funeral Mass)

Introductory Rites

Greeting

Sprinkling with Holy Water

[Placing of the Pall]

Entrance Procession _____

[Placing of Christian Symbols]

Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading _____

Responsorial Psalm _____

[Second Reading] _____

Gospel Acclamation _____

Gospel _____

Homily

General Intercessions

Final Commendation

Invitation to Prayer

Silence

[Signs of Farewell]

Song of Farewell _____

Prayer of Commendation

Procession to the Place of Committal

Music during the Procession _____

⁵ See Order of Christian Funerals, §183.

*Rite of Committal*⁶

[Music] _____

Invitation

Scripture Verse _____

Prayer over the Place of Committal

Committal

Intercessions

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

Prayer over the People

[Music] _____

⁶ See Order of Christian Funerals, §216.

Ministers for the Order of Christian Funerals

Vigil

Presider _____

(priest, deacon, lay leader of prayer)

Lector _____

Cantor _____

Greeter/Ushers _____

Accompanist _____

Funeral Mass

Presider _____

[Deacon] _____

Lector (s) _____

Cantor(s) _____

Accompanist _____

Altar Server (s) _____

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Pall Bearers _____

Rite of Committal

Presider _____

[Deacon] _____

[Lector] _____

[Cantor] _____

Christian Symbols Placed on Coffin

Pall _____

Cross _____

Bible _____

Other _____



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