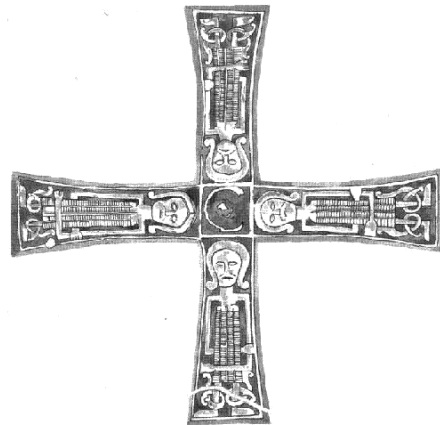


GUIDELINES
FOR THE
CELEBRATION
OF FUNERALS



DIOCESE OF CLOYNE

APRIL 2026

April 21st 2026

A Cháirde,

It is said that the Irish do funerals well. It is a strange kind of compliment, but we understand what is meant. The funeral ritual is celebrated with a solemnity and dignity that conveys our Christian understanding of both life and death.

The liturgy of the Church is profound in its wisdom and insight. It is the bearer and expression of our understanding of death as not an end but a new birth into life eternal. Our funeral celebrations convey our hope in the realisation of the Lord's promise of eternal serenity in his presence.

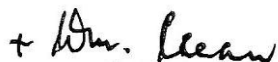
To help us continue this noble and wholesome tradition of our faith these guidelines have been prepared and will be circulated to funeral directors, priests and all those who minister to the bereaved. These guidelines will help keep our focus on the essential and most important elements of the funeral rites. In a fast-changing culture some well-intended but mistaken "novelties" have crept into our practice of funeral celebrations. Please read these guidelines as an aid to celebrating our funeral liturgy with the dignity both the de-ceased and bereaved deserve.

The priest is entrusted with special responsibility to be a "guardian of the liturgy" in the service of the whole community.

I am indebted to Fr. Andrew Carvill, the Diocesan Master of Ceremonies, who has co-ordinated this work with the assistance and advice of many people with whom he consulted.

Wishing all those who minister to the bereaved every grace and blessing.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wm. Crean".

Most Rev. William Crean, D.D.,
Bishop of Cloyne.

I: General Considerations.

1. The Catholic Funeral Rites are set out and explained in the *book Order of Christian Funerals – Approved by the Irish Bishops’ Conference for use in the Dioceses of Ireland* (Veritas Publications) and confirmed by the Holy See in 1991.
2. One of the tasks of those presiding at funeral liturgies is to guide and direct mourners and funeral directors in their participation in the rites. Presiding clergy, and any other person leading any part of the rites, should be thoroughly familiar with the contents of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, and in particular with the explanations set out in the notes pre-ceding each Rite.
3. The Catholic funeral liturgy provides for the community to gather at several different times, or stations, to pray for the dead and accompany the bereaved. Each of the stations has its own character, which should be respected (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1686-90).
4. The three main stations of the Catholic funeral are as follows:
 - The gathering(s) in the presence of the body, in the family home of the deceased person, in a funeral home, or in another suitable place. The principal gathering of this station is the vigil for the deceased. This station is completed with the closing of the coffin, and it is followed by the transfer of the body to the church.
 - The reception of the body into the church, followed, either immediately or on the next day, by the funeral Mass or a funeral liturgy outside Mass.
 - The gathering at the cemetery, for the committal (burial) rites.
5. While extraordinary pastoral circumstances will sometimes necessitate that the funeral rites be adapted to meet particular needs, and while the wishes of families in times of particular tragedy should be addressed with pastoral sensitivity, the Bishop requests that adaptations which might be allowed in order to address exceptional circumstances should not become ‘normalized’.
6. The following guidelines will not repeat what is already given in the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Instead, they will address some questions concerning correct practice that have arisen among clergy, members of the faithful, and funeral directors in the diocese in recent times.
7. Pastors and funeral directors are asked to adhere faithfully to these guidelines, leading the Christian people towards an ever deeper understanding of the meaning and the comforting richness of the funeral liturgy, faithfully and correctly celebrated. Pastors are asked, also, to explain these guidelines, at an appropriate time, to funeral directors and to the people.

II: Guidelines Concerning Particular Points

A) Vigil for the Deceased

8. The vigil for the deceased is the principal rite celebrated in the time following death and before the funeral liturgy. It takes place at the home of the deceased or in another suitable place such as a mortuary chapel. The prayers of the vigil are often offered towards the end of a more prolonged gathering of the community to greet and sympathize with the family of the deceased and to exchange reminiscences (the wake). The church, as the place where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, and where other services must take place, is not a suitable place for the wake.

9. When for pastoral reasons a vigil for the deceased does take place in the church (cf. *Order of Christian Funerals* no. 71) the prayers for the reception of the body into the church (*Order of Christian Funerals* nos. 138-141) should first be offered, followed afterwards by the vigil prayers (nos. 85-98). Some time may be dedicated for members of the community to sympathize with the family; however, an atmosphere of prayerful silence befitting the house of God should prevail. Morning or Evening Prayer from the *Office of the Dead* might also be celebrated during this time.

10. The *Order of Christian Funerals* (nos. 100 - 103) notes that the closing of the coffin should take place *before* the removal of the body to the church, “that the moment of the sealing of the coffin is an emotional one for immediate family, and that it should be approached with sensitivity and privacy be ensured”. For a number of reasons, it is not fitting that the coffin be opened, nor that the closing of the coffin in the presence of the family, take place in the church which is of its nature a public place of worship.

11. For these reasons, and after due consideration, the Bishop requests that, when for pastoral reasons a vigil for the deceased is allowed in the church, the family of the deceased person be asked to accept that *the coffin must remain closed at all times while in the church*.

12. When a family wishes to keep the body of the deceased person at home during the last night before burial, the rites provide that the closing of the coffin and removal of the body to the church take place on the same day as the funeral, with the reception of the body into the Church taking place immediately before the funeral Mass or liturgy (*Order of Christian Funerals* nos. 186-192).

B) Flags and personal mementos.

13. If a photograph, flag, or personal mementos of the deceased person are brought to the church, these may be brought either at the time of reception of the body, or before the Mass, and placed on a table near the coffin.

14. It is not recommended that these items be brought up as part of the offertory procession, which is reserved to the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine.

15. Serving or retired members of the Defence Forces or Emergency Services may be accorded military honours at their funeral, in which case certain protocols concerning the handling of the national or other flags apply. These protocols will be familiar to those performing the honours.

C) Placing of the Christian Symbols.

16. The placing of the pall (if used), the Cross, and the book of the Gospels on the coffin during the rite of reception is of particular significance and value. The short prayers accompanying the placing of these symbols should not be omitted.

17. Other symbols such as banners, mementoes or photograph of the deceased person, etc., should be placed on a table nearby rather than on the coffin itself, so as not to obscure or cover the Christian symbols, which should themselves be of distinguished quality befitting what they signify.

18. The Christian symbols should be removed from the coffin before the final prayers of commendation and blessing at the end of Mass, since it is the body itself, as a temple of the Holy Spirit destined to rise again, that is blessed with holy water and incensed during this rite.

D) Eulogies.

19. The *Order of Christian Funerals* (no. 27) provides that “A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the Gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given at the vigil service; but there is never to be a eulogy”. The homily should “illuminate the mystery of Christian death in the light of the risen Christ” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1688).

20. There is no provision in the *Order of Christian Funerals* for anyone to deliver a eulogy or make a 'speech' during the liturgy. While the homilist will usually refer during the homily to the Christian life and vocation of the deceased person, the principal focus of the Catholic funeral liturgy is not on the earthly life now ended, but rather on "prayer for the spiritual support of the dead, to honour their bodies, and to bring to the living the comfort of hope" (*Code of Canon Law*, Can. 1176).

21. A eulogy on the life of the deceased, if it is indeed desired by the family, should instead be delivered during the gathering at the home of the deceased person or the funeral home, at the graveside following the committal prayers, or even on a later occasion.

22. While it is permissible that one family member may, if desired, say a few words of thanks and appreciation on behalf of the family of the deceased at the beginning or at the end of Mass, pastors should ensure that families do not feel under any obligation to do this. The priest celebrant can himself offer to thank the assembly on behalf of the family.

E) Music

23. The guiding principle is that music during the liturgy should be liturgical or other sacred music, and that it should consist of actual singing and/or playing of instruments, rather than recordings.

24. The musical tradition of the Church provides a large repertoire of both traditional and modern hymns that convey the Christian meaning of death, offer prayer for the dead, and express the hope of eternal life; these hymns should be used in the funeral liturgy.

25. Families will sometimes ask for a favourite piece of music of the deceased person to be played as the remains are carried out of the church. While sensitivity towards the wishes of the family should be shown, they should be guided towards choosing a piece which accords with Christian faith and can be played or sung 'live' by the musicians or the choir assisting at the funeral. Alternatively, the air of such a song could be played instrumentally (without words).

26. A song which had special meaning for the deceased person or the family could alternatively be played or sung at the graveside after the committal prayers have been offered.

F) Cremation and the Burial of Ashes

27. “The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching.” (*Code of Canon Law*, Can 1176 §3).

28. It is recommended that the Funeral Mass be celebrated in the presence of the body in the usual way, and that the rite of committal take place afterwards at the crematorium in the same way as it would at a graveside.

29. As with burial, the committal of the body at a cremation is a constituent part of the funeral rites. It is not right that the rite of committal be omitted because cremation has been chosen following a Catholic funeral. If the family of the deceased wish for the presence of the priest to celebrate this rite, every effort should be made to grant this. In the event that it is not possible for a priest or deacon to attend, a suitably instructed lay minister should officiate, using the prayers of the committal rite (*Order of Christian Funerals*, Rite of Committal at a Crematorium, Appendix I, nos. 333-339).

30. Since the ashes are the mortal remains of the deceased, their burial or immurement in a cemetery, where the Christian community comes to pray for the dead, is enjoined on the faithful who choose cremation. Church teaching does not permit the scattering or dividing out of the ashes, nor keeping them as mementos, since these practices do not accord with the Christian understanding of the significance of the body (Cong. Doctrine of the Faith, *Ad Resurgendum cum Christo*, 15th August 2016).

31. The prayers of committal may be offered (or repeated) at the time of burial of the ashes, which is often some days or weeks after the cremation. In the case, for example, that the ashes of a person who died abroad are brought home for burial, the prayers of committal ought to be recited at the time of burial of the ashes.

32. In the case of ashes being brought home from abroad for burial, if the family requests it, a Mass for the Dead may be celebrated in the presence of the ashes, followed by burial of the ashes at the cemetery.

G) Funerals on Sundays and Holy Days

33. Because of the increasing number of parishes in the Diocese that have only one priest or have many more scheduled Masses than priests, when funerals take place on a Sunday or Holy Day, it will normally be the case that the funeral liturgy may only take place at the last scheduled Mass of the Sunday or Holy Day morning. Only in cases of exceptional necessity may another funeral Mass be celebrated on a Sunday or Holy Day, in addition to the scheduled Masses.

III Essential Resources

The Order of Christian Funerals (the 'Blue Funeral Book')

The Order of Christian Funerals Approved by the Irish Bishops' Conference for use in the Dioceses of Ireland (Veritas Publications) and confirmed by the Holy See in 1991

Part I of the *Order of Christian Funerals* describes the Rites, giving detailed and useful explanations, for the different stations of the Funeral:

General Introduction: nos. 1-51 (pages 1-17);

Gathering in the Presence of the Body: nos. 60 - 62 (page 23);

Vigil for the Deceased: nos. 70-84 (pages 30-32);

Transfer of the Body to the Church: nos. 99-103 (page 43);

Reception of the Body at the Church: nos. 113-137 (pages 49-51);

The Funeral Mass and Final Commendation: nos. 150-170 (pages 65-69);

Reception of the Body Before the Funeral Mass: nos. 186-190 (pages 81-84);

Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass: nos. 198-205 (page 89-91);

Rite of Committal (burial): nos. 214-217 (page 97).

Part II of the *Order of Christian Funerals* (Pages 107 - 173) provides Funeral Rites for Children.

Part III of the *Order of Christian Funerals* (Pages 176 – 212) provides optional alternative prayers to the ones given in Parts I and II, for use in particular circumstances, for example at the funeral of a person who has died by suicide.

Part IV of the *Order of Christian Funerals* (Pages 213-219) provides Public Prayers for the Dead, for example for use in the November visitation of cemeteries.

The Appendices of the *Order of Christian Funerals* provide the *Rite of Committal at a Crematorium* (Pages 221-228) and *Prayers in Irish* (pages 229-256).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives a detailed but concise explanation of Catholic doctrine concerning the Christian understanding of death (nos. 988 - 1050) and the theological and pastoral significance of the funeral rites (nos. 1680 – 1690).

Streaming

1. Streaming by third parties

This arises when third parties bring their own equipment to the church, carry out the streaming and recording themselves and provide access to the streaming/recording with no involvement from the parish, (except that the ceremony is taking place in the parish church).

The data protection obligations that arise in this situation are primarily for the third party carrying out the streaming/recording. To keep risk at a minimum, I advise the following:

- The parish should engage with the funeral director in advance and indicate to them where the parish permits the recording/streaming equipment to be placed. Cameras and other recording equipment should be placed at the back of the church and in places agreed with parish clergy or staff. The placing of cameras and other equipment should not interfere with the ceremony and should not create a health and safety hazard e.g. take care with placement of wires so that they do not create a tripping hazard. The parish should ask the funeral director to stream/record the congregation from the back and be mindful of sensitive parts of the ceremony, e.g. receiving the Eucharist.
- Ask the funeral director to provide signage re streaming/recording which can be erected in the church.
- It is imperative that streaming can be stopped in the middle of a ceremony, in case any unforeseen circumstances occur.
- It is up to the third party to obtain any necessary consents from the family.

2. Streaming of a funeral mass by the parish where a child is involved in the ceremony as a reader etc.

As you are aware, the usual requirement is that the written consent of parents/guardians is obtained if that person's child is participating in a mass or ceremony that is being live streamed or recorded. However, this is challenging in the case of a funeral as often a child who is involved in the funeral mass will be a member of the immediate family. Therefore, in these circumstances, instead of obtaining written consent of parents, I kindly ask you to inform the family that the mass is being live streamed/recorded, as the case may be. This will ensure that the parish has fulfilled its obligations of (i) being clear to the family how the parish is using their personal data (in this case, their images); and (ii) the fact that the person is aware of the streaming/recording and continues to participate in the mass, may be used to signify their consent. You can have this conversation with the family as part of the funeral preparation and indeed, it is advisable that this conversation happens even if children are not partaking in the ceremony. Also, it is generally advisable that recordings of funeral masses are password protected, this will help safeguard the children involved.

Please kindly note, that this should only be used in these limited circumstances. The written consent of parents/guardians of children who participate in other masses e.g. as altar servers or in sacramental masses should be obtained as usual.