



## DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

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Office of the Bishop

April 1, 2013

Dear Brother Priests,

Having just recalled, as part of our yearly celebration of the Paschal Triduum, the death and burial of the Lord, I would like to reiterate the importance of our pastoral responsibilities to families facing this most difficult of life experiences: the death of a loved one. As you know, these moments bring us and our staffs in contact with people who especially want to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and who in many cases have been away from the faith.

To assist you in your ministry to the bereaved and to clarify questions you might have about appropriate protocol at the time of a funeral, I also wish to share with you a diocesan funeral policy, which I was advised to formulate by our presbyteral council. I will be communicating the policy to local funeral directors and to all the people of God in the Diocese by means of *The Catholic Spirit*. You may wish to include the policy in your parish bulletin.

Thanking you for all you do to bring Christ's compassion to those who mourn and to all the vulnerable among us, and with prayerful good wishes, I remain

Sincerely in the Risen Lord,

Most Rev. Paul G. Bootkoski  
Bishop of Metuchen

Enclosure

## Policy Governing Funeral Rites in the Diocese of Metuchen

1. All pastors and administrators, as "teachers of faith and ministers of comfort" (Order of Christian Funerals [hereafter OCF], 14), are to provide proper funeral rites for Catholics belonging to or associated with parishes within the Diocese of Metuchen. This ordinarily includes three components:
  - a. The *Vigil for the Deceased*, which serves to spiritually prepare the faithful for the funeral liturgy. The vigil should ordinarily take place the afternoon or evening before the funeral liturgy.
  - b. The *Funeral Liturgy* can take two forms: a Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass. Except when it is prohibited by law, e.g., Holy Thursday, solemnities that are holy days of obligation, the funeral Mass is the normative form of the funeral liturgy in the Diocese of Metuchen. The "memorial of Christ's death and resurrection is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral" (OCF, 5), reflecting our belief in God's gift of eternal life and affirming our belief in the resurrection of our loved ones.

When the deceased was a regular communicant, the ministering priest should make every effort to persuade the family to schedule a Mass even if the family initially does not want one.
  - c. The *Rite of Committal*, which is the final official ritual we provide our dearly departed. The Church refers to this action as the rite of committal because we commit the body (or remains) to its final resting place. Since it is through the body that we cooperate with God's will for us, it is only fitting that this same body, destined to be glorified at the second coming of Christ, be regarded with the utmost reverence even in death.
2. In the event that a pastor, administrator, or any other priest assigned to the parish is unable to celebrate the funeral Mass, arrangements are to be made for another priest to celebrate the Mass. Priests and deacons ordinarily preside at the vigil service and rite of committal, but when no cleric is available a layperson may preside (OCF, 14).
3. A service at the funeral home or a memorial Mass is not a legitimate substitute for a funeral Mass.

4. Priests who enjoy diocesan faculties can extend funeral rites to unbaptized children whose parents intended for them to be baptized (Priestly Faculties, 18).
5. Priests who enjoy diocesan faculties can extend funeral rites to the non-Catholic spouse or other family member of a parishioner provided this was not contrary to the will of the deceased and the deceased's own minister is unavailable (Priestly Faculties, 19). The latter condition should always be interpreted benignly, e.g., a non-Catholic who has no relationship with his or her own church and has been regularly attending Mass should be presumed not to have their own minister.
6. While it is preferable that the body of the deceased be present at a funeral Mass, a Mass with only the cremains present is permitted in the Diocese of Metuchen provided this has not been "chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching" (c. 1176 §3; OCF, Appendix 2, 426b).
7. Because of its "power to console and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love," sacred music is "integral to the funeral rites" and is not to be omitted (OCF, 30).
8. The color of vestments used in funeral rites in the Diocese of Metuchen is white, which "expresses Christian hope" (OCF, 39).
9. It is preferable that a eulogy take place outside the context of the funeral Mass, e.g., at the vigil service or following the rite of committal, but a eulogy is permitted at a funeral Mass following the Prayer after Communion and under the following conditions: one person is to speak, the speaker is to be advised that the eulogy is not to exceed five minutes, and a written copy of the eulogy is to be submitted to the celebrant prior to the Mass if the celebrant so requires it.
10. Given the great respect which we afford the body, since through it we cooperate with God's will for us, in cases where the deceased will be cremated, priests and others who minister to the bereaved are to prudently remind the family of the obligation that the final disposition of the cremains take place in a reverent and respectful manner, i.e., by burial in the ground or placement in a mausoleum.
11. As ministers of Christ and servants of the Gospel, all who are involved in the planning and celebrating of funeral rites are to have a working knowledge of the canonical norms covering funeral rites (cc. 1176-1185), the General Introduction and rubrics of the Order of Christian Funerals, and paragraphs 1680-1690 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.