

**Notes:**

1. The Diocese of Metuchen has built a crematorium at Holy Cross Burial Park in East Brunswick. It is scheduled to be opening in November 2008. For more information please contact Deacon Russ Demkovitz, Director of the Office of Cemeteries for the Diocese of Metuchen.

Office of Cemeteries  
Resurrection Burial Park & Mausoleum  
899 Lincoln Ave.  
Piscataway, NJ 08854

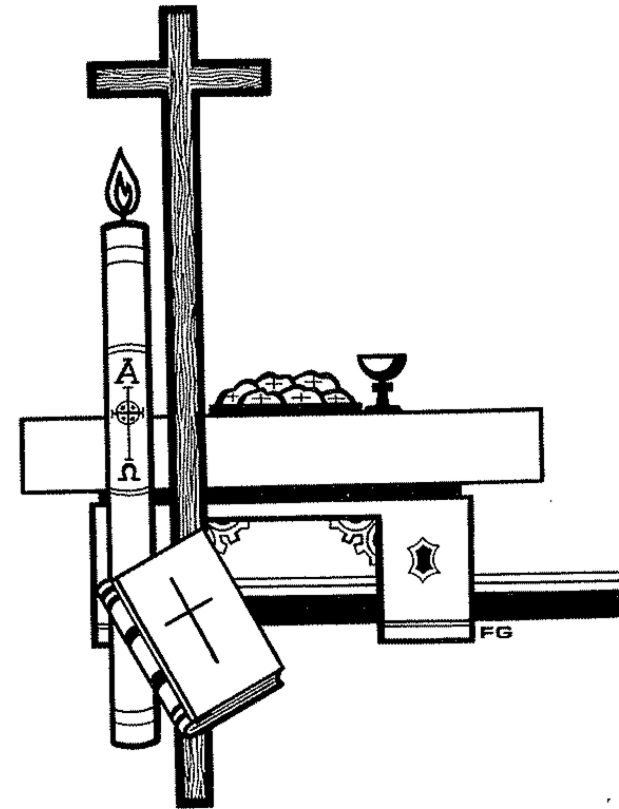
732-463-1424  
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# Catholic Funeral Liturgies: Frequently Asked Questions



**Diocese of Metuchen**  
Department of Worship  
and Liturgical Formation

**10. *In situations where the deceased is to be cremated, does the body of the deceased need to be present in order to have a Catholic funeral Mass or other funeral rites?***

*The Order of Christian Funerals* clearly states that “funeral rites are to be granted to those who have chosen cremation unless it is evident that cremation was chosen for anti-Christian motives.” (#19)

However, the rites also stress the fact that the Church prefers and strongly encourages that the body be present for both the Vigil service and the Funeral Mass. In the Diocese of Metuchen, this is the norm. Cremation would take place after the Final Commendation following the funeral Mass. Based on pastoral need, a funeral Mass in the presence of the cremated remains is permitted. Consultation with the Pastor is recommended for any exception to the norm.

**11. *After the body is cremated, how should the ashes or cremated remains be disposed? What prayers or rites are used for the cremated remains?***

Even though cremation is chosen, the Church stresses the need to inter or properly bury the ashes of the deceased in keeping with our Christian tradition and practice. Cremated remains must be given the same respect as would the body of the deceased in all manners of handling. In keeping with the need to give the utmost reverence to the cremated remains, it is not considered appropriate to scatter the ashes or divide the ashes in any way nor should the ashes of the deceased be kept in the home. The ashes should also be placed in a suitable vessel or container.

Since the cremated remains should be buried, preferably in a Catholic cemetery, a Rite of Committal can be celebrated at the cemetery at the time the cremated remains are to be interred.

denomination may receive Communion but this would require permission of the local Bishop.

**8. *Sometimes families will request particular music at the funeral Mass, perhaps a favorite song of the deceased, a song that was particularly meaningful to a couple or a popular ethnic selection depending on the nationality. Is it permissible to include this music as part of the funeral liturgy?***

Generally speaking, no. Clearly, music is an important part of the funeral liturgy. “The music at funerals should support, console, and uplift the participants and should help create in them a spirit of hope in Christ’s victory over death and in the Christian’s share in that victory.” (OCF #31) Songs and music should also be chosen with the Scripture readings for the liturgy in mind. With this as a basis, secular music is not appropriate at a funeral liturgy. Music, especially selections chosen for sentimental reasons, can evoke strong feelings in the bereaved. That is why the “music for the celebration of the funeral rites should be chosen with great care.”

Bagpipes are also frequently requested at funerals. When a bagpiper is present, secular selections may be played as the funeral procession is entering and/or leaving the church. Again, good taste and judgment in song choices are recommended in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion. When in doubt, consult with the priest or presider.

**9. *More and more, Catholics are choosing to be cremated rather than buried. What is the Church’s view on cremation versus traditional burial?***

The Church lifted a previous ban on cremations for Catholics in 1963. While cremation is permitted, the Church’s teaching still stresses the preference for burial or entombment for the body of the deceased. This long tradition is based on our Christian belief in respect for the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. “Since in baptism the body was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became a temple of the Holy Spirit, Christians respect and honor the bodies of the dead and the places where they rest.” (OCF #19) Not only is it an ancient Christian tradition to bury the dead, this practice is also done in imitation of how Jesus himself was buried.

## CATHOLIC FUNERAL LITURGIES Frequently Asked Questions

**1. *Very often a family member or friend of the deceased will request to give a eulogy at the funeral Mass. Under what circumstances, if any, is this permissible? What is the current policy about eulogies in the Diocese of Metuchen?***

According to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, “A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service, but there *is never to be a eulogy.*” (OCF #27) However, the *Order of Christian Funerals* (OCF #170) does include a provision for a family member or friend to speak in remembrance of the deceased after Communion and before the final commendation begins. This same opportunity is available at the Vigil for the Deceased and may be included after the prayers of intercession and before the final blessing. These ‘words of remembrance’ are permitted in the Diocese of Metuchen on the following conditions:

- 1) Only one person may speak.
- 2) It should be brief, not to exceed three minutes.
- 3) A written copy, or at least an outline, must be given to the presider beforehand, to guarantee it is properly focused and consistent with our Catholic faith and the ideals of Christian burial.
- 4) It is more practical that these ‘words of remembrance’ take place outside the context of Mass, i.e., at the Vigil Service at the funeral home, or at the Committal Rite and the Place of Committal, between Concluding Prayer and before the final blessing.

A Pastor may not forbid a speaker on his own initiative. However, he may absolutely require that conditions 1 – 3 be met.

**2. *Are there days during the liturgical year on which a funeral Mass cannot be celebrated?***

A funeral Mass may be celebrated on any day *except* the following:

- Solemnities that are holy days of obligation;

- The Easter Triduum including Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday;
- Sundays of Advent, Lent and Easter (The Easter season extends from Easter Sunday through Pentecost Sunday).

**3. *Are there circumstances under which it would not be appropriate to have a funeral Mass? If so, what other options for a funeral liturgy are available?***

“The funeral liturgy is the central liturgical celebration of the Christian community for the deceased. When one of its members dies, the Church encourages the celebration of the Mass.” (OCF # 128)  
 However, there may be times when a Mass cannot be celebrated (see #2 above) or for pastoral reasons the circumstances may suggest that a “Funeral Liturgy outside of Mass” may be more appropriate. The Pastor, in consultation with the family, would decide on the appropriate funeral liturgy to be used.

The format of a “Funeral Liturgy outside Mass” includes a Liturgy of the Word with readings and homily, prayers of intercession, and final commendation. “The celebration may also include holy communion.” (OCF # 180) This form of the funeral liturgy would ordinarily be celebrated in a church but may also be celebrated at the home of the deceased, a funeral home, chapel of rest or cemetery chapel. Appropriate music is also customary.

Finally, “when a funeral liturgy is celebrated outside Mass before the committal, a Mass for the deceased should be scheduled, if possible, for the family and friends at a convenient time after the funeral.” (OCF #128)

**4. *When the deceased is a military veteran or other civil servant, the coffin is generally draped with the American (or other national) flag. Is it appropriate for the flag to remain on the coffin during the funeral liturgy?***

No. Any flag or other organization insignia should be removed from the coffin when the body is received at the church. It may be replaced once the coffin is removed from the church. In the Rite of Christian Funerals, a white pall is placed over the coffin when the body is received at the church. This pall serves as a reminder of the baptismal

garment of the deceased and is a sign of the Christian dignity of the person. “The use of the pall also signifies that all are equal in the eyes of God.” In addition, only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy. (OCF # 38)

**5. *Can a Catholic funeral Mass or funeral liturgy be celebrated for a person of another Christian denomination?***

Yes. This can be done with the permission of the local Bishop. “The Church’s funeral rites may be celebrated for a baptized member of another Church or ecclesial community provided that this would not be contrary to the wishes of the deceased person and provided the minister of the Church or ecclesial community in which the deceased person was a regular member or communicant is unavailable.” (OCF #18)

**6. *Can non-Catholic family members participate in the funeral liturgies as readers or in other ministerial capacities?***

The funeral rites encourage active participation by family members in the various liturgies. Family members can serve as readers, ushers, pall bearers, musicians or cantors, gift bearers at the offertory and as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Participation by non-Catholic family members or friends would include all of the roles indicated above with the exception of serving as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.

**7. *Can non-Catholic family members or friends receive Holy Communion at a Catholic funeral Mass?***

Since many friends and family gather at a funeral liturgy to pay their respects and say farewell to the deceased, frequently the congregation at a funeral Mass has a mix of people from various religious backgrounds. As with any other Catholic Mass, all non-Catholics are welcome to attend and pray with the family and community. However, “because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of that oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united (other Christian denominations) are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion.” The same is true for non-Christians. There may be exceptional circumstances under which a Christian from another