

Funeral Guidelines for St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church

A funeral is a most solemn event in the Catholic tradition. For those who were active, devout Catholics and have survivors who are active communicants, a funeral Mass is appropriate. However, due to “mixed” congregations of Catholic and non-Catholic, a funeral service is also desirable.

Preparation:

No funerals should be planned without consulting the Church office and presiding priest/minister.

Optimally, when the family or survivors meet with the funeral home for initial arrangements, it is appropriate to also meet with the priest to plan the funeral. This helps coordinating the service with the funeral home as well as offering less “busy-work” for the family during this sensitive time.

Only Catholic ceremonies can be performed in St. John’s Church.

For Funeral Masses, all ministers of the Word and Eucharist should be Catholics in good standing. Altar servers must also be practicing Catholics.

Services not including Mass may involve non-Catholics to perform functions such as reading and ushering.

Flowers are the responsibility of the family or through the funeral home. One or two bouquets for the back altar are the only flowers allowed in the church/sanctuary area. The churches vases are also an option to use. No vases or stands will be permitted in the sanctuary.

Liturgically, the color used by the presider and ministers is white most usually. However, violet and black are optional.

No decorations or paraphernalia may be placed in the sanctuary, the casket or the Church (balloons, banners, sports/college memorabilia, photographs, etc).

Service Music:

The Christian Funeral Rite is rich in symbols and gravity. The use of music should reflect the nature of the Paschal Mystery, especially on the promise of Resurrection. It is suggested that specifically Catholic hymns and songs be used. Secular music or “old favorite” songs are not appropriate for the funeral Mass or service but may be performed during the wake or by graveside.

The ministers of music are most likely the parish musician and organist/pianist. If the desire is to use someone else, then arrangements must be made with the pastor.

The family is responsible for printing holy cards and service programs. These are optional. Funeral cards are usually available through the funeral home.

Readings and Ceremony:

The Church directs those who mourn to hear the word of God in some select readings. The minister usually chooses the readings unless the family has some particular scriptural texts that are of value. In such case, the minister of the ceremony must approve the text for the occasion. No readings other than those from the Christian Bible may be used in a Funeral Mass or service.

A homily is given by the presider or deacon during a funeral Mass or service. It is not recommended that a “eulogy” be given by a lay person or family member during the Mass as such reflections are best given during the “wake” preceding the funeral. For pastorally sensitive cases, a lay person or family member may give a short “eulogy” at the end of the service. Any reflection given must not be strictly secular but be Christian in nature and content.

The Visitation:

Prior to the wake or funeral, family members are traditionally open to receiving friends and well-wishers in the proper place for visitation. There are a few options:

Visitation at the Funeral Home: The director of the Funeral home will accommodate the family and offer options for hospitality.

Visitation at the Parish Center: The casket is placed in a suitable place for viewing and hospitality is offered to the family and visitors. There is a fee for this service.

Visitation in the Church: A more solemn affair that excludes any food, drink, visiting and socializing due to the reverent nature of the Church sanctuary. If a visitation is to be held in the Church, it is recommended that it be held no more than an hour before the Funeral service or Mass.

The Wake/Rosary:

The proper terminology for the service the night before the Funeral is “vigil”. Over the course of time, it is a custom for Catholics to recite the Rosary during or after the vigil. This is not obligatory.

The vigil includes the proper Scriptural readings and prayers suggested by the Church and may include, at the family’s request and choosing, lay persons to speak during the service.

Comments should be no longer than 5 minutes and should not include anything that would profane the ceremony or embarrass the family. Recorded music or videos in lieu of a speaker are not appropriate.

The Funeral:

There are basically three forms the funeral service can take: 1) the traditional Funeral Mass followed by Committal service at a cemetery; 2) funeral service at the Funeral Home chapel with no Mass followed by the Committal; 3) Graveside service. If Cremation is involved, the funeral can take place with the body prior to cremation or after cremation, with the cremains. Concerning cremation, the Church certainly allows this practice as long as it is being chosen for reasons not contradictory to the beliefs of the faith concerning Resurrection of the body.

The only other issue with cremation is that the Church requires that the cremains ultimately be interred or entombed in a sacred place. Once the family decides which option they desire, then certain aspects can be addressed. St. John's has a columbarium for cremains and there are separate guidelines for its use.

The Funeral Mass: this will be the traditional requiem Funeral celebrated in Church. The family/survivors have the option of choosing a reading from the Scriptures. The pastor/priest will help with the selection.

Songs that are appropriate may also be chosen by the family. There should be no canned music or popular music if possible.

Ministers of the altar may be chosen by the family but they must be Catholics in good standing and have been trained in the ministry they are performing.

The family may opt to bring up the gifts and place the pall on the casket although this is not necessary.

Funeral Luncheons:

The parish is not required to provide a reception or meal to the family after the funeral. However, there may be some occasions that arise where the family does not have an adequate gathering place to entertain out-of-town guests. The parish Hospitality Committee is available to provide some small, light reception if there is such a need.

The Parish Center may be used for the reception but the family must follow these guidelines:

The reception should last no longer than two hours from set up to serving to clean up. Socializing and family reunions may be held elsewhere.

The family may make a financial offering to the Parish for the use of the Center and for the cost of food. If the family would like to cater a meal, they are required to pay for it themselves.

Our Hospitality Committee is made of parish members; they are not staff members. The family is encouraged to help with cleaning up after the reception.

No reception is to be held without a Hospitality Committee person to arrange it.

Alcohol is not to be served during a Funeral reception at St. John's.

Any infraction of the civil law of the land or any inappropriate behavior of any kind will result in the termination of the reception.

Fees:

Most funeral directors itemize all costs within their billings. This is something that should be discussed with them. In such case as the funeral director does not accommodate for ministers, the family is responsible for payments and donations for the ministers and Church. The parish is not responsible for any of the expenses.

The following services should be accounted for:

1. Pianist/organist: \$100.00
2. Soloist/cantor: \$100.00
3. Servers (Mass): \$25.00 each

In addition, an offering can be made for the use of the Church sanctuary if the family wishes to do so.

There is no fee for the priest's involvement but a donation to the priest is appreciated and welcome).