

costs from different firms before making your final choice

You should be able to rely on a funeral director to give you clear advice on the various matters that need addressing on someone's death, and offer you a range of options regarding the cost of the coffin and other aspects of the funeral service.

- **What are the financial implications?**

Your funeral director will be able to advise you on the costs of the service they provide. There is often a higher cost for a funeral which includes burial. Those choosing burial will also need to consider the upkeep of the grave.

There is usually a fee for an organist or other musician.

A stipend or offering to the parish for the services of the priest/ deacon leading the funeral service(s) is usual. In the Archdiocese of Westminster a standard fee is set by a parish or deanery. This stipend is usually included automatically in the account prepared by the Funeral Director, though the family is free to make its own arrangements.

- **When can the funeral take place?**

The funeral director will liaise with family, parish and cemetery/ crematorium to arrange the day and time of the funeral service(s). Generally nothing can be done until a death has been registered.

If the cause of death is clear, the doctor will issue a medical certificate and a formal notice confirming that he or she has signed the certificate. This notice gives information on how to register the death so that funeral arrangements can then be made.

If the doctor reports the death to the coroner, there may be a delay while a post mortem or inquest is carried out. Reference to a coroner will be necessary for example when no doctor can issue a medical certificate of cause of death, when a death is judged unnatural or suspicious, or when a person dies during an operation or under anaesthetic.

Preparing for a Catholic Funeral

Catholic Christians celebrate funeral rites to offer worship and thanksgiving to God, the author of all life. We do this to pray for the deceased, and to offer support to the bereaved.

The Church encourages us to say farewell to our loved ones in three main stages:

- The Vigil of Prayer, usually the evening before the funeral;
- The Funeral Liturgy, which may be a Mass or a Funeral Service;
- The Committal at the cemetery or crematorium.

It is not always practical to celebrate all three stages. The funeral may even comprise a single act of worship either in the cemetery chapel or crematorium.

The Church's ministers will help you consider what is best and practical for your particular circumstances. They will also prepare the detail of the services with you, so that they are true to the tradition of the Church, and appropriate to the one who has died, and those who gather to pray for them. For this reason please ensure that you make contact with the priest who will lead the funeral service before finalising any arrangements with the Funeral Director.

The Vigil of Prayer

This Vigil is the first stage of the farewell journey. Its mood is one of quiet support which helps to prepare the bereaved for the final leave-taking. It may be held in the home of the deceased person, in a funeral home or in the church. The body of the deceased may be present or not. The Vigil may be led by a priest, but may also be led by others. It will include prayers and readings from scripture. It may include the Rosary, and appropriate poems and songs.

God of all consolation,
open our hearts to your word,
so that, listening to it,
we may comfort one another,

finding light in time of darkness
and faith in time of doubt.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Funeral Liturgy

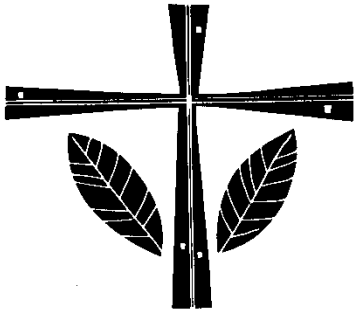
This is the Church's main time of prayer for the deceased person. It may take the form of a

Funeral Mass, but, for example, if the majority of the mourners are not familiar with the Mass this Liturgy may take a simpler and more broadly inclusive form.

The family and friends of the deceased, if they feel able, can assist during the Funeral Liturgy in a variety of ways, for example:

- Placing on the coffin symbols of Christian faith, such as the pall (a large white cloth which reminds us of Baptism), a crucifix and an open bible.
- Placing other symbols of the person and their life on a table near the coffin.
- Reading the scripture passages or the intercessions.
- Speaking briefly in memory of the deceased person.

The Funeral Liturgy usually takes place in a parish church but it may sometimes be appropriate to hold it in the chapel of a cemetery or crematorium.



The Committal

The final act of saying farewell takes place in a brief service at the graveside or at the crematorium. When a body is cremated there may be a further brief service, some time later, for the burial of the ashes.

Questions about the Funeral Services

- **Who will help me plan the funeral services?**
The priest, deacon, or other nominated members of the parish community will be happy to help.
- **How can I know what choices are available?**
Planning Guides are available which contain the choice of readings and prayers. Suggestions about hymns are given in most hymnbooks. Your parish community will help you to access these. Please note that choices need to be made in accordance with the nature of the funeral services as celebrations of the Church and celebrations of Christian faith.

- **What choices can I make?**

Probably more than you think. You can help choose hymns and also scripture readings and prayers. You can help decide which principal services will be celebrated, and some of the things that will happen during those services - for example the use of symbols of faith, and the act of leave-taking at the Committal.

- **Can I choose favourite songs or readings?**

Care should be taken that the words and musical style of any material proposed for use in a service is in keeping with our Christian faith. Other readings and songs will find their proper place elsewhere - for example popular songs will find a more natural and fitting place during a social gathering following the funeral.

- **Can a stillborn baby have a funeral?**

Yes, the Church provides a special service within its collection of liturgies, *Order of Christian Funerals*. It can also be adapted for parents who have suffered a miscarriage.

- **What about cremation?**

Catholics in this country can be cremated. The Church encourages the bereaved to bury the ashes in a final resting place.

Other practicalities

- **Funeral directors**

Unless the deceased had a pre-paid funeral plan, (in which case a number of features regarding the funeral will already have been agreed and paid for), choosing a funeral director is a matter for the family. Your parish priest may be able to provide you with contact details of a number of local companies that you can select from with confidence. It is common to invite estimates of

Lord God,
giver of peace and healer of souls,
hear the prayers of the Redeemer,
Jesus Christ,
and the voices of your people,
whose lives were purchased
by the blood of the Lamb.
Forgive the sins of all who sleep in Christ
and grant them a place in the kingdom.
Amen.