

Tri-Parish Health Ministry – Funeral Liturgies

Supplemental Notes and Hints on Planning a Funeral Mass/Service

Introduction

Planning a funeral Mass or Service can seem like a daunting task, as it requires information and input from a variety of sources. The pastor and/or a parish priest will provide some information regarding the requirements of the church, parish, and diocese. The Director of Music and Liturgy can offer some assistance when selecting music, providing contacts for any required ministers, and preparing the liturgy. Since certain questions often arise, this document provides some details to consider and some time-saving hints in an effort to minimize any confusion.

Ministries – Ways that family / friends can help and serve

- 1) Whether through friends, family, or the parish, insure any / all liturgical ministers have been contacted
 - 1.1) **Readers** (1+) ó normally proclaim 1st and 2nd Readings; sometimes Prayers of the Faithful
 - 1.2) **Gift Bearers** (2+) ó normally family members or friends
 - 1.3) **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion** (varies) ó number depends on two main factors
 - 1.3.1) Size/arrangement of the church (where are the aisles / Communion lines located?)
 - 1.3.2) Projected size of congregation (how many people will require Holy Communion?)
 - 1.4) **Musicians** (2+) ó Normal minimum is one singer and pianist/organist
 - 1.4.1) Some churches offer a Funeral Choir who will sing ó ask for details (OLL offers this)
 - 1.4.2) Some churches require Director of Music to play / sing (as part of job contract)
 - 1.5) **Altar Servers** (1+) ó can be adults or youth; ***if non-parishioner, consult priest about this***
 - 1.6) **Ushers / Hospitality Ministers** (none) ó normally not required, but depends on church
 - 1.6.1) Can be helpful in seating guests for large crowd
 - 1.6.2) Number depends on size/arrangement of church, size of congregation, etc.
- 2) Insure Readers practice the Readings and understand that they are proclaiming God's message
 - 2.1) Posture/Movement
 - 2.1.1) Walk slowly and reverently to/from the ambo (podium)
 - 2.1.2) Bow to the altar when entering/leaving the sanctuary
 - 2.1.3) Stand tall and make eye contact with the congregation occasionally
 - 2.2) Diction/Pronunciation ó speak slowly and pronounce words clearly
 - 2.3) Microphone usage ó
 - 2.3.1) Mics will only amplify what they are given ó whispers and low voices will be unheard
 - 2.3.2) Cannot move head away from mic or sound will be lost, words will be dropped
 - 2.3.3) Voice-activated mics require a threshold volume, otherwise they will not turn on
- 3) Insure any Altar Servers *who are not parishioners* have time to ask questions
 - 3.1) Where are various items located?
 - 3.2) Does the priest have specific preferences about common procedures?
 - 3.3) How does the priest like to handle items specific to funerals? (e.g. incense, holy water sprinkler)
- 4) Insure Musicians have clear information about musical choices
 - 4.1) When will each hymn be used?
 - 4.2) Which hymns are preferred if time is short and not all music is required? (e.g. Communion)

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Liturgy – Planning the components of the Mass / Service

- 1) General Selection of Music
 - 1.1) Musical selections should be based on established liturgical criteria
 - 1.1.1) Pastoral Efficacy (does the music accurately reinforce the readings/event?)
 - 1.1.2) Liturgical Propriety (is the music appropriate for this specific point in the Mass/Service?)
 - 1.1.3) Artistic Integrity (does the music possess aesthetic value in general?)
 - 1.2) Music should facilitate participation in the liturgy by the congregation
 - 1.2.1) Where appropriate, consider cross-over repertoire known by other denominations
 - 1.2.2) Consider simpler/more common settings and arrangements of Mass/Service music
- 2) Responsorial Psalm
 - 2.1) Normally, this should be led by music ministers with the response sung by congregation
 - 2.2) Selection may depend on music available at parish – ask Director of Music for options
- 3) Preparation of Gifts
 - 3.1) Will not include a collection, so offertory ministers not required
 - 3.2) Length of hymn should be taken into consideration – longer hymns may be truncated
- 4) Communion Hymn(s)
 - 4.1) Most funerals do not require more than one hymn, especially if longer
 - 4.2) If more than one chosen, insure priority is known by musicians
- 5) Recessional Hymn
 - 5.1) If casket present, family normally leaves with Pall Bearers / casket – most of song is not heard
 - 5.2) If urn present, family may leave with clergy or remain for entire hymn – check with priest

Logistics – Keeping track of the physical items

- 1) Programs – normally provided by the funeral home
 - 1.1) Hymn names and hymnal names/numbers for any songs that the congregation should sing
 - 1.2) Basic chronological outline of Mass – what happens in what order
 - 1.2.1) Often appreciated by any non-Catholic friends/family
 - 1.2.2) Assists with cues (e.g. when to approach altar for readings, prayers)
 - 1.3) Responses or communal prayers – depends on format of program and space available
 - 1.3.1) Helpful for non-Catholic friends/family
 - 1.3.2) Can clarify response when more than one option is available
- 2) Flowers
 - 2.1) Placement for Display – each church has specific regulations, so consult priest with any questions
 - 2.1.1) Should not pose a tripping or snagging hazard (e.g. blocking distribution of Communion)
 - 2.1.2) Should not damage any church furniture or fixtures
 - 2.1.3) Should not distract the congregation from the focus of the Mass/Service
 - 2.2) Disposition after Mass/Service
 - 2.2.1) Donations of flowers to church should be approved in advance – do not just leave them
 - 2.2.2) During specific seasons, flowers/decorations may already be present – may not have room
- 3) Mementos (includes urn, if present)
 - 3.1) Pictures
 - 3.1.1) Do not assume church will have easels/stands available – funeral home *might*
 - 3.1.2) Try to assign a family member/friend to collect them after the Mass/Service
 - 3.2) Flags / Medals / Personal Items
 - 3.2.1) Make certain that anything of value is collected promptly after the Mass/Service
 - 3.2.2) If something goes missing, check with church office right away – may have been turned in

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Final Thoughts and Conclusion

- 1) Communicate as much as possible about your thoughts and expectations— assuming that everyone agrees on a particular detail may cause confusion for family members later.
- 2) Ask questions immediately, and write answers down for later reference— you will forget stuff!
- 3) Never hesitate to say “I don’t understand” if you are confused— confusion now breeds chaos later.

If you have any questions about planning a funeral at Our Lady of Lourdes, please contact:

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