

Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Funerals at the St. John Paul the Great Parish

160 Main Street, Torrington, CT 06790 | 860-482-4433

1. OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

“In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity. Christians celebrate the funeral rites to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life and the hope of the just”
(Order of Christian Funeral).

LITURGICAL RITES

The presence of the Christian community is most evident during the three distinct ritual “moments” which mark our prayers for the Deceased and our attempt to comfort the bereaved: The Vigil, the Funeral Mass, and the Rite of Committal (graveside service) are the three principal parts which make up the Rite of Christian Burial. We encourage families to make use of this rich heritage of Church Tradition. In each of these you have options to consider:

The Vigil

The Vigil, often referred to as a “wake,” includes the period of time during which the Church prays with the family prior to the main funeral liturgy. The Vigil Service customarily takes place on the evening before the Funeral Mass or for a period of time prior to the Funeral Mass. It is the practice at St. John Paul the Great Parish for this Vigil generally to be held at a local funeral home on the evening(s) prior to the Funeral Mass.

It is also recommended that the family consider the Eulogy as a part of the Vigil Rite, a time when families gather and share stories and memories as well as pray. Sometimes the Eulogy (Rite of Remembrance) at the Funeral Mass is awkward and families wish to speak longer and with more speakers than is appropriate. If this is the case, we encourage a time of family sharing at the funeral home during the Vigil.

The Funeral Mass

The Funeral Mass is the central prayer of the Church community for the Deceased and with the family and friends of the Deceased. The Mass is the prayer by which the power of Christ’s own suffering, death and resurrection and the Eucharistic Communion of the Church is offered for the benefit of the Deceased. It is important to remember that, although the Mass is a great source of consolation for those mourning the loss of their loved one, its primary purpose is to be offered for the repose of the soul of the person who has died, and it is an obligation of the Catholic community on behalf of those who have died in faith, seeking everlasting life.

Funeral Masses are permitted in the presence of the cremated remains of the Deceased, but it is the preferred custom of the Church that, if the body is to be cremated, the Funeral Mass first be celebrated in the presence of the body, and that cremation take place following the Mass if possible.

No one who is a member of the parish or, indeed, even non-Catholics who live within the boundaries of the parish, will be refused a Christian burial if it is requested of St. John Paul the Great Parish. For non-Catholics, the Funeral Mass is usually substituted with a Liturgy of the Word

(without Eucharist), which may take place in the church or the funeral home, depending on the wishes of the family.

The best time for the Funeral Liturgy will vary according to individual circumstances. We are eager to accommodate the family's wishes as best we can. **The customary times for funeral Masses at St. John Paul the Great Parish Church are between 10:00am and 12 pm from Monday – Saturday.** The Church may not celebrate Funeral Masses on Sundays or other high feast days, or Solemnities, of the Liturgical Year. You may call the Parish Office to learn which times the church and celebrant are available; arrangements are most often made directly through the funeral home.

The Rite of Committal

Christian burial is the Church's final act of prayer in the presence of the body or bodily remains of the Deceased. These rites are held at the place of committal, at graveside. The prayers are fairly brief and bring the entire liturgical process to a conclusion. The burial generally follows immediately after the Funeral Mass.

The Rite of Committal also includes appropriate prayers for situations in which cremation is chosen. When cremation takes place after the Funeral Liturgy, the Rite of Committal is carried out at a later date when the cremated remains are ready for interment. Out of reverence for the cremated remains, Church guidelines require that they must be buried or placed in a vault; they may not be scattered.

2. CHURCH TEACHINGS

At the foundation of all Church teaching and practice is the dignity of the human person, as in life, so also in death. All activities must proceed in such a way as to regard our human life as sacred, and the remains of a person must be given the dignity they demand.

In the Tradition of the Church, the burial of the body is given priority in all considerations. In fact, cremation is not to be considered an equal alternative to burial, but only when pastorally necessary and, even then, not for financial reasons.

Cremation

Since 1963, the Church has permitted cremation as long as the Church's teaching on the resurrection of the body is upheld. *The Rite of Christian Burial* is clear that priority is given to the burial of the body of the Deceased, because of confusion that often results in the mind of many who believe that a person is simply "gone." Ancient pagan rites practiced cremation as a witness that there was no belief in the afterlife. Even when cremation is to take place, the Church asks the family to consider planning a Funeral Mass in the presence of the body of the Deceased, and to have the body cremated after the Mass and before the interment. Families ultimately make this decision.

In pastoral need, the practice of cremation has been allowed as an alternative but should never be considered a preferred method simply for expediency or economic gain.

"The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires. Whenever possible, appropriate means of recording with dignity the memory of the deceased should be adopted, such as a plaque or stone which records the name of the deceased" (Order of Christian Funeral).

Death of a Stillborn Infant

“Funeral Rites may be celebrated for children whose parents intended them to be Baptized but who died before Baptism. In these celebrations the Christian community entrusts the child to God’s all-embracing love” (Order of Christian Funeral).

Non-Active Catholics

By virtue of Baptism, the baptized was marked with the seal of the Trinity and became a temple of the Holy Spirit to live in full communion with the Church and God. This person is entitled to the prayers of the Church including the Funeral Rites.

In the Case of Suicide

“Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obligated to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.

Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God.

We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives” and entrusts them to God’s love and mercy, therefore extending all Funeral Rites” (Catechism of the Catholic Church).

3. FUNERAL PLANNING SHEET

Someone from the parish will contact you for the following information. This planning sheet is provided to assist you in compiling the information in advance.

Deceased _____ Age _____

Address _____

Date of Birth _____ Date of Death _____

Mass Day/Time _____ Date _____ Church _____

Funeral Home _____ Calling Hours _____

Contact Person _____ Relationship _____

Address _____

Home Phone # _____ Cell Phone # _____

Reception of the Body – It is the right of the family to place the pall on the casket if they so desire, they may also place the Bible on the casket, or the priest may place a crucifix on the casket.

Item to be placed on the casket: _____

To be placed by: _____

Liturgy of the Word:

(See <https://www.johnpaulgreatparish.com/uploads/docs/funeralmassreadings.pdf>)

Old Testament Reading (from list) _____ Lectionary Reference _____

Reader/Relationship _____

New Testament Reading (from list) _____ Lectionary Reference _____

Reader/Relationship _____

Prayer of the Faithful **I or II** Reader/Relationship _____

Preparation of the Gifts -- Gift Bearer Names (2-4) _____

Music Requests (See <https://www.johnpaulgreatparish.com/uploads/docs/funeralhymns.pdf>)

1. Entrance _____

2. Offertory _____

3. Communion _____

Veteran **YES or NO**

National Anthem **YES or NO**

4. Recessional _____

Homily -- Please give details or reflections to share with the priest. This will assist him as he prepares his homily. For example: family life, involvement in church, hobbies, occupation, community involvement, and favorite stories of/about the deceased. NOTE: We are looking for information in addition to what is listed in the obituary.

4. PLANNING THE FUNERAL MASS

Liturgy of the Word

Please contact the director of Pastoral Care for any questions you may have in the process of planning the Funeral Mass. The first part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, is a series of readings from Sacred Scripture, which are, in part, read by people you may choose. The First and Second Readings, from the Old and New Testaments, are opportunities for members of the family or friends to participate in the Mass as Lectors. You will find on the Liturgy Planning Sheet spaces where you may insert the names of those persons you have chosen.

Those chosen to read should be baptized persons, ideally Catholics, at least sensitive to the expectations of the Church for those who serve in the Ministry of Lector, and able to read the Word of God in a way that is simple, clear and without personal interpretation.

Presentation of the Gifts

The gifts of bread and wine, which, are taken to the altar at the time of the offertory/presentation of the gifts, may be carried by members of the family (usually two-four people) or anyone chosen by them who are Catholic.

Eulogy

One eulogy may be given by a family member or close friend after the rite of reception, before the opening prayer. Eulogies should be brief and are intended to commemorate the life of the deceased. A eulogy might contain a condensed life history, details about family, friends, interests or achievements. They could reflect a favorite memory, poem or lessons learned from the individual's character, faith and example.

The ideal time for the eulogy, however, is when the family gathers in a more informal way at the funeral home at the Vigil on the evening previous. At the funeral home it is possible to invite as many speakers as you wish, and the content can be more informal, as people recall stories and memories of the Deceased.

It is strongly suggested that the eulogy be written or typed. The celebrant may request to review the text in advance for input and discussion.

Symbols of Our Catholic Faith

The Easter Candle

The Easter candle reminds the faithful of Christ's undying presence among them, of his victory over sin and death, and of their share in that victory by virtue of their initiation. It recalls the Easter Vigil, the night when the Church awaits the Lord's resurrection and when new light for the living and the dead is kindled. During the Funeral Mass and also during the Vigil Service, when celebrated in the church, the Easter candle is usually placed near the body.

The Pall

The pall, or white cloth that is placed over the casket when it enters the church at the beginning of the Funeral Mass, is the baptismal garment that was put on the Deceased on their first day in this world with Christ, the day of their baptism. Both the white baptismal garment and the Paschal (Easter) Candle are signs of Christ's presence seen on these, our first and last days on this earth, the time when Christ is still with us but we are away and waiting to be with him in a perfect way in heaven.

The family is welcome, if they wish, to participate in the placing of the pall on the casket at the rite of welcoming the body to the church at the beginning of the Funeral Mass. Also, the placing of another symbol on the casket (a family Bible, or a family crucifix, for example) is also possible, if the family desires to do so.

Holy Water

Holy water reminds the assembly of the saving waters of baptism. In the rite of reception of the body at the church, its use calls to mind the Deceased's baptism and initiation into the community of faith. In the rite of final commendation, the gesture of sprinkling may also signify farewell.

Incense

Incense is used during the funeral rites as a sign of honor to the body of the Deceased, which through baptism became the temple of the Holy Spirit. Incense is also used as a sign of the community's prayers for the Deceased rising to the throne of God and as a sign of farewell.

Guidelines for Receiving Holy Communion

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the following guidelines in 1987 for receiving Holy Communion:

For Catholics

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to

receive Communion, participants should be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For our Fellow Christians

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions, which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of Faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are not ordinarily admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharist sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 § 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of Communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844.3).

For Non-Christians

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

For Those not Receiving Holy Communion

All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

5. Saint John Paul the Great Funeral Receptions

We welcome our parishioners who are in need of a location for a funeral reception to use the facilities of the church at no cost as long as no scheduling conflicts exist. We ask that you call our parish office as soon as possible so that we can make every effort to accommodate you.

We also encourage family to display any photos or mementos at the reception.

The Bereavement Ministry

The Bereavement Ministry is a group of St. John Paul the Great parishioners whose ministry is committed to meeting the needs of those who have lost a loved one.

The Ministry offers care, condolences and assistance to bereaved families at the time of death and in the days following. When notification of a death is received in the parish office, members of the Bereavement ministry are contacted. Members, in turn, call the family to pray with them, and attend the Vigil and Funeral Mass.

6. MASSES IN MEMORY OF THE DECEASED

We welcome parishioners and non-parishioners to come by the Parish Office and request that Mass be celebrated for the intention of their loved one. St. John Paul the Great parish provides a Mass Remembrance Card, which, confirms the date and time a specific Mass intention will be offered. A suggested offering of fifteen dollars per Mass is customary during weekdays and twenty-five dollars during Sunday Mass, but not required.

It is important to note that the number of Mass intentions which may be scheduled by an individual is limited on a monthly basis so that more people may take advantage of this opportunity, and that Mass intentions are often booked months in advance. Once a calendar year is fully booked the new Mass book for the coming calendar year is not opened until November. Masses may be requested which are unscheduled, that is to say, celebrated by priests when they concelebrate community Masses or celebrate Mass elsewhere or privately, and excess Mass intentions are always fulfilled, if not in the parish, by Masses celebrated at other parishes or by other priests who have a shortage of Mass intentions at hand.

The parish organizes an annual Mass and reception on or near All Soul's Day (November 2) celebrated for the intention of those who have died throughout the previous year. Family members and friends of the Deceased are sent invitations to attend.

7. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

St. John Paul the Great Parish does not charge a fee for pastoral care. There are fees applicable for the use of the church, organist, cantor and whatever musicians may be desired for the funeral liturgy:

\$600.00 Funeral Mass at St. John Paul the Great Parish

\$225.00 Funeral Ceremony at the Funeral Home

These resulting fees are handled through the funeral home.

Any consideration of giving notice in the obituary concerning donations to the Saint John Paul the Great Parish "in lieu of flowers" would be appreciated in perpetuity. Please contact the parish center office if you have any questions. If you are experiencing a financial hardship, please do not hesitate to speak to one of our priests.