

# When Someone Dies

## Who will need to be informed as soon as possible?

- next of kin, if not present
- family doctor, if the person dies at home
- funeral director, if the family is using one (the deceased may already have made arrangements)
- priest

In addition, if you are called to someone who has died unexpectedly or in unusual circumstances, the police will need to be informed. Do not touch or move anything in the room.

## What happens next?

### *Arranging the funeral.*

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 and will enable funeral arrangements to 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. The coroner's office will advise you on what arrangements may be made.

### *Registering the death.*

The death will need to be registered within five days unless it has been reported to the coroner. Further detail concerning these procedures can be found in a booklet available from the Department of Social Security.

## What are the financial implications?

If the family wishes to use a funeral director, it is quite proper to invite estimates from different firms.

There is a considerable financial difference between cremation and burial, and those choosing burial will also need to consider the upkeep of the grave.

There may be a fee for an organist or other musician.

An offering to the minister or parish is discretionary, though customary, and you may wish to check. Where the family uses a funeral director an offering may be included automatically in the account, though the family is free to make its own arrangements.

*O Lord,  
support us all the day long  
of this troublous life,  
until shadows lengthen,  
and evening comes,  
and the busy world is hushed,  
and the fever of life is over,  
and our work is done.*

*Then, Lord, in thy mercy,  
grant us a safe lodging, a holy rest,  
and peace at last.  
Amen.*

Cardinal Newman

This leaflet was prepared by the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference. It is based on *Into Your Hands: Planning a Catholic funeral, readings and prayers* published by Decani Books (01638 716 579).

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# CATHOLIC FUNERALS A Guide



*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May they rest in peace.*

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

The model for Catholic funerals is the Easter journey of Jesus Christ from death to resurrection. This is why we are encouraged to celebrate the funeral in three stages: prayer vigil, funeral liturgy, and committal.

Funeral practice varies considerably, and the Church provides several options from which we can choose freely. There is greater flexibility and involvement possible than we sometimes imagine.

## Prayer Vigil

This is the principal rite celebrated between death and the funeral itself. It 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.

The Vigil or wake may be held in the home of the deceased, the funeral home, or in another suitable place, for instance a hospital chapel. It may also be celebrated in church. The body of the deceased may be present, but this is not necessary. The form of the service is a simple Liturgy of the Word of God or Evening Prayer.

## Funeral Liturgy

This is the main celebration of the Christian community for the deceased person. It is usually celebrated in the parish church where the local community gathers for the Sunday Eucharist. Sometimes people may celebrate the Funeral Liturgy in a crematorium or cemetery chapel. Two forms are possible: a funeral Mass, (also called the Requiem Mass) or a funeral liturgy outside Mass.

The Church encourages a Mass since the eucharist remembers and celebrates Christ's own death and resurrection. However, while the eucharist is our central liturgy, it is not always the best option for every funeral. To celebrate a funeral without Mass is a truly valid form of Catholic worship.

## Committal

The rite of committal usually follows on immediately from the funeral liturgy. This final act of leave-taking is celebrated at the graveside or at the crematorium. When a body is cremated the funeral liturgy is concluded with the interring of ashes sometime afterwards.

While we are encouraged to celebrate a funeral over these three stages, for a variety of good reasons this model is not always possible or appropriate to the circumstances. Many combinations of funeral rites are possible. The funeral may even comprise a single act of worship either in the cemetery chapel or crematorium.

*Lord, in our grief we turn to you.  
Are you not the God of love  
always ready to hear our cries?*

*Listen to our prayers for your servant N.  
whom you have called out of this world:  
lead him/her to your Kingdom of light  
and peace  
and count him/her among the saints  
in glory.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

## Some Questions

### *What choices can I make?*

More than you think. Not only can you choose hymns but also scripture readings and prayers.

### *How do I plan a funeral?*

Planning Guides are available which contain the choice of readings and prayers. *Into Your Hands*, prepared for the Bishops' Conference, also contains helpful advice on the form of the funeral service.

### *Who can help me plan a funeral?*

The priest, deacon, or other members of the parish community will be happy to help.

### *Can I have a poem or favourite song?*

There are opportunities for personal choices in each of the three stages of the funeral. Secular poems and songs often fit best in the prayer vigil, but there is also an opportunity for 'Words in Remembrance' towards the end of the funeral liturgy. Care should be taken that the words of any material is in keeping with our Christian faith.

### *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.

*I am the resurrection and the life,  
says the Lord,  
whoever believes in me will never die.*