

# PARISH GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL



**The Parish of Mary,  
Queen of the Apostles  
Belmont, North Carolina**

The Parish of Mary,  
Queen of the Apostles  
503 North Main Street  
Belmont, North Carolina 28012

704 - 825 - 9600

*First published August 2008*

*Revised November 2012*



These parish guidelines exist to assist family members at a time when many decisions have to be made in an environment of grief and confusion. They might also be helpful to an individual who chooses to make arrangements for their own Funeral. We hope that the material found here can help guide you through some of the planning that is a necessary part of Christian death. We will help you prepare for the three stages of Christian burial: the Wake, the Funeral Mass, and the Interment.

These guidelines are designed to be best applied in consultation with the pastor or with an appropriate member of the Parish Staff.

## 1. What Should I Know As We Begin This Process?

a) While we will do everything we can to accommodate family needs, Funeral arrangements should never be finalized at the Funeral Home until the Parish has been consulted. We always have to consider the scheduled use of the building, the availability of clergy, and the occasional restriction of the Church year (which prohibit the Celebration of a Funeral). Since we want to serve you as best we can this consultation is important.

b) Family members are encouraged to participate as much as they are able in the Funeral celebration. Generally this means there are opportunities for them to

- act as Readers at the Wake service
- act as Readers or Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion at the Mass
- assist in placing the pall on the casket
- process into the church with cremated remains
- bring forward the gifts in the Offertory procession
- act as Servers
- provide a short reflections (eulogy), if appropriate, at the Wake service or after Communion at the Funeral.
- plan the readings and the music for the service along with the Parish Liturgy Director.

c) The Funeral Pall is used at every Funeral. It is the white covering for the casket and is also used to cover the table and the container of cremated remains.

d) Flowers are a common expression of sympathy and support. While they are acceptable at the Wake service, it is not our custom to place flowers in the church for a Funeral. If the family wishes to place a special bouquet at the altar, in the Gathering Space or Narthex by the Guest Book, or at some other appropriate place, we are happy to accommodate them but flowers sent by friends and relatives are not placed in the church. Some options exist to sending flowers. You might invite family and friends to make donations to the deceased's favorite charity, to a medical research non-profit organization or to the Parish in lieu of flowers.

c) The Parish always provides a personal, printed program for each funeral as a participation aid and especially as a guide for non-Catholic attendees. We do try very hard to make everyone feel welcome.

d) The final station is the Cemetery or the Columbarium. The rite celebrated there is short. Occasionally a body or cremated remains will be shipped to another place for burial. When this is done, there are some adaptations made to the prayers that are prayed at the church. It is important for us to know that this is the plan for burial prior to the funeral. As well, some Catholic cemeteries in other states require a letter to accompany the deceased stating they were active members of the church. If this is necessary, the funeral director will inquire about it and usually transport it to the place of burial.

## 6. Can Family Members Give a Reflection (Eulogy)?

a) A Reflection is a more personal statement about the life and accomplishments of an individual than a homily or sermon would be. It can be appropriate to include one at a Wake Service or even at the Funeral Mass.

b) At a Wake Service a few family members might share stories and reflections in the context of shared prayer. At the Funeral Mass, however, only one person will be permitted to offer a Reflection.

c) Reflections should be brief (they come at the end of a service that has taken about an hour) and able to be delivered in two to three minutes. A Reflection should reflect the person's life and accomplishments and engage everyone who has gathered for the funeral. It should avoid purely personal tributes and should always be shaped in the context of the worship service in which it is delivered. All Reflections must be typed and approved by the Pastor ahead of time.

## 5. How Do We Celebrate Christian Funerals?

a) In the revised Rite of Funerals in 1986 three stations” are celebrated. The first station is the Wake. It is a gathering of friends and family with the deceased. It starts with a formal service of prayer. This service includes hymns, readings from Scripture, shared prayers by those assembled and on occasion, a eulogy or reflection given by a family member or close friend. It is followed by an opportunity for visitation with the family. This service is celebrated at every Wake. In the past, many people were familiar with the tradition of praying the Rosary at a Wake. The Wake service precludes this more traditional prayer. However, if the Rosary was of particular importance to the deceased there are other possibilities to consider:

- A decade of the Rosary can be included at an appropriate point in the Wake with an appropriate introduction.
- The family can gather in the home or in the Parish’s Parlor at some time prior to the Wake or Funeral. Led by the clergyman they can recite the Rosary together.
- Prior to the beginning of the Wake Service, family members could lead the Rosary, or a part of it, for those assembled.

b) The Mass of Christian Burial is a celebration that uses the symbols of Baptism to remind us of the promises of eternal life. It is a celebration even though the emotions surrounding it are different from most “celebrations” we attend. These rites are performed with the participation of the people who gathered in shared prayer and in song. The Parish Staff will assist the family in planning the Funeral Liturgy. Funerals are times of a heightened need for memories. This can sometimes distort the purpose of the churches rites: making them opportunities for someone’s favorite songs, favorite poems, and favorite devotions. We will work with you to help you keep an appropriate focus for word and music at a Funeral that preserves the intention of the church’s rites and adequately connects them in a personal way to a loved one.

e) Funerals are special times of remembering. Remembrances and photos can be important. We invite you to consider putting photographs (arranged as a display) or a portrait or other personal belongings in the Gathering Space. We can assist you with tables and easels for an appropriate display.

f) The Parish, through the generous work of our Bereavement Committee, provides a light reception either at the Wake Service or after the Funeral Mass and Interment. Your guests are invited to the MAK Center Hall for this opportunity to visit and offer support. Our Director of Liturgy will contact you to work out the details of this reception prior to the services.

g) There are no fees required by the church for the burial of its members. Our funeral choir is a volunteer service of Parish members wishing to assist a family in celebrating Christian burial. There is no fee for this ministry. The same is true for the reception. The Parish allocates money for the food that is prepared by the committee. If you hire additional musicians or if you require a more complex reception, then fees will be negotiated with the individuals involved.

## 2. Who Can Be Buried From the Parish?

a) Catholic members of the Parish and any Catholic may be buried from this church. This applies to our Catechumens as well.

b) Any Christian connected to the community by other family members (spouse, parent, etc.) or any Christian without a church home can also be buried from this church.

c) In special circumstances, non-Christians can also be buried from here. This is discussed on a case by case basis. The Church provides specific rites for a variety of circumstances.

d) Some Catholics have a perception that those who take their own life may not be buried from the Church. This is an erroneous belief. We are happy to provide the Church's rites and the consolation of the Sacraments in just such circumstances. Similarly, some also have recollections that unbaptized children in the past were not permitted to have a funeral. This is not the case any longer and a Funeral Mass may be celebrated for an unbaptized infant.

### **3. Can I Be Cremated?**

a) In the Catholic Church we have a long standing tradition of honoring the body of deceased members. However, cremation is permitted as long as it is not a statement by an individual of an anti-Christian bias or a disbelief in the final resurrection. It appears to be growing in acceptance and does provide a dignified and economical means for burial.

b) The family can bring the body to church for the Wake and the funeral and have the cremation following these services or gather for a Funeral Mass after the cremation. Another option is to have both the Wake and the Funeral Mass in the presence of the cremated remains. Interment may be immediate or private and the family might gather at a more opportune time later on with relatives and friends for a Memorial Mass. All of these options may be discussed with the Funeral Director and with the Parish Staff.

### **4. Where Do We Celebrate the Parts of the Funeral?**

a) In our culture we are accustomed to using funeral establishments for the reception of guests prior to the funeral. This is done in a parlor or in a chapel designed for this purpose. There are, however, some other options open to individuals in planning a funeral.

-The evening before the Funeral Mass, the body may be viewed or the cremated remains visited and guests may be received at the church rather than the Funeral Home.

This can be a meaningful alternative for the deceased or for family members. It can also make rather large gatherings a bit more comfortable. The evening starts with the short Wake Service and then the family can receive guests. Often a light reception can accompany this gathering. The body or the cremated remains can stay at the church overnight.

-Guests can be received at church for an hour in the evening. The Funeral Mass can follow in the same evening at the church followed by a reception. Burial would be an intimate, private, family affair the next morning or at some other pre-arranged time.

(For example, the family can receive guests beginning at 6:00 PM and the Funeral Mass could follow at 7:00 or 7:30 PM. A reception follows Mass. This option often allows more people to attend. Interment may follow the next morning.)

-When possible the viewing can take place in the family home. It begins with a short Wake Service there and then the body or cremated remains are transported to the church for the Funeral Rites.

b) Please keep in mind that the church is always available for use for a Funeral. If there are circumstances that warrant the use of the Funeral Home chapel, this must be discussed first with the Pastor.

c) For a variety of reasons some individuals choose not to celebrate a Funeral Mass but prefer a prayer service or graveside service. These can be acceptable alternatives. It would be important to discuss this possibility with a member of the Parish Staff.