

MUSIC AT FUNERALS

A Parish Musicians' Guide to the New Rites

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

In 1990 a new Funeral Rite was published, the **Order of Christian Funerals** ('OCF'), This booklet aims to explain what all this means for those planning the music.

WHAT'S IN IT

Principles

Here is everything the OCF says about music:

- why it is important to have music at all
- what parts should always be sung, and which are highly recommended
- who is involved in the singing: the whole community, and ministers of music, particularly the cantor
- how the family should be involved in the planning

Outlines of the rites, showing the three main stages:

- 1, The 'Prefuneral' liturgies, in particular the **Vigil**
- 2, The funeral rite itself, in particular the **Funeral Mass**
- 3, The **Committal** (burial) Including the new rites for use in a cemetery or crematorium chapel

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WHAT THE RITUAL SAYS

General Statement

Music is integral to the funeral rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love. The texts of the songs chosen for a particular celebration should express the paschal mystery of the Lord's suffering, death, and triumph over death and should be related to the readings from scripture. §30

Music for the assembly should be truly expressive of the texts and at the same time simple and easily sung. §21

When needed

Music should be provided for the vigil and funeral liturgy and, whenever possible, for the funeral processions and the rite of committal. §32

The psalms

The psalms are rich in imagery, feeling and symbolism. They powerfully express the suffering and pain, the hope and trust of people of every age and culture. Above all the psalms sing of faith in God, of revelation and redemption. They enable the assembly to pray in the words that Jesus himself used during his life on earth. The Church, like Christ, turns again and again to the psalms as a genuine expression of grief and of praise and as a sure source of trust and hope in times of trial. §25... Since the psalms are songs, whenever possible, they should be sung. §26

Planning

Whenever possible, ministers should involve the family in planning the funeral rites: in the choice of texts and rites provided in the ritual, in the selection of music for the rites, and in the designation of liturgical ministers, §17

Since music can evoke strong feelings, the music for the celebration of the funeral rites should be chosen with great care. The music at funerals should support, console, and uplift the participants and should help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christian's share in that victory, §31

Learning

Many musical settings used by the parish community during the liturgical year may be suitable for use at funerals. Efforts should be made to develop and expand the parish's repertoire for use at funerals. §32

Ministers

An organist or other instrumentalist, a cantor, and, whenever possible, even a choir should assist the assembly's full participation in singing the songs, responses, and acclamations of these rites. §33

Funerals: A Parish Concern None of the rites of the Liturgy can be properly celebrated unless they are rooted in the community. There should not be a gap between and life, rather our worship and rituals should be the 'source and summit' of our life. Nor are funerals private celebrations of the family: at every liturgy the whole Church is there.

A death is one of the most momentous events in the life of the community, leaving no-one unaffected. The way it touches people will vary. For those closest to the dead person, grief and bereavement will be the strongest feelings. For friends and acquaintances the sense of loss will be less intense and these people can help the bereaved, if they need it, to cope with the present and prepare to look to the future. For parish ministers the concern should be to put their ministry at the service of the family and the community. For musicians, their task lies in helping the family with the choice of music and making sure there is someone to sing and play it.

Preparation for a funeral takes place long before one actually occurs. Just as hospitals are ready to deal with disasters, parishes should know what is required when someone dies. It should be taken as a matter of course that there should be music at funerals (see *When needed* — previous page). The shape of the rite should be learned, so that the right parts are sung (see *Priorities*, in the following pages). Music can be introduced into the parish repertoire (see *Learning*, above) so that there are appropriate hymns and psalms which are known when needed. Musicians (see *Ministers*) who are free on weekdays — perhaps retired people — should be sought out.

The death of anyone is a challenge to us all. It questions our faith, our idea of what our destiny is. It is the mark of a healthy community to share the responsibility for giving 'ritual shape' to this event.

1. THE VIGIL

OUTLINES OF THE RITE

Greeting	<i>Introductory Rites</i>
OPENING SONG (§76)	
Invitation to Prayer	
Opening Prayer	
First Reading	<i>Liturgy of the Word</i>
RESPONSORIAL PSALM (§78)	
Gospel	
Homily	
Litany	<i>Prayer of Intercession</i>
The Lord's Prayer	
Concluding Prayer	
Blessing	<i>Concluding Rite</i>
Concluding Song or Silent Prayer	

Key: **Bold** indicates musical items; **BOLD CAPITALS** indicate high priorities

'Music is integral to any vigil, especially the vigil for the deceased.' In the difficult circumstances following death, well-chosen music can touch the mourners and others present at levels of human need that words alone often fail to reach. Such music can enliven the faith of the community gathered to support the family and to affirm hope in the resurrection.' §86

Priorities: What to Choose First

'In the choice of music for the vigil, preference should be given to the singing of the opening song and the responsorial psalm, The litany, the Lord's Prayer, and a closing song may also be sung.' §86

Ministers: who sings and plays

'Whenever possible, an instrumentalist and a cantor or leader of song should assist the assembly's full participation in the singing.' §86

Opening Song

'The opening song or entrance song should be a profound expression of belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the dead, as well as a prayer of intercession for the dead' §76 - see also §102 for Vigil with Reception

Choosing an Opening Song: The Opening Song should be well-known or easy to pick up, so that everyone has the opportunity of joining in. A standard hymn might be advisable, or a psalm with response (e.g. Ps 42, 63, 130). The mood should be of Christian hope, but people may not feel able to sing something triumphant or rousing in character at this point. The Vigil may also begin with a Gathering Song (e.g. a Taizé or other chant) which starts before the ministers enter.

Responsorial Psalm

'The Responsorial Psalm enables the community to respond in faith to the reading and to express its grief and its praise of God, In the selection of the readings the needs of the mourners and the circumstances of the death should be kept in mind', §78

Choosing a Psalm: Ideally there will be a Cantor present, but this cannot be relied upon. Metrical (hymn-style) versions may be used as a substitute for psalm-tones. What is important (as this is the Liturgy of the Word) is to sing a *psalm* and not a hymn totally unconnected with the psalter.

Prayer of Intercession (The Litany)

'In the prayer of intercession the community calls upon God to comfort the mourners and to show mercy to the deceased. The prayer of intercession takes the form of a **litany**, the Lord's Prayer, and a concluding prayer'. §80

Music for the Litany: Of the three elements of the Prayer of Intercession the litany presents the most possibilities for singing. Spoken invocations can be interspersed with a sung response such as 'Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer'.

Concluding Song

'The vigil concludes a blessing, which may be followed by a liturgical song or a few moments of silent prayer or both'. §81

** *Note on Processions: see below after 'Procession to place of Committal'*

2. THE FUNERAL LITURGY

OUTLINES OF THE RITE:

Greeting	<i>Introductory Rites</i>
Sprinkling with Holy Water [Placing of the Pall]	
Entrance procession/ENTRANCE SONG (§144)	
Opening Prayer	
Readings	<i>Liturgy of the Word</i>
RESPONSORIAL PSALM (§148)	
GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (§149)	
Gospel	
Homily	
Intercessions (Response)	
'Celebrated in the usual manner'	<i>Liturgy of the Eucharist</i>
Song for Procession of Gifts or Instrumental Music (§ 153)	

EUCCHARISTIC ACCLAMATIONS

Dialogue, Sanctus, Memorial

Acclamation, Great Amen (§153)

Lord's Prayer and Doxology (§153)

Lamb of God (§ 153)

COMMUNION SONG (§153)

Invitation to Prayer

Final Commendation

Silence

[Signs of Farewell]

SONG OF FAREWELL (§156)

Prayer of Commendation

Psalms

Procession to place of Committal

'Since music can evoke strong feelings, the music for the celebration of the funeral rites should be chosen with great care.' The music at funerals should support, console, and uplift the participants and should help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ's victory over death and in the Christian's share in that victory', §31

Priorities

'In the choice of music for the funeral Mass, preference should be given to the singing of the acclamations, the responsorial psalm, the entrance and communion songs, and especially the song of farewell at the final commendation' §166; *funeral outside Mass* §192

Ministers

'An organist or other instrumentalist, a cantor and, whenever possible, a choir should be present to assist the congregation in singing the songs, responses and acclamations of the funeral liturgy'. (§162)

Musicians at Funerals: It may seem fanciful to expect the presence of cantors, organists and so on on a weekday morning. However, if funerals can be timed to take place at a regular weekday parish Mass, there is a ready-made congregation who can at least sing hymns or the most familiar chants, such as a Song of Farewell, and only need someone with confidence to start them off. There may be choir members or cantors in the parish who are retired and who can be on standby to come to funerals on weekdays to assist. It is a question of effort and planning,

Planning with the family

Whenever possible, ministers should involve the family in the planning of the funeral liturgy: in the choice of readings, prayers and music...' (§161)

Helping the Family: The funeral liturgy is one of the few occasions when ordinary people have a say in what happens at a Church service. Sometimes people are unfamiliar with procedure or don't know any suitable music. Sometimes they will suggest music which is widely inappropriate. What do you do? The first principle is to ensure that the liturgical requirements are respected, but the time of bereavement is not the right moment to give a crash course in

liturgy, and someone's 'favourite hymn; may be the best expression of the faith of the bereaved. The rite is supposed to be a healing encounter with the all-merciful God, and we should not stand in the way.

Like a wedding, a funeral has more 'moments; than those that happen in church — there are also gatherings after Mass and at home. We should not try to pack everything into the liturgy; some memories are best celebrated at other moments, in which favourite pieces of music find a better place.

Sometimes the family may not want to sing at all. They may not be used to being in church. They may however appreciate having some music played or sung by regular congregation or musicians.

Opening Song

To draw the community together in prayer at the beginning of the funeral liturgy, the procession should be accompanied, whenever possible, by the singing of the entrance song. This song ought to be a profound expression of belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the dead, as well as a prayer of intercession for the deceased. §144, cf. §76 (NB for processions see page 9)

Choosing an Opening Song: The Opening Song must be well-known or easy to pick up, so that everyone has the opportunity of joining in. A standard hymn might be advisable, or a psalm with response (e.g. Pss 42, 63, 120). The mood should be of Christian hope, but people may not feel able to sing something triumphant in character right at the start. You can feel Christian hope without being able to give an outward show of joy.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Responsorial Psalm

The Responsorial Psalm enables the community to respond in faith to the first reading. Through the psalms the community expresses its grief and praise, and acknowledges its Creator and Redeemer as the sure source of trust and hope in times of trial. §148

How to sing the psalm

Psalms may be sung responsorially, with the response sung by the assembly and all the verses sung by the cantor or choir, or directly, with no response and all the verses sung by all or by the cantor or choir. When not sung, the responsorial psalm after the reading should be recited in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God. §148

Choosing a Psalm: Ideally there will be a Cantor present, but this cannot be relied upon. Metrical (hymn-type) versions can be used as a substitute for psalm tones. What is important is to sing a *psalm* and not a hymn totally unconnected with the psalter.

Gospel Acclamation

In the *alleluia*, or the gospel acclamation, the community welcomes the Lord who is about to speak to it. If the *alleluia* is not sung, it is omitted. The cantor or choir sings the *alleluia* or Lenten acclamation first and the people repeat it. The verse is then sung by the cantor or choir and the *alleluia* or Lenten acclamation is then sung once more by all. §149

The Gospel Acclamation: This is one of the most important sung parts of the Mass. If there are enough regular worshippers present, it should be no problem to sing an Alleluia or Lenten equivalent, even without a cantor, and with the verse being read.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of Gifts

Instrumental music or a song (for example Psalm 18:1-6, Psalm 63, Psalm 66: 13-20, or Psalm 138) may accompany the procession with gifts. §153

Eucharistic Prayer

Since music gives greater solemnity to a ritual action, the singing of the people's parts of the eucharistic prayer should be encouraged, that is, the responses of the preface dialogue, the Sanctus, the memorial acclamation, and the Great Amen. §153

Singing the Acclamations: The 'Holy, Holy', Memorial Acclamation and Amen are also top priority for singing. There should be a simple 'weekday' setting which is known to the regular congregation, or a responsorial one which will help participation.

Communion Rite

To reinforce and to express more fully the unity of the congregation during the communion rite, the people may sing the Lord's Prayer, the doxology, the Lamb of God, and a song for the communion procession (e.g. Pss 23, 27, 34, 63 or 121). §153

Singing at Communion: Of the items listed here, the Lamb of God or 'Breaking of Bread' song and the Communion Processional are the most important. Experience, however, shows that people need a lot of encouragement to sing while processing to Communion, and if it seems unlikely that people will join in, the cantor could sing a suitable psalm, or the tune of the Song of Farewell could be played through quietly. If a Communion Song is to be sung, it could start at the end of the procession.

THE FINAL COMMENDATION

Song of Farewell

The song of farewell, which should affirm hope and trust in the paschal

mystery, is the climax of the rite of final commendation. It should be sung to a melody simple enough for all to sing. It may take the form of a responsory or even a hymn. When singing is not possible, invocations may be recited by the assembly. §156

Singing the Song of Farewell: As this is one of the ‘priority’ items of the funeral liturgy, it is very important for the parish to learn one or two settings (perhaps one hymn-style and one song-type setting). Note that the Song of Farewell is (perhaps the only) song in the Liturgy which addresses a person directly.

Procession to Place of Committal

Especially when accompanied by music and singing, the procession can help to reinforce the bond of communion between the participants. Whenever possible, psalms or songs may accompany the entire procession from the church to the place of committal. In situations where a solemn procession... is not possible, an antiphon or song may be sung as the body is being taken to the entrance of the church. Psalms, hymns, or liturgical songs may also be sung by the participants as they gather at the place of committal. §158

† For processions, ministers of music should give preference to settings of psalms and songs that are responsorial or litanic in style and that allow the people to respond to the verses with an invariable refrain §41

† **Processions:** Nowadays it is only in exceptional circumstances that a proper procession to the graveside will be possible. The short procession out of the church does, however, give time for the singing of a setting of the processional song mentioned in §158, and the parish repertoire should include one or two of these.

RITE OF COMMITTAL

The singing of well-chosen music at the rite of committal can help the mourners as they face the reality of the separation. At the rite of committal with final commendation, whenever possible, the song of farewell should be sung. In either form of the committal rite, a hymn or liturgical song that affirms hope in God’s mercy and in the resurrection of the dead is desirable at the conclusion of the rite. §232

Live music

Live music will almost always be preferable to recorded music. Pastors may have to arrange for copies of appropriate music to be kept at the chapel for the use of congregations. Where recorded music is habitually used, pastors should ensure that the crematorium authorities are supplied with recordings of good quality liturgical music. §235

Rite of Committal at a Crematorium

In the rite of committal with final commendation at a crematorium, the invitation and the Scripture verse are followed by an invitation to silent prayer and the signs of farewell. A song of farewell may be sung, after which a prayer of commendation and committal is said, during which the coffin may be removed from view. The rite concludes with the prayer over the people and a final song. §227

COMMITTAL WHEN NO OTHER LITURGY HAS TAKEN PLACE

Greeting	<i>Introductory Rites</i>
Sprinkling with Holy Water	
Entrance Procession/ Opening Song (§263)	
Invitation to Prayer	
Opening Prayer	
(First Reading)	<i>Liturgy of the Word</i>
Psalm or suitable song (§268)	
Gospel	
Homily	
General Intercessions	
Intercessions	
The Lord's Prayer	
Concluding Prayer	
Invitation to Prayer	<i>Final Commendation</i>
Silence	
Signs of Farewell	
SONG OF FAREWELL (§278)	
Prayer of Commendation	
Psalms and Songs (§280)	<i>Procession to Place of Committal</i>
Invitation	<i>Rite of Committal</i>
Scripture Verse	
Prayer over the Place of Committal	
Committal	
Prayer over the People	<i>Concluding Rite</i>

A hymn or song may conclude the rite (§250)

COMMITTAL

WHEN NO OTHER LITURGY HAS TAKEN PLACE — CREMATORIUM RITE

Greeting	<i>Introductory Rites</i>
Sprinkling with Holy Water	
Entrance Procession/ Opening Song (§306)	
Invitation to Prayer	
Opening Prayer	
(First Reading)	<i>Liturgy of the Word</i>
Psalm or suitable song (§311)	
Gospel	
Homily	
General Intercessions	
Intercessions	
The Lord's Prayer	
Concluding Prayer	
Invitation to Prayer	<i>Final Commendation</i>
Silence	
[Signs of Farewell]	
SONG OF FAREWELL (§321)	
Prayer of Commendation and the Committal	
Prayer over the People	<i>Concluding Rite</i>
<i>A hymn or song may conclude the rite</i> (§323)	

Music for the 'single-stage' funerals; It has to be recognised that the 'one-stop' funeral, which consists simply of a visit to the crematorium, is quite a common occurrence, especially in certain parts of the country.

Seen from an ideal standpoint, this is a rather poor way to celebrate a funeral, but the wishes of the mourners should be respected, and the approach of the presider (and musicians, if any) should be to treat a crematorium or cemetery chapel funeral with as much care as any other, and look upon it as opportunity for God's love to be made known. It is for this reason that the rites described here have been provided, one of the great innovations of the Order of Christian Funerals. The considerate attitude should extend to the provision of music, which has already been singled out as an important element ('Music is integral to the funeral rites', says the very first quotation of this booklet), but it cannot be denied that the practical problems are considerable, for example the shortness of the time allowed at most crematoria and the lack of provision for musical accompaniment apart from the organ played by the official organist.

Look at the priorities (bold type), noting how they correspond with those of a funeral held in church, including the Song of Farewell.

If it seems probable that the participation of the congregation will be minimal, for whatever reason, recorded music may be used. In what is probably the first mention of such music in an official paragraph 235 (quoted above) deals with this question.

THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Music

The sung celebration of the liturgy of the hours 'is more in keeping with the nature of this prayer, and a mark of both higher solemnity and closer union of hearts in offering praise to God' (*Musicam Sacram*, 1967, §37, DOL §4158) Whenever possible, therefore, singing at morning and evening prayer should be encouraged. §553

Priorities

In the choice of music preference should be given to the singing of the hymn, the psalmody and the gospel canticle. The introductory verse, the responsory, the intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, and the dismissal may also be sung. §553

Ministers

An organist or other instrumentalist and a cantor should assist the assembly in singing the hymn, psalms and responses. The parish community should also prepare booklets or participation aids that contain an outline of the hour, the texts and music belonging to the people, and directions for posture, gesture and movement. §553

Singing Evening or Morning Prayer: It is no more complicated to sing Evening Prayer or Morning Prayer than anything else in the liturgy. The only problem is our lack of relative familiarity with these rites, and of the knowledge of how to go about simplifying the rather complicated official versions. You should start with examine the texts as they are given in the OCF, Part IV, but adaptation is recommended if it will lead to these sections actually being used. A basic form could include:

Introduction
 [Lighting of candle, in the evening]
Hymn
Psalm (one or two) [incense psalm in the evening]
Scripture
Magnificat (Benedictus in the morning)
Intercessions
Lord's Prayer
Conclusion: a prayer, sign of peace

As with all liturgy, it is preferable to *sing* what is singable rather than simply recite it. Music for almost all these elements may be found in the standard hymnbooks in use in most parishes and also in published collections of music for the OCF. The sort of music suitable for the Vigil will be found very suitable for Evening Prayer.
