

# HOW FUNERALS ARE CHANGING



ST MARY'S ON THE HILL PARISH

From 1st July 2024

## **A. Introduction**

Customs by their nature do not change very often and this is especially true of funeral customs. In Ireland, we have been used to a three- or four-day wake followed by a funeral Mass and burial or cremation. The Priest has played an important part in these customs saying prayers at the wake, celebrating the funeral Mass and saying prayers at the graveside or the crematorium.

However, when changes do come along - less priests, new ministries in the Church and a desire for families to be more involved in the funeral rites - customs need to adapt.

The Priest will continue to have an important role in the funeral customs of the Catholic Tradition - so long as there are still Priests - but new ministries and family led prayers will be part of a new funeral rite.

## **B. When a Loved One dies**

After a 'Loved One' has died you will need to contact a Funeral Director who will prepare the body of your 'Loved One' for burial. The Funeral Director will liaise with the parish, on your behalf, to help make the funeral arrangements. As the date and time of the funeral Mass will need to coordinate with the date and time of the burial or cremation, the Funeral Director is best placed to arrange both together.

## **C. Prayers in the Home**

Once contact has been made with the parish office the priest, when he is available, will call at the wake house to meet the family, discuss the funeral arrangements and say prayers.

If circumstances mean there cannot be a wake at home, he can call to the Funeral Home to meet the family, discuss the arrangements and say prayers there.

The Priest will call again, either to the wake house or the Funeral Home, on the night before the funeral to say prayers but he will no longer call on the morning of the funeral just before the coffin leaves the house.

During Covid, when the practice of calling on the morning of the funeral was postponed, there were no worries for the Priest about delays in traffic and the family were appreciative of personal time to say 'goodbyes' before the coffin left the home. Families were happy to say a prayer themselves and some played a favourite song of the deceased – easily done at home. Therefore, in this parish, the Priest will say prayers in the wake house the night before, not on the morning of the funeral.

*The Priest will say the prayers in the wake house the night before, **not** on the morning of the funeral.*

#### **D. When should the Wake begin?**

Nowadays it is not uncommon for a funeral to be celebrated up to a week after the death of a 'Loved One'. This is usually beyond the control of the parish and the Funeral Director, depending on the availability for burial or cremation. When this happens, some families postpone the beginning of the wake at home until a few days before the funeral.

The family may either bring the coffin home immediately but communicate that the house is private until a few days before the funeral or the coffin might stay with the Funeral Director until a few days before the funeral. This can give the family a period of rest before the wake begins. The family may need this time especially if they were sitting up with their 'Loved One' before he/she died. The bereaved should know that people are very understanding about such matters.

## **E. The Funeral Mass/Service in the Church**

It has been customary for a Priest of the parish to say a funeral Mass for parishioners of the parish, and this will continue to be the practice so long as we have Priests available. Looking to the future a time will come, in many parishes, when there may not be a Priest available to celebrate a funeral Mass, but an ordained deacon can lead a Funeral Service and preach, either in the Church or at the Crematorium. A deacon cannot celebrate Mass, but a Mass can be offered for the deceased at the time of the Months Mind.

*[The Diocese introduced the ordained ministry of the Deacon several years ago. A Deacon may be a married or single man, working or retired, who is ordained and assigned to a parish by the Bishop to help with pastoral and liturgical ministry. A Deacon can celebrate some of the sacraments that a Priest celebrates, however he cannot celebrate Mass.]*

## **F. The Committal at the Crematorium: A Service of Farewell**

**A Priest will lead the Funeral Mass in the Church, but a family member or close friend will lead the Service of Farewell at the Crematorium.**

As you are probably aware, in June 2023, Antrim and Newtownabbey Council opened a new crematorium at 582 Doagh Road, Newtownabbey. The new crematorium facilitates cremations on the hour and allows the family 45 minutes for a service.



When a funeral Mass has already taken place in the church and the soul of a 'Loved One' has been commended to God's love and mercy, it is not essential for the Priest to attend the service at the crematorium. Therefore, from **1st July 2024**, after the Priest has celebrated the funeral Mass in the Church, a family member or close friend (not the Priest) will lead the service at the crematorium.

It is both permissible and appropriate that a family member, a close friend or even a fellow parishioner be invited to lead the service in the crematorium. This service we are calling a 'Service of Farewell'. While some families may be initially nervous about this, many will welcome the opportunity to be more involved in the funeral rites for their 'Loved One'. Any queries or concerns a family might have can be discussed with the Priest beforehand.

*It is both permissible and appropriate that a family member or a close friend lead the Service of Farewell in the crematorium*

*[The Diocese has introduced a new Funeral Ministry course for lay people who could lead a Service of Farewell at the crematorium if the family felt unable to do so or say prayers at the graveside if a Priest was unavailable. Our parish has already one such person trained.]*

The crematorium has facilities to enable the family to play music (hymns/songs) to accompany the service – three pieces of music are adequate. As the crematorium is less intimidating and people are more easily heard than in a large church, it is best to have a 'sharing of memories' about the deceased there.

Immediate family members could lay flowers on the coffin and then finish with the Prayers of Committal. The Prayers of Committal can be printed by the parish and made available.

The crematorium staff or the funeral undertakers can be on hand to help with the running order, so that the service does not overrun into the next service.

## AN EXAMPLE OF A SERVICE OF FAREWELL FOR NEWTOWNABBEY CREMATORIUM

*[This would need to be shortened for Roselawn Crematorium as the service there is only thirty minutes.]*

### 1. THE FIRST PIECE OF MUSIC

The crematorium staff will play the first piece of music as the coffin is carried (or wheeled) into the crematorium and placed on the catafalque.

### 2. WORDS OF THANKS ON BEHALF OF THE FAMILY & THE SHARING OF SOME MEMORIES OF THE DECEASED

Once the coffin is placed on the catafalque and everyone has taken their seats a member of the family or close friend should come forward to the microphone to speak a few words of thanks and share some memories of the deceased.

*(It is good to have some notes written down - 10 minutes maximum.)*

### 3. READING OF A POEM, A REFLECTION OR A PIECE OF SCRIPTURE

*(Optional)*

### 4. THE SECOND PIECE OF MUSIC & LAYING OF FLOWERS ON THE COFFIN

While the crematorium staff play a second piece of music immediate family members could place a single flower on top of the coffin in an act of farewell. The flowers could be ordered beforehand or taken from the funeral spray on the day.

### 5. THE FINAL PRAYERS

When immediate family members have returned to their seats a family member, friend or fellow parishioner, could lead the final prayers of committal.

## 6. THE FINAL PIECE OF MUSIC & CLOSING THE CURTAIN

The crematorium staff will announce the closing of the curtain and play the final piece of music. When the music is finished, they will open the exit doors for the congregation to depart.



### *PLEASE NOTE*

*If, for whatever reasons, a family decide not to have a Funeral Mass in the church but go straight to the crematorium, the Priest will go to the crematorium and lead a Funeral Service there. This is not the same as the situation outlined above: a Service of Farewell.*

## **G. The Committal at the Grave: Prayers at the Graveside**

It is not practical to have a Service of Farewell at the graveside because there are not the facilities provided at the crematorium and the weather can be inclement. It could be more difficult and intimidating for a family member or a close friend to lead a service at the graveside. For these reasons the Priest (or maybe at times a person from the lay funeral ministry) will accompany the funeral procession to the local cemetery and lead the family in the traditional prayers for the committal at the graveside.

This should not be interpreted as the Priest preferring burial in a grave to cremation. This is simply for practical reasons.

## H. Conclusion

Whilst the above might seem daunting and new, there was a time in Ireland when parts of the funeral rites were conducted by members of the family and/or by members of the community e.g. from preparing the body of the deceased for burial (now done by Funeral Directors), to the 'keening' women who helped the family to grieve; from the digging of the grave (now done by the Council) to those who led the Rosary in the home. Remembering these old customs can encourage people to embrace new customs for a new time and for family and community to witness to the importance of faith and prayer as we bury our dead.

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

*May their souls  
and the souls of all the faithful departed  
through the mercy of God rest in peace.  
Amen.*