The Funeral Vigil
When: The vigil is celebrated between the time of death and the funeral liturgy, often on the day before or evening before the funeral Mass.
Where: The vigil may take place in the home of the deceased, at the funeral home, or in the church.
Minister: A priest, deacon, or layperson may preside at the vigil.
Content: The vigil consists mainly of the liturgy of the word. It centers on readings from sacred Scripture, songs, psalms, and intercessory prayer. A brief homily/reflection by the presider is also included. The vigil service is the preferred time for family and friends to offer stories, reflections, and eulogies on the life of the deceased. Devotional prayers, such as the rosary, may not replace the vigil service but may be added.

Introductory Rites
Greeting
Opening Song
Invitation to Prayer
Liturgy of the Word
First Reading
Responsorial Psalm
Gospel
Homily
Prayer of Intercession
Litany
The Lord’s Prayer
*[Eulogies]*
Concluding Rite
Blessing

The Rite of Committal
When: The burial/committal takes place as soon as possible after the funeral Mass.
Where: The rite of committal takes place beside the open grave or place of interment. If this is not possible, it may take place at the cemetery chapel.
Minister: A priest, deacon, or lay person may preside at this service.
Content: Invitation
Scripture Verse
Prayer over the Place of Committal
Committal Intercessions
The Lord’s Prayer
Concluding Prayer
Prayer over the People

Content: Introductory Rites
Greeting
Sprinkling with Holy Water
[Placing of the Pall]
Entrance Procession
[Placing of Christian Symbols]
Opening Prayer
Liturgy of the Word
Readings
Homily
General Intercessions
Liturgy of the Eucharist
*[Eulogy]*
Final Commendation
Invitation to Prayer
Silence
[Signs of Farewell]
Song of Farewell
Prayer of Commendation
Procession to the Place of Committal

The Funeral Mass
When: The funeral Mass is normally celebrated the evening before, or the day of burial/committal.
Where: The funeral Mass takes place in the parish church.
Minister: A priest is the presider for a funeral Mass.

Introducing Rites
Greeting
Sprinkling with Holy Water
[Placing of the Pall]
Entrance Procession
[Placing of Christian Symbols]
Opening Prayer
Liturgy of the Word
Readings
Homily
General Intercessions
Liturgy of the Eucharist
*[Eulogy]*
Final Commendation
Invitation to Prayer
Silence
[Signs of Farewell]
Song of Farewell
Prayer of Commendation
Procession to the Place of Committal

"The celebration of the Christian funeral brings hope and consolation to the living. While proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and witnessing to Christian hope in the resurrection, the funeral rites also recall to all who take part in them God’s mercy and judgement and meet the human need to turn always to God in times of crisis.”
(OCF #7)
Selecting Readings
“The readings proclaim to the assembly the paschal mystery, teach remembrance of the dead, convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom, and encourage the witness of Christian life. Above all, the readings tell of God's designs for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called his own.” (OCF #22)

The parish staff can provide you with resources for selecting the scripture readings. It is important that readers be chosen and prepared to proclaim the scriptures. Members of the family or friends (preferably Catholic) may assist with the readings during the Vigil or Mass if their grief will not make it too burdensome.

Selecting Music
“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.” (OCF #30)

A parish musician or special funeral musician can provide you with assistance in selecting sacred music for the funeral rites. All Catholic liturgy is communal prayer, in which all who have gathered join. The songbook in the church is an excellent starting point to look for assistance in selecting sacred music for the funeral rites. All Catholic funeral Masses have the music sung in the principal languages of the community. Popular songs that were important to the deceased may be used during the reception or other family gatherings.

Eulogies
A family member or friend may speak briefly on behalf of the family. Statements about the deceased should describe the person’s relationship to God, family, and community, or the Christian legacy left behind for others to learn from. Video retrospectives on the life of the deceased are not permitted during the liturgy in the church. These presentations are well suited to the reception or other occasions.

During the **Vigil Service**, the number of people giving eulogies or telling stories about the deceased is not prescribed. The number of speakers should be pre-arranged between family and the Vigil presider. An “open mic” format is not appropriate for liturgy, but additional speakers may share their reflections during a reception. Eulogies may be offered following the Concluding Prayer and before the Concluding Rite.

During the **Funeral Liturgy**, the number of eulogies should be limited to one person (OCF #170). It may be given after Communion and before the Final Commendation. Eulogies should last between 3-5 minutes and should be well prepared in advance.

**Frequent Questions**

**Q:** My child died before baptism. May we still have a Catholic funeral?

**A:** A child who dies before receiving the Sacrament of Baptism may be given Christian funeral rites if the parents intended to have the child baptized.

**Q:** My sister had been away from the Church for some time. May we have a Catholic funeral rites if the parents intended to have the child baptized?

**A:** A: Yes. The family of the deceased is asked to make an offering at the funeral rites.

**Q:** My mother wished to be cremated and to have her ashes scattered. Are Catholics allowed to be cremated? May we scatter her ashes?

**A:** The Catholic Church permits cremation unless it is evident that cremation was chosen for anti-Christian motives. Even when cremation is chosen, the Church recommends that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites. The presence of the human body better expresses the values that the Church affirms in the funeral rites. In the Diocese of Sacramento, a funeral Mass may be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains upon the approval of the pastor. Adaptations of the funeral rites have been prepared for these circumstances. The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they came. 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 the cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires.

**Q:** My father was a decorated military veteran. Why can't we keep the American flag on his casket during the Mass?

**A:** A: Rich or poor, saint or sinner, ordained or lay, veteran or member of a religious order, all are draped with the funeral pall for the Rite of Christian Burial as a sign of our common baptism. In the Church we are all equal, for none of us has earned our salvation. Whatever sort of life we have lived, our faith and hope are in God's free gift of grace, symbolized at the beginning by the white garment of baptism and at the end by the white funeral pall. The casket may be draped with the American flag before entering the Church. The flag is replaced with the funeral pall during the Liturgy. The casket may then be draped again with the American flag upon leaving the Church.

**Q:** My brother committed suicide. Does this mean he cannot have a Catholic funeral?

**A:** A: Catechumens are entitled to the full rite of Christian burial.

**Q:** Should we pay the priest, deacon, or ministers who serve at the funeral rites?

**A:** A: The family of the deceased is asked to make an offering to the Church. The parish or funeral home can assist with determining an appropriate offering.