

I had the privilege to work on the same pastoral staff with Jill Maria Murdy as she developed her strategy and resources for enhancing funeral ministry in the parish. Her approach balances good theology and practical advice. At a time when a growing number of contemporary funeral directors almost seem to be “marketing” services to grieving families by promoting secular memorials, Jill Maria provides a helpful path for retaining the power of the Catholic ritual to address the reality of death and bring healing and hope through the celebration of the promise of the resurrection.

**MOST REVEREND JEFFREY R. HAINES**, *Auxiliary Bishop,*  
*Archdiocese of Milwaukee*



In this insightful pastoral resource, Jill Maria covers many of the issues and societal changes that have emerged since the *Order of Christian Funerals* was promulgated almost thirty years ago. Filled with practical advice and thoughtful theological reflection, this book should be on the shelf of every priest, musician, and pastoral minister who deals with funerals.

**CHRISTOPHER FERRARO**, *Director of Music,*  
*Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Lindenhurst, NY*

Jill Maria Murdy has written a wonderful, pastoral, practical, personal, liturgical, and theological resource for anyone involved in ministry to persons preparing for the celebration of the funeral of a loved one, or preparing for their own funeral. I am adding it to the required texts for a class that I teach on the *Order of Christian Funerals*. It will help our society view death as part of life, and grief as part of the journey into eternal life.

**REV. PAUL H. COLLOTON, OSFS, D.MIN.,** *Priest Chaplain  
and Director of Campus Ministry, Ohio Dominican University*



Changing times, changing mores. Death and dying in the American context have evolved over the decades and continue to do so. Just to mention a few developments, hospice is involved more and more in the events surrounding death, and many more people are choosing cremation as the preferred way to deal with the mortal remains of loved ones. These present challenges for the *Order of Christian Funerals* published in 1985 and revised in 1989. Jill Maria offers concrete, practical, and pastoral measures on how the Order can be applied in these changing times.

**MICHAEL S. DRISCOLL,** *Professor Emeritus, University of Notre Dame*

*A Parish Guide for*  
BEREAVEMENT  
MINISTRY  
& FUNERAL  
PLANNING

JILL MARIA MURDY



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## PROLOGUE

O death! How bitter is the thought of you  
for the one at peace in his home,  
For the one who is serene and always successful,  
who can still enjoy life's pleasures.  
O death! How welcome is your sentence to the weak,  
failing in strength,  
Stumbling and tripping on everything,  
with sight gone and hope lost.  
Do not fear death's decree for you;  
Remember, it embraces those before you and those to come.

■ **SIRACH (ECCLESIASTICUS) 41:1-3**

IF WE SPEND ANY TIME IN PARISH FUNERAL MINISTRY, WE WILL SURELY EXPERIENCE BOTH THESE EXTREMES. There are tragic deaths of children, those who die suddenly in car accidents and in violent situations, the death of police officers and soldiers, or young adults dying from a terminal illness. Similarly, there are times when an elderly person has been dying for so long that death is indeed welcome, when the pain of an illness has been so extreme the family is just glad that the struggle is over.

When a parish gets a call about an incoming funeral, it puts many different wheels in motion. Likely, an administrative assistant will be the first one to take a call on a funeral, and will be making calls and sending texts or emails trying to coordinate with priests, ministers, and funeral home, while also juggling the facilities calendar to sched-

ule a time to meet with family members for planning, and times for the Vigil service, funeral, luncheon, and Rite of Committal.

Often, when we meet with a family, we do not know what the story is until they arrive. We know that it will be emotional and that we must be prepared to help the family through any situation. In my own life, I have sat on both sides of that planning table, and it is never easy; but is so very important to do it reverently and well! In this book, I include information about the rites in general, along with particular examples based upon my understanding of death. This book, then, is a mixture of knowledge acquired along the way in my profession, my own personal experiences, and research in areas that were foreign to me. It is my prayer that this book will provide you with tools to help those you serve sing the resurrection song!

*Jill Maria Murdy, July 2018*



## CHAPTER ONE

# *The World We Live In*

ONCE UPON A TIME, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAFE TO ASSUME THAT A FAMILY COMING IN TO PLAN A FUNERAL WOULD ALL BE CATHOLIC, and that ninety percent of those attending the funeral would likely be Catholic too. Most would likely be from the parish. In many cases, the family really didn't have any input into the Scripture readings, and the same basic hymnody might be employed for most funerals. Those with memories of pre-Vatican II liturgies may recall the haunting Latin *Dies Irae* and the *In Paradisum* ending the liturgy.

Though there have been no changes to the *Order of Christian Funerals* since 1985/89, society has been through many transitions. The way we grieve is different. Many cultural traditions, including wakes that lasted several days, no longer happen. In many ways we have sanitized death and tried to make it as quick and pain free

as possible. As Richard P. Taylor tells us in his book, *Death and the Afterlife*,

the wake is observed today only by some Roman Catholics and by Orthodox Jews. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is much more common for the deceased to be removed from the home very quickly (if he or she is not already away from home, dying in a hospital or hospice). The local coroner or attending physician is called to complete an official certificate of death, and the body is soon transported to a morgue or funeral home. Thus, religious traditions play little part of the funerary customs of Christians today until the body has been handled by secular professionals, cosmetically altered, placed in a coffin, and made ready for transport to the funeral service.

■ *DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE, FUNERARY CUSTOMS, P. 129*

This is echoed in an essay by Charles O. Jackson entitled “Death Shall Have No Dominion” in *Death and Dying: Views from Many Cultures*. There he tells us:

the dead world has been largely lost because an increasingly temporal and secular-minded living world has actively chosen to abandon even the topic itself. Though hardly news, it should be noted here nonetheless that in this century death has become a taboo. Very little relationship is possible with a realm which we are rigorously seeking to forget...In a culture which will support no longer the certainty of afterlife, natural death and physical decomposition have become too horrible to contemplate or discuss. ■ *DEATH AND DYING, P. 52*

Much has changed in recent years. Families have spread out, and many times the children of the deceased are nonpracticing Catholics

or they have moved on to another tradition, likely a nondenominational church that is almost the polar opposite of the Catholic ritual. In the Catholic rite itself, the post-Vatican II ritual has more emphasis on hope in the resurrection. However, many times the liturgy gets stuck in an almost cookie-cutter format with “Amazing Grace,” “How Great Thou Art,” “Here I Am, Lord,” “Be Not Afraid,” “On Eagle’s Wings,” and “Shepherd Me, O God.” (Note: Nothing is wrong with these songs; they just don’t have to be the automatic choices. This will be discussed in a later chapter.)

Occasionally, family members trying to get a jump on planning go to the internet and YouTube, where they may come up with ideas like Vince Gill’s “Go Rest High Upon a Mountain,” or Frank Sinatra’s “My Way.” They come in with prayer poems with titles like “It was God’s Plan” that may be comforting to them but have no place in the liturgy. They mean no harm and are thinking of their loved ones, so it is necessary in these situations to deal with them in as kind and pastoral a way as possible, while still respecting the rites. It means that clear and honest explanations of the ritual and a discerning heart are necessary in working with them. What we do not need to do at this time is reinvent the liturgy. Rather we need to follow the rites as best we can and let their inherent richness help the family involved celebrate the Rite of Christian Burial.

It is safe to say that most people do not have a clear understanding of the *Order of Christian Funerals*, and that for various reasons, neither parishes or funeral homes often encourage the Rite in its full form today. A lot of factors influence this: people’s understanding of the rites themselves, mobile family traveling in from all over, the working society of today, the schedules of churches and funeral homes, and the almighty dollar itself.

Many years ago, early in this author’s parish ministry, there was a case where a woman died. She was a daily Massgoer, and her faith was part and parcel of her very being. Sadly, her kids did not go to church,

so they said, “Just do a little service at the funeral home.” Both the priest and I angsted over this woman not receiving a full Mass of Christian Burial, so we began talking about how we could help other folks in that situation. It was at that time that we decided we wanted to help people prepare in advance, so that they might understand the rites and their wishes might be respected. We began to offer funeral planning workshops in our parish. In the next chapter we will talk about those workshops and preplanning in general.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# *Preplanning for Funerals*

ONE OF THE EASIEST MISTAKES TO MAKE AS A PROFESSIONAL MINISTER OR A TRAINED VOLUNTEER IS TO PRESUME KNOWLEDGE. In our fields, we work with death and funeral rituals so much they can become commonplace and just another thing on our calendar for a busy day or week. But for those looking at death for the first time, there are a lot of unknowns out there. It is not uncommon for funeral homes to sell prepackaged deals, but that usually amounts to getting a plot and getting details lined up and paid for, and doesn't usually include any of the fine points dealing with the funeral rite itself. So let us take a look at how we can address some of those questions.

The parish I serve offers a funeral planning workshop once or twice a year, and we also schedule individual planning meetings as requested to better assist people. Below are topics addressed in our planning sessions that might be helpful to you. We start before death itself, by explaining the difference between anointing of the sick and last rites.

**ANOINTING OF THE SICK, LAST RITES, AND PRAYERS FOR THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED**

During the course of an illness, one may be visited many times by a pastoral minister or lay volunteer bringing Holy Communion to the home and praying with the sick. Before a major surgery, or when one is in failing health, they may also receive the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. Many are afraid of this, thinking it is a sure sign they are about to die. But remember, sacraments are for the living. One may be anointed multiple times in life.

In pre-Vatican II days, the concept of “Extreme Unction” or “Last Rites” was prevalent as the only time one was anointed. Then, one made a last confession, received communion, and was anointed on their deathbed. When someone is ill, they may be visited by a pastoral care worker or volunteer, or by the priest, who may anoint them. The introduction to the anointing of the sick states: “The priest should ensure that the abuse of delaying the sacrament does not occur, and that the celebration takes place while the sick person is capable of active participation” and that “those needing the sacrament should seek it at the beginning of a serious illness” (99). It is preferable to anoint someone who has the wherewithal to understand they are receiving the sacrament, but if not, God’s grace still prevails.

The *Catechism* reminds us, “The Eucharist should always be the last sacrament of the earthly journey, the ‘viaticum’ for ‘passing over’ to Eternal life” (1517). In the absence of a priest, a lay person may

give someone this final communion but may not anoint them or hear their confession and give absolution.

There may be a Catholic hospital chaplain on staff or on call at your local hospital, or perhaps the priests in the area have a rotation system where each takes different days or nights of the week. Often, though, hospital staff may be calling around scrambling to find any priest to come anoint a person. There are times when someone may be dead on arrival, or when a family calls the parish because a loved one has just passed away. At those times, the priest may come and pray with the family, and many will find comfort in that, but he cannot anoint the deceased, though some will do what is call a “conditional anointing.”

However, there are beautiful “Commendation of the Dying” prayers, as well as the “Prayers for the Dead” found in the *Order of Christian Funerals* (OCF). If the priest knows the family well, being there at this time will surely be a comfort to them. When a priest or pastoral minister is able to come and visit and pray with the family, it may help a family that is less connected feel closer to the church, and it may also provide a sense of the person’s life, and their family, so that the priest and staff are better able to minister to them. At this time, the family may be overwhelmed and not know what to do next; so helping them address this will help lessen their confusion.

It is good to recall that the priest must do the anointing, or reconciliation, but any pastoral care worker or Minister of Communion may visit with the sick, or offer communion and prayers with the dead. Perhaps there is someone on your staff assigned these tasks, and they can steer the family in the right direction.

#### **WHOM DO I CALL FIRST?**

Hopefully, your parish has a good working relationship with local funeral homes. Often it is the funeral home that notifies the parish of a death, but it is usually better if the family calls the church before

going to visit the home. This way staff can be aware of the death to add the name to general intercessions and parish bulletins, and begin making plans for the impending funeral. Sometimes the logistics of getting family members, priest, musicians, and the mortuary together are really difficult. Once upon a time it might have been simple to say, “Mom died, and we want to have her funeral on Thursday at 11 AM,” but with the shortage of priests, and the frequent clustering of parishes, there are fewer people to cover a much larger area.

Often, families end up meeting with the funeral home before they come in and plan the funeral liturgy, and the home is rushing to get the obituary into the paper. Sometimes decisions are made about what the services will look like without consulting the parish, and this can make it more difficult for those meeting to plan the funeral. For example, the family may be planning to have a visitation before church in the narthex, and no Vigil service, yet they have four people who want to speak about the deceased. This can be problematic, and would be a situation where a Vigil service may have been very beneficial. It is wise to provide families with some outline of the funeral process, so that they can make planning decisions that they feel good about. There are times when people do start out by calling the funeral home, and surely, the two make it work, but encourage your people to contact your parish first.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURE OF THE FUNERAL RITUAL**

### ***The Vigil***

Ideally, the Rite of Christian Burial should be a threefold rite. There should be a Rite of Reception and Vigil for the Deceased, frequently taking place the night before at the funeral home or church itself. Usually what happens is that there is a brief service at the end of a visitation period. According to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, “The

vigil in the form of the liturgy of the word consists of the introductory rites, the liturgy of the word, the prayer of intercession, and a concluding rite” (57).

This is the first stage of grief for many who, perhaps, see the body and casket or urn for the first time. It is also a time to greet and hug and share tears and laughter. For those unable to attend the funeral, it is a chance to share their respects with the family. It is also a time when many non-Catholic friends frequently come because they are more comfortable with a visitation than with the funeral liturgy. In many cultures the vigil or wake used to last several days and was frequently held in the home. This was a very healthy part of the grieving process that we have lost in many ways.

Being connected electronically also changes things. Sometimes instead of waiting in line to sign a guest book, people offer their condolences at a website set up by the funeral home or at legacy.com. Similarly, since many people post information about a loved one’s death on social media, they may be getting notes from hundreds of people offering pictures, stories, and sympathies. This is especially true in times of tragedies. Often someone will start a GoFundMe page to ask for financial help for the funeral. It is also not uncommon for obituaries to request that in lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the funeral expenses, the Cancer Society, the local parish, or a charity of their choice.

The Vigil itself is usually presided over by a priest or deacon, but it easily could be a Sister, or a commissioned, trained lay person. Sometimes, the Vigil takes the shape of the Rosary instead of a word service, or groups like the Knights of Columbus or a women’s altar guild will do a Rosary or a prayer service before the formal Vigil begins.

This is also a place for family members to share their remarks of remembrance or a eulogy. In fact it is more appropriate to do so now than on the day of the funeral itself. Sometimes the person leading

the service will open it up to remarks from the floor, or this is the place where all the grandchildren can “share something special about grandpa,” etc. One of the beautiful things about a visitation, especially away from the church, is that it is a fine place to play the Elvis songs grandma so loved, or something else that is special, quirky, and a beloved part of the departed. Put simply, the Vigil and visitation are very much about the deceased, and there is a simple ritual in place, but there is also some leeway in how it is celebrated.

Due to busy schedules, and the economics involved, there are many times when families no longer opt for a separate Vigil. Sometimes it depends on whether they have talked to the funeral home or the church first. It is becoming very common for there to be a one- or two-hour visitation at the church before the funeral, which may then be a day or evening funeral.

The difficult thing about this is that then people try and put everything into the funeral—the poems, the fishing stories, the favorite song from high school, each child sharing memories of Dad. (This author was at a funeral once where four children each told the same story of a toy airplane and took over twenty minutes to do so.) Add to that the K of C still wanting to get their Rosary or prayer service in, and it can become a very messy rite of redundant and combined rituals and non-Catholic things. It is always challenging when we mix devotional prayer (the Rosary) and liturgical prayer (word service). This is similar to the growing number of elements that people try and throw into a wedding today, just because they saw it someplace else or read about it on Pinterest.

Sometimes, this is where the hard part of balancing pastoral and professional comes in. It is our job to know the rites and rituals and keep to them as best we can. In reading obituaries, it becomes very obvious that many people are not religious and are inventing their own funerals or making things up along the way. They are often called “Celebrations of Life,” and many times people want to bring

this title into the Catholic liturgy, but the funeral liturgy is not so much about the deceased. We can lose the focus that this is a Mass of Resurrection. The message is that Jesus Christ died and rose again so that we might have eternal life. We are there to pray for the person who died.

### ***The Funeral Mass***

The Rite reminds us:

At the funeral liturgy the community gathers with the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ's victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God's tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery. Through the Holy Spirit the community is joined together in faith as one Body in Christ to reaffirm in sign and symbol, word and gesture that each believer through baptism shares in Christ's death and resurrection and can look to the day when all the elect will be raised up and united in the kingdom of light and peace. ■ OCF 129

If we can understand this ourselves, and help those we are working with to enter into this glorious mystery, the funeral will be all the richer for that—by virtue of the very rite itself, without adding all the extras. Celebrate the life with more shared memories at a meal afterward.

Funerals may not be celebrated Holy Thursday morning or throughout the Paschal Triduum, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, or on Holy Days of Obligation (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM], 380). While a funeral may technically be celebrated on a Sunday of Ordinary Time, very few priests are willing to do that. Adding this on top of the weekend's roster of Masses is

extremely demanding on them physically and spiritually. Technically, a Sunday service could only be one without a Mass. Rather than get into the minute details, most parishes simply say “no” to Sundays. Besides the parish difficulties, it would be very hard to work with a cemetery on that day, so burial would have to take place later.

### ***Visitation***

Many times there is a visitation at church prior to the funeral. Depending on parish tradition, size of funeral, and architecture, this may take place in a gathering space or narthex, or in the body of the church itself. It is important to have a clear understanding of what may or may not be allowed in these spaces.

Picture boards, florals, PowerPoint videos, and other memorabilia come to mind here. It is helpful to have a clear policy in writing as to what your parish or diocese allows. Make sure that you have the same materials posted on your parish website, as some people will go there first looking for information. If this is included in writing in your planning materials it will help you in difficult situations so that you do not have to make a decision on the fly. If the visitation is in the church itself, some of these materials may need to be removed before the liturgy, depending on the liturgical season or the policies of the parish.

Many churches clearly state that the flowers and environment in the church are not to be disturbed. Some may suggest that a few bouquets may remain in the church for the liturgy, while in other parishes they must be removed beforehand. (*Note:* The liturgical season may also play a factor in this, e.g., flowers in Lent.) One parish may welcome flowers and plants from funerals as donations, and another may say “please remove them all.” Things like that may depend on the pastor involved, or whether your church has three funerals a month or five funerals a week.

## **THE FUNERAL MASS**

People can be easily overwhelmed by explanations of the funeral liturgy. A simple way to describe it is, “The beginning and end are a little more complex, but the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist are the same,” or help put them at ease by saying, “It doesn’t matter if you don’t understand what comes next. We do, and we’ll help you along.”

While you may want to put their minds at ease, some persons are more detail oriented, or will want to return to the information another time to prepare themselves mentally. It might be a good idea to have another sheet explaining frequently asked questions or “What to Expect at a Catholic Funeral Mass.” I do not like to discuss parish and musician fees during a planning session. Usually the mortuary will take care of that, but it is good to include that information somewhere so that people may have access to it in advance.

### ***The Funeral Mass—Introductory Rites***

This is the outline given for the Introductory Rites. They are meant to be brief.

**GREETING**—These begin with a simple formula. This is not a chatty “how do you do” or “welcome to the parish.” It is scripted in the rite. There are four texts given in OCF 277.

**SPRINKLING WITH HOLY WATER AND/OR BRIEF ADDRESS**—OCF 278 offers this beautiful prayer for those baptized: “In the waters of baptism N. died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May he/she now share with him eternal glory.” It is important to note this is not a time for everyone in the church to sprinkle the casket or urn. That is a tradition that can take place at two other times. Holy water may be available by a prie-dieu during the visitation, or family members and friends may bless with holy water after the Rite of Final Commendation.

**PLACING OF THE PALL**—OCF 279. This is optional and depends on local custom, but may be done by family, friends, or the funeral home. The pall is typically white and is a beautiful symbol of baptism. There is no formal text to accompany this action, but it is helpful if the priest offers a word of explanation, especially if this is taking place in the back of church, because many people cannot see and are relying on the commentary to participate. It is also a brief teaching moment. (*Note:* In the appendix on cremation, OCF 434 clearly states that the covering with pall is to be omitted.)

### ***Entrance Procession***

**PLACING OF CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS**—OCF 281 invites, “A symbol of the Christian life, such as a cross may be carried in procession, then placed on the coffin, either in silence or as a specific text from the rite is said.”

**OPENING PRAYER**—Now we are back into the familiar territory of the liturgy, as this is a prayer straight from the *Roman Missal* in the format people are accustomed to. There are different prayers for celebrating funerals of children, or the unbaptized as well.

While these elements of the Introductory Rites are listed in a clear order in the OCF, what may actually happen could look a bit different depending on the traditions in your parish. Often these center around architecture. As Professor James White taught me in grad school, “Liturgy is ritual, but architecture is king!” meaning the rite and the rubrics may say one thing, but you have to make it work in the building you are in. Several factors come into play here. Where did the visitation take place? Is the casket or urn coming forward in procession, or is it already in place? Will family members be accompanying the procession or are they already seated?

For example, in the parish I serve, it is different if there is a casket or cremated remains present.

With a casket, the procession begins in the back with the welcome and the sprinkling, and then the entrance song is sung while it comes forward. With an urn, though the rite permits it, our parish policy is that it is not carried in procession, but placed in the ossuary beforehand.

So in a funeral liturgy with the urn/ossuary, the liturgy actually begins with the opening hymn and procession, and then the rite of reception and sprinkling with holy water takes place once they have reached the sanctuary. Similarly, you may have to adapt that order to your own situation.

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**—One thing to note is that the OCF says nothing about Entrance and Communion Antiphons, but the Roman Missal itself provides a couple of options for these. Consider reciting or singing them as a regular part of the liturgy. It could easily take place before the greeting.

#### **THE FUNERAL MASS—LITURGY OF THE WORD**

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**—Readings from the Old and New Testament are provided. Typically there will be one of each, but OCF 283 reminds that “depending on pastoral situations either one or two readings may be read before the gospel reading.” In the case of two readings, there is an Old Testament and New Testament reading, unless we are in the Easter Season, in which case there are some New Testament options that may be used as the first reading. There is always a gospel reading.

Sometimes the challenge is that people come in with three gospels, or a couple of psalms or something else. That is when it is important for the staff to step in and help straighten things out. As OCF 344 reminds us, “in consultation with the family and close friends, the minister chooses the texts that most closely reflect the particular circumstances and the needs of the mourners.”

No matter how you “package” the Scriptures, it may be hard to find just the right ones; it will take good discussion and listening. It is interesting to see how other authors have tried to do this.

In his 1987 book *Funeral Liturgies*, Irish priest Flor McCarthy creates “sets” of readings, e.g., an Old Testament, New Testament, and gospel reading that fit together, along with a sample homily to go with it. While this may be a helpful tool for the pastor for reflection, or for a Vigil service, I don’t think it is something you would want to present to the families.

In a more recent attempt, Father Paul Turner creates thematic indexes of the Scripture readings in his book *Light in the Darkness: Preparing Better Catholic Funerals*. This is a more helpful approach, but what they both tell me is that the person working with the family to plan the funeral rite must have an intimate knowledge of the funeral rite, and of the Scriptures involved. That way, you can simply make the loose association to a reading when talking with the family. (The same is true for hymnody and making the right suggestions.)

**THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM**—Frequently, people say things like, “We want the Twenty-third Psalm recited by my uncle.” It is important to explain that it is sung as a responsorial psalm within the context of the liturgy. One can sometimes defuse a situation by either offering a sung version of the psalm, or suggesting that in lieu of remarks of remembrance, or as part of them, the psalm be recited in whole before the liturgy begins, or it could be put on a prayer card, or recited together at the cemetery. Learning how to gently tell people “no” and moving them on to another idea is truly an art in compassion and care.

**THE HOMILY**—A brief homily is given after the gospel reading. Again, the homily is based upon the readings and our hope in the resurrection. It may mention the individual who has died or offer connecting

points about their life and the Scriptures, but this is not the time for a eulogy.

**THE GENERAL INTERCESSIONS**—OCF 285 provides intercessions but says that they may be adapted or new ones composed. Think strongly before you veer from them, though. There is a lot of powerful resurrection theology in them.

**THE FUNERAL MASS—LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist takes place in the normal fashion. There are particular prefaces to be used for this. Sometimes, family members assist as Extraordinary Ministers, but if so, they should be practicing Catholics familiar with this role. Often, before the distribution of communion, it is helpful if the priest explains how it is to take place, e.g., “We will distribute the Body and Blood of Christ to the right side of the church first. Afterward, I will move to the left-hand side. You may receive communion if you are a Catholic in good standing, or you may come forward with your arms crossed to receive a blessing if you will not be receiving communion. If not, you are welcome to remain in the pew. Thank you.”

**THE FUNERAL MASS—FINAL COMMENDATION**

**REMARKS OF REMEMBRANCE**—After Communion, there may be remarks of remembrance offered, though I recommend moving them to before the liturgy begins. In any instance, have clear, concise instructions on what is expected and allowed, e.g., “one page, typed; or three to five minutes.”

**INVITATION TO PRAYER**—There is a formal prayer offered, followed by silence.

The rite is rather nebulous about when the casket or urn is to be sprinkled with holy water or incensed. It suggests it may take place

before or during the Song of Farewell. This is an easy place for the priest and musicians to falter if they are not on the same wavelength. I have found it very helpful when the priest offers an introduction to the Song of Farewell. Just add a simple note or sticky tack to your ritual book saying something like this: “In a moment, as we incense the body of N., we will recall that the incense is a symbol of our prayers rising to heaven [a reference to Psalm 141], and accompanying him/her on his/her journey. Please join us in singing the Song of Farewell found on the back of your order of worship.”

**SONG OF FAREWELL**—This is a frequently misunderstood part of the liturgy. There are times when people just put in any song they want or see this as a place for a solo. However, if one looks at OCF 292, there are clearly specific texts called for. Some of the Catholic publishers do a disservice to families by providing other contemporary texts that are just songs of grief or mourning. They may be beautiful, but they do not replace the song of farewell. It is also an important spot to have everybody praying. By the use of a very simple tune, such as the “Old Hundredth” or “Londonderry Air” settings, you will easily get active participation. Or choose a version that is sung in a responsorial format.

**PROCESSION TO THE PLACE OF COMMITTAL**—Again, a careful look at 294 of the Rite suggests a particular text: “May the angels lead you into Paradise,” the traditional “*In Paradisum*.” Sadly, this whole beautiful setting has frequently been lost to simply singing a “closing song” or a “recessional hymn.”

As perhaps a way of trying to return to the rite itself, but offering some sort of compromise, the latest version of the funeral planning book and materials at my parish lists *In Paradisum (May the Angels Lead You)* as the recessional. If the family still wants “Amazing Grace” or another hymn and they weren’t able to fit it into the places