

New diocesan funeral policies to take effect July 1, 2026

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last year I had extensive discussions with our Presbyteral Council and Diocesan Pastoral Council about how to address some irregular practices that have crept into local funeral services. Following these discussions, over the past several months I have had a series of regional meetings throughout our diocese with local funeral directors and priests in our deaneries to go over the changes in our diocesan policies and procedures that will go into effect July 1, 2026, to ensure that Catholic funerals in our diocese will conform to the norms of the Catholic Church.

According to the Order of Christian Funerals, there are **three parts for the Christian Funeral Rites**: 1) the **Vigil for the Deceased**, which takes place the night before the Funeral Liturgy; 2) the **Funeral Liturgy**, which may be a Funeral Mass or a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass; and 3) the **Rite of Committal**. All three Stations of the Funeral Rites are intricately connected to each other and together form the whole Order of Christian Funerals.

One of the liturgical anomalies that has emerged over the past few years is the practice of having a visitation in the church immediately preceding the Funeral Mass. **As of July 1, 2026, visitation will not be permitted in church on the day of the funeral liturgy.** The vigil, by definition, is the night before, so the vigil prayers will be prayed then by the priest or deacon even if there is no public visitation. In such cases, it would be fitting at least for the immediate family members to join the priest or deacon in the vigil prayers.

This does not mean that the family and friends of the deceased cannot gather at the funeral home prior to the Funeral Mass. In fact, the Order of Christian Funerals has a brief prayer service called **Transfer of the Body to the Church** or to the Place of Committal. Since a priest or deacon is not usually available at the funeral home to lead this prayer service immediately prior to the funeral liturgy in the church, these prayers at the funeral home may be offered by the funeral director, a member of the parish staff, or a relative or friend of the deceased. If the architecture of the parish church can accommodate this, the gathering for the transfer of the deceased into the church may take place in the narthex of the church. The casket with the body of the deceased or the urn with the cremated remains is then brought in procession into the church. If the gathering takes place in the funeral home, the procession will usually take place by motorcade with the remains of the deceased transported in a hearse. If the funeral home is nearby or the gathering is in the narthex of the church, the procession could be on foot. Either way, **the symbolism of this procession of bringing the body of the deceased into the church is a reminder of when the deceased person first entered the church.** Upon arrival at the church entrance, the casket or urn is sprinkled with holy water as a reminder of the waters of baptism. The casket is then covered with a white pall or cloth as a reminder of the baptismal garment that symbolizes putting on the life of Christ.

Another problematic area that has crept into recent practice is with eulogies. The word “eulogy” in Greek literally means “good word,” thus a eulogy in the context of a funeral is speech or writing praising a person who has recently died. **The Order of Christian Funerals permits in certain circumstances “speaking in remembrance of the one who died,”** but does not permit a eulogy during the funeral rites. What’s the difference?

To speak in remembrance of the deceased is to speak about the faith-life of the one who died and to give praise to God. A eulogy makes the person being praised the main focus of attention. The homily and the words of remembrance have God as the primary focus. In this regard, reference may be made to how the deceased person put his or her Christian faith into practice, which provides a good example for others to follow and gives hope for an eternal reward in Heaven.

Unfortunately, too often people speaking at the end of a Funeral Mass say things that are very inappropriate. Even if the remarks are suitable words of remembrance, family members are often overcome with grief and have a hard time getting through their remarks. To avoid either of these difficult situations, **words of remembrance must be submitted for approval to the pastor of the parish at which the funeral rites are to take place at least three days prior to the funeral. Only the priest or deacon will then read the words of remembrance at any of the three stations of the funeral rites, namely, the Vigil, the Funeral Mass or Liturgy, or the Rite of Committal at the cemetery.** If deemed appropriate by the family, words of remembrance or even a eulogy may be given by someone other than the priest or deacon in other gatherings, such as at the meal following the committal service. This should not, however, immediately precede or follow any of the Christian funeral rites.

Although the Catholic Church does not prohibit **cremation** unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine, such as denial of the resurrection of the body, the Church still earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burying the bodies of the deceased be observed. **When cremation does take place, however, all of the cremated remains of the deceased person’s body must be interred following the Rite of Committal.** At no time and in no way shall the cremated remains be divided, separated, or interred in more than one place. Since the Rite of Committal is an essential component of Catholic Funeral Rites, our diocesan policy requires **that interment of cremated remains should ordinarily take place within 30 days following the funeral rites.**

Making funeral arrangements when a loved one has died is difficult while one is in the midst of grief. Our clergy, parish staff members, and local funeral directors are committed to providing caring and compassionate service that offers the consolation and support of the Christian community in carrying out the corporal work of mercy of burying the dead in a dignified and graceful manner.

May God give us this grace. Amen.



Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois