

When a Loved One Dies... As you begin to plan the funeral ritual for your loved one, it is helpful to note that there is a three-stage movement in the rites that we celebrate. The **Vigil**, the **Funeral Liturgy** and the **Committal** outline a movement from the past to present and future. Not long ago, the normative experience of funerals included the body of the deceased, visitation at a funeral home for a full day or more, the church funeral and a cemetery for ground or vault burial. But recently we have seen an increase in families choosing only a few hours or no visitation at the funeral home, declining the Vigil Prayer, choosing immediate cremation, delaying burial of cremains and other funeral innovations. Most of this document assumes the time-tested means of spiritual support when a loved one dies.

At the vigil in a funeral home we remember the person who has died. This usually includes a formal time of prayer called the **Vigil for the Deceased (also called a Wake Service)** led by a parish minister after which those in attendance may choose to offer a eulogy or share memories. We look back over their life, remembering the good times and the bad times. We tell stories we have told before, and hear new stories too. Some families go through their collection of photos and put together a storyboard of a life.

Secondly is the gathering at the church for the **Funeral Liturgy**. The liturgy may be with or without Holy Communion which is decided with the family when planning. Bible readings and songs are chosen by the family in consultation with a member of the parish staff. At the Funeral Liturgy we move from the past into the present. We bring with us all of the memories that have surfaced since the news of this death and bring it to prayer. We lift up this life to God as we gather together in prayer. At the door of the church, the casket is sprinkled with the water of Baptism, clothed with the white pall which is our baptismal garment worn for the last time, and the Paschal Candle is placed before the mortal remains, recalling our journey of faith in the light of Christ. This moment opens us to the consolation of the readings and music and moves us toward the final stage of the funeral journey.

Finally, we leave the church and bring our beloved to a cemetery for the **Committal**, the final place of rest. The graveside prayer and burial of a body or committal prayers in the cemetery chapel are brief, but a very important step in our grieving process. Now we take a step into the future. This is always hard, but as we have moved through the stages in the funeral rite, we are ready to take this last step and let go, not for good, but for now. For we know that one day we will be reunited with our loved one in the Kingdom of God. Our grieving is incomplete in the span of a few days, but this three-step movement outlines the scope of the journey, and leads us forward in faith.

Regarding cremation: Many families choose immediate cremation or cremation after the funeral liturgy. In the case of immediate cremation, there is rarely time spent in a funeral home, so the vigil would not occur. Rather, family and friends gather at the church before the funeral liturgy for which the urn containing cremated remains is present. A photo storyboard can be placed in the gathering area. An 8X10 photo of the deceased may also be placed with the urn in church. After the liturgy, a brief word of gratitude and any invitation to a memorial meal may be offered. Whenever cremation is chosen, the urn should be interred in cemetery ground, a columbarium or mausoleum as a final resting place. When cremation of the body takes place following the Funeral Liturgy, a parish minister can be available to join the family to offer a prayer of committal at a later date. We treat these mortal remains as respectfully as we would care for the body of your loved one.

We suggest reading the Funeral FAQ's from the Archdiocese of Detroit which can be found on our parish website.