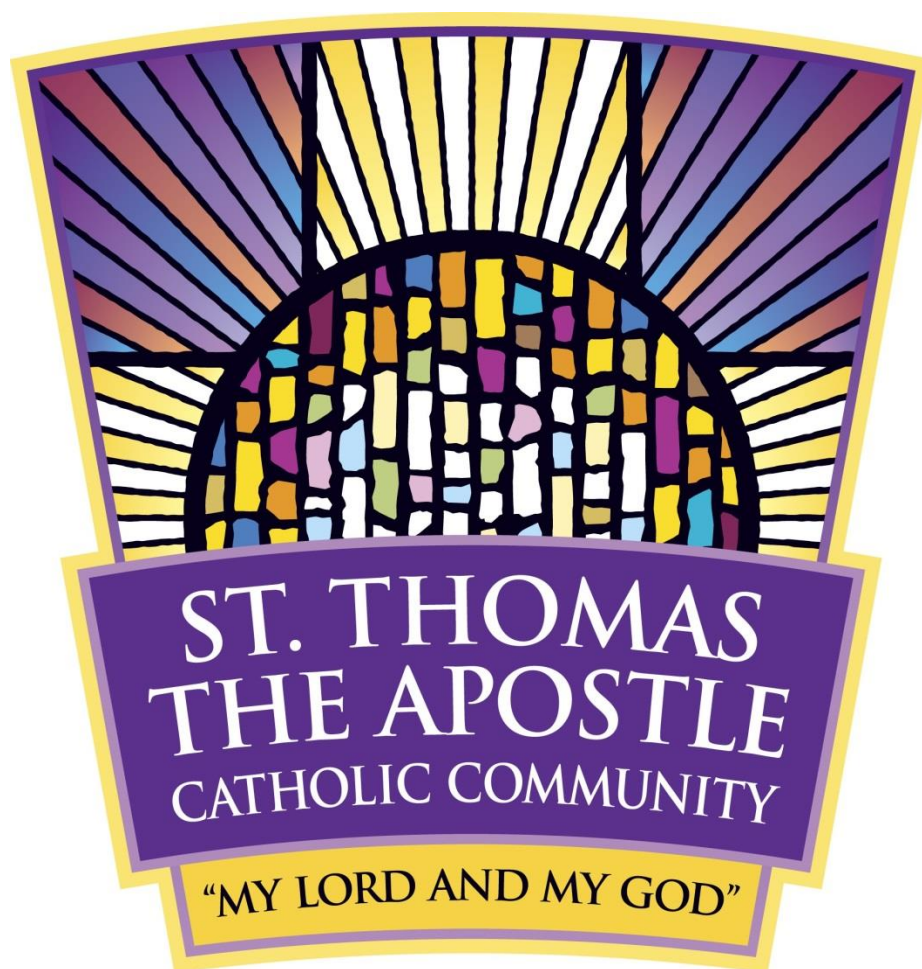


# FUNERAL PLANNING GUIDE



**SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH  
BILLINGS, MT**

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# Introduction

This guide is provided for the benefit of parishioners of St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Parish in Billings, Montana, and their families/loved ones. Please note that per Canon Law of the Catholic Church no. 1177: *“A funeral for any deceased member of the faithful must generally be celebrated in his or her parish church.”* This means that in order to celebrate a funeral at St. Thomas, the deceased should be a parishioner of this parish, unless there is an extenuating circumstance, which per Canon Law requires permission of both the Pastor of the deceased’s parish and the Pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle.

## Words from the Pastor

As it is written in the third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes: *“There is an appointed time for everything... A time to be born, and a time to die... God has made everything appropriate to its time, and has put the timeless into our hearts...”* When a loved one dies, we do not mourn or lose hope, but have cause for great celebration, for our God is a loving and merciful God who desires to show us the fullness of life in his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is in this spirit of faith we gather to mourn the passing of a loved one, recount stories and memories at the Vigil service, usually at the funeral home. As a Christian, Catholic people, we believe that death is not the end of life, but the beginning of a new life in God. We gather for the funeral Mass—a celebration—which reflects our hope, giving thanks to God for the gift of the life of a loved one through our most sacred act of thanksgiving, the Eucharist. We, the parish staff and parishioners at St. Thomas the Apostle are blessed to walk with you and yours in this time of transition towards eternal life in Christ.

## Essential Contacts

When preparing for a funeral, it is very important to make arrangements with the parish church and a chosen funeral home. You do not need to wait until a loved one has passed to contact the church/funeral home to make arrangements. It is recommended that you consult with a loved one about their wishes, or write down your own wishes which will ultimately guide decisions in the process ahead. This preparation process can bring great peace, as it is good to put one’s affairs in order—we at the parish are here to help. Please contact us to prepare for a funeral and be in touch with your desired funeral home, all of which are fine options:

St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Parish	(406) 656-5800	2055 Woody Drive, 59102
Michelotti-Sawyers Mortuary	(406) 252-3417	1001 Alderson Ave, 59102
Dahl Funeral Chapel	(406) 248-8807	10 Yellowstone Ave, 59101
Smith Funeral Chapels	(406) 245-6427	304 34 <sup>th</sup> St W, 59102
Cremation & Funeral Gallery	(406) 254-2414	29 8 <sup>th</sup> St W, 59101
Sunset Memorial Gardens & Mausoleum	(406) 656-6350	1721 Central Ave, 59102
Remington Letcher Funeral Chapel	(406) 672-0099	420 19 <sup>th</sup> Ave W, Laurel, 59044

## Important Planning Considerations

The parish church of St. Thomas the Apostle is an active community, and while the care of loved ones and the celebration of a funeral is of paramount importance, there may be some activities/events in the parish which are inflexible due to a variety of reasons. Our staff will do everything possible to accommodate your needs in scheduling and provision of space/resources for you and your loved ones. Thank you for your patience, as we are all part of a community of faith.

The passing of a loved one is an occasion to rely on faith, the traditions of the Church, and the active, consoling presence of God. While personalization of the liturgies is essential, it is important to remember that the ultimate purpose of our gathering is for the comfort of all. Consider the Sacred Scriptures to be proclaimed, decoration, music and persons to be involved. Please be aware that the Pastor has the final say on all matters.

### Format of Vigil

The Vigil for a deceased loved one is a very open and flexible opportunity for recounting memories, sharing songs, viewing photos, offering personal prayers, and hearing eulogies. The Vigil takes place at the funeral home typically at 7pm, the evening prior to the funeral Mass. The funeral home setting has many benefits, including providing the opportunity for audio-visual elements, music or songs which are not suitable for the funeral Mass, and the sharing of good words (eulogy). The time and format of the Vigil is to be set up with the Pastor and Funeral Home at the earliest possible convenience, usually in conjunction with the Funeral Mass planning. Consider what prayers, songs, stories and memories are important to share and anticipate the Vigil as the primary place for sharing.

### Format of Funeral

The funeral Mass is a joyous occasion, a celebration of the new life one now shares through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. As a general rule, good Sunday worship is good funeral worship – this means that the practices that our community observes for Sunday liturgies are the best practices for celebration of a funeral, as they are not foreign but comforting and meaningful to the community of people with whom we celebrate. The funeral is a Catholic celebration, and so follows the norms of the Roman Catholic Church. Also, the funeral is a Parish celebration, and so should honor and welcome the parish community. What follows are the essential parts of the funeral Mass.

### Sacred Scriptures

Sacred Scripture is essential for the celebration of a Catholic funeral, as the Word of God connects us to the greater reality of God's presence in the midst of grief and loss. As with the Sunday Mass, the Funeral will have three scripture readings from the: 1) Old Testament 2) the New Testament 3) the Gospel. Family members are strongly encouraged to consider readings from the Funeral Lectionary that represent the deceased loved one. Likewise, families should elect two persons to proclaim the first and second readings, providing the text well in advance so that the proclaimer may rehearse and pray with the readings for the benefit of all.

Strong spoken members among family and friends should be chosen if no trained lectors/proclaimers are available. The Gospel is proclaimed by a Deacon (if present) or by the Priest. The second reader will likely also be asked to proclaim the Intercessions on behalf of a loved one if a Deacon is not present for the funeral. The Intercessions are provided by the pastor, available prior to the funeral. The Director of Liturgy will be present during the hour before a funeral for direction, guidance and the answering of any questions. Readings should be selected from the funeral lectionary, but may also be selected from elsewhere from scripture; please ensure scriptural readings are given to parish staff which are not present in this guide. Readings which are of significance but are not from the Bible are best shared at the Vigil.

## Music

Sacred song has a power unlike anything else to inspire, to draw persons together, and to relieve the heavy heart. Please visit with the Director of Liturgical Music in the parish regarding any songs or musicians which may be of special value to the deceased or those gathering to celebrate their life. For the sake of accessibility of those in attendance, music for the funeral should be well known and drawn from the *Breaking Bread* hymnal or another reputable, Catholic hymnal. Other songs that are secular in nature are best observed at the Vigil.

There are many people in the parish and community at large who are very good at leading song for the funeral. Regarding musicians, the Director of Liturgical Music will be able to recommend persons and best determine how to incorporate loved ones or appreciated liturgical musicians into the celebration. A musician is not the same as a trained accompanist or cantor, someone who is capable of leading others in Catholic worship. Please discuss all intentions with the parish surrounding music.

## Persons to Involve

It is essential to involve as many family members as possible in the funeral celebration. This not only helps move the grieving process along, but also personalizes and enriches the liturgy for all gathered. As mentioned above, proclaimers of the word and a cantor will be needed for the funeral. Likewise, if you are planning to celebrate a funeral Mass, then family members will be needed to bring forward the gifts of bread and wine, and trained Eucharistic ministers will be needed. If there are no trained Eucharistic ministers in the family or among friends, parishioners will be called upon to assist with this ministry. Depending on the level of involvement of a funeral home, you may wish to ask others to assist with other portions of the ritual, such as greeting and seating guests, serving as pall bearers (where applicable), et cetera.

## Environment

Flowers are often associated with funerals, as they bring life and color to the fore. Please see that any flowers are delivered to the church no later than 1 hour prior to the service, and are promptly removed following the funeral unless other arrangements are made with the Director of Liturgy.

Also, consider living plants or establishing donations in the name of a loved one to a favorite church or charity as alternatives to cut flowers. The environment in the parish sanctuary always corresponds to the liturgical season and is intended to remain present unless an exceptionally strong reason warrants change. If any elements are moved or removed from the church space, they are to be replaced immediately following the funeral.

## Burial

The deceased may be present either embalmed in a casket with the assistance of a funeral home or cremated in an urn with or without funeral home assistance. In either case, the funeral home will assist you in making the arrangements for a burial site/time. Unless there is an exceptional reason, the burial should immediately follow the funeral. This allows the family/friends to have closure surrounding the death of a loved one and enables the pastor and parish staff to resume their ministerial services within our busy parish. Please consult the pastor directly with any questions concerning the burial.

## Funeral Luncheon

The sharing of a meal with loved ones following the funeral and burial is both an essential and also healing experience. The parish regularly facilitates the provision of a funeral luncheon for family/friends following a funeral service. Depending on the estimated attendance, luncheons can occur in the multipurpose room of the parish center or in the gymnasium. A generous donation of \$3.00-\$5.00 per person is much appreciated to defray the costs to parishioners who prepare and provide the home-made foods. If you wish to have food catered, please make arrangements with the Administrative Assistant to ensure procedures for kitchen use and space cleanup are observed. Contact the parish office to request a funeral luncheon at the parish.