

YOUR
GUIDE TO
PLANNING
A CATHOLIC
FUNERAL

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When Someone Has Died



The death of a loved one is a shock, whether it is sudden and unexpected or it comes after a lingering illness where all have had time to prepare for the event. When someone is ill, there is time to call a priest to administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. We may have time to pray with and for the person who will soon be leaving us.

When a person dies suddenly, our thoughts may be clouded by grief and shock. Perhaps some regrets come pouring forth, or questions of why or what happened. Often we do not always think immediately about praying. But prayer at this point is appropriate and can be very helpful. For example:

- You might say a prayer from the heart, a prayer of thanks for the love and life you shared together, a prayer for their spirit to peacefully go to God, a prayer of release and letting go.
- You might say a traditional Catholic prayer, such as the Hail Mary, or the Lord's Prayer.
- If you are in the habit of reading the Bible, perhaps you might turn to Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd," or another Scripture passage that is especially meaningful to you. For example:

Isaiah 25:1-10 (The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces.)

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that it will be the same for all those who have died in Jesus. God will welcome them.)

- Perhaps you will call upon the Holy Spirit to offer the prayer for you because you are at a loss for words. Just set your intention to be in prayer for your loved one and ask the Spirit to help in this moment.
- You may be moved to cry or want to talk. Too often we hide our tears from one another in order “to protect” the other person. Tears are a sign of love, of how much we will miss our loved one. Let them flow. Let them be part of your prayer. They are part of the healing process, not something to hide in shame.
- Take some time in silence or with gentle music to listen to your feelings. What are your strongest feelings? Be as honest as you can be with yourself. Remember that there are many aspects of grief, and you may have feelings that you do not like or want, such as self-pity, guilt, anger, regret... If you feel guilty, what has caused this in you? If you feel angry, what is creating this feeling?
- After you have spent time surfacing your feelings, take each of your strongest ones and talk with God about them. Hold them out before God and ask God to help you release what is not helpful and to remember that you and your loved one both did your best in the circumstances you were in here in this life.

Loving God,
be with us in our pain and sorrow,
and let our tears flow
as into a great river of love.
It is so hard to say goodbye!
Help us find peace in the promise
that we will be united again
in your warm embrace.

Amen.



Tasks Surrounding Death



- 1 Pray with the person for a peaceful “passing over” the boundaries, from this world to the next.
- 2 If the death is unexpected or happens at home, call 911.
- 3 Death certificates need the signature of a doctor and must be issued by the county in which the person dies. You will need these for insurance claims, probate of will, sale of cars, snowmobiles, motorcycles, etc. and other legal matters. Ask for more copies than you think you will need, as they are more difficult and more expensive to obtain once they have been issued.

Organ and tissue donations must be taken within 24–36 hours after death. This is a tremendous gift of life that the deceased can contribute to another person.

PLAN AHEAD » *Make sure your family knows your wishes so they are not left in a vulnerable time to be making such decisions.*

4 Contact next-of-kin and those who need to say goodbye to the person at home, before the body is removed. Call other family and friends, especially those far away, to let them know.

PLAN AHEAD » *Prepare a list of those you wish to have notified in case of death. Leave it with your will, honorable discharge papers, instructions about the location (and key) of your lockbox, and your wishes for the dispersal of your most treasured items or family heirlooms.*

5 Arrange for someone to care for children, pets, plants, utilities, etc., in the home of the deceased.

6 Contact the funeral home of your choice.

- Local funeral home. They can help you with the cemetery arrangements.
- Membership in funeral, cremation, or memorial society.

7 Choose cremation or burial. Think about whether your loved one would prefer a casket or an urn. The Catholic Church allows cremation within certain guidelines. Talk with your parish liturgist or pastor for further details and specific information. In general, when a person is cremated, the remains must be placed in a worthy, sealed container, such as an urn, and the ashes are to be buried—they may not be spread or used in any other way.