

ST HEDWIG CHURCH
11482 Los Alamitos Blvd.
Los Alamitos, CA 90720 Tel: 562-296-9000

Dear Families,

This document serves to answer some questions you may have about Catholic Funerals. We hope to guide and assist you with your arrangements and selections for a funeral Mass at St. Hedwig Church.

The funeral Mass is the central service within the Order of Christian Funerals and a source of great comfort to all who gather for it.

Planning the funeral Mass can help you better express your love for the one who has died, for your own sorrow, and your faith in our kind and merciful God who promises eternal life.

We truly believe you will be blessed, and we pray that you will open your heart and receive blessings through this journey of hope.

With Peace and Grace,

St. Hedwig Bereavement Ministry

Catholic Funeral Rites

A Catholic Liturgical Celebration commends the deceased to God, demonstrates our faith in resurrection, and provides hope and support to the grieving. The funeral rites have three main times of prayer for the family and the Church community:

The Vigil ~ The Funeral Liturgy ~ The Rite of Committal

The Vigil usually follows the pattern of: Scripture Readings ~ Intercessions ~ The Lord's Prayer ~ Concluding Prayers ~ and Blessings.

A Vigil Service can be celebrated in the church, in the home of the deceased or in a funeral home, and the format can be adapted to suit the particular place.

The Vigil is usually preceded by a Visitation, where friends and relatives gather to offer condolences and share memories of the person who has died. This recounting of life events is important to the grieving process. The Visitation includes time for communal prayer, to support the bereaved and to pray on behalf of the person who has died.

The Funeral Liturgy (With Mass or without Mass)

The Funeral Liturgy is the main celebration when the family, friends and the Church community take solace in Scripture, give thanks for Christ's victory over sin and death and receive Holy Communion.

The symbolic elements:

- **Words of Remembrance** - different from a eulogy, this is an optional time for loved ones to give witness to the Christian Life lived by the deceased.
- **Welcoming the body into the Church** - in remembrance of Baptism, the first welcoming into the Church.
- **The sprinkling of holy water** - reminding of Baptism's redemptive waters.
- **Easter candle** - Christ's conquering of sin and death.
- **Funeral pall** - The white cloth draped over the casket represents the white garment received at Baptism. Christian symbols can be placed on top of the pall, most often the cross and Bible.
- **Christian community** - give witness to our hope in the resurrection.

- **Word of God** - brings to our consciousness the presence of our loving God.
- **Eucharistic sacrifice** - the thanking for, the offering of and the sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ is a foretaste of Heaven's everlasting banquet.
- **Final commendation** - the farewell affirms that, though separated for now, we share the same destiny of resurrection on the last day.
- **Blessing with incense** - a symbol of respect. The rising smoke is a sign of the community's prayers for the deceased rising to God.

Rite of Committal

This prayer brings the earthly remains to a final resting place. The Rite of Committal consists of Scripture, a prayer over the place of committal, intercessions, the Our Father, concluding prayer and a prayer over the mourners. This rite may be celebrated at graveside, crematorium, or burial at sea. Concluding the rite is a final time of prayer, accompanied by a parting sign such as the sprinkling of holy water.

Catholic Position on Cremation

Christian tradition has been to bury or entomb the remains of the deceased. Until 1963, the Church did not accept cremation for Catholics, based in part on the belief that cremation was a pagan practice, and in part on the belief of the resurrection of the body. In 1963, the Church lifted the ban and since has allowed cremation as long as it is not chosen for anti-Christian reasons. The Church now recognizes that cremation might best meet the family's needs when hygiene, expenses, or transportation across borders are of concern.

Church Preference

The Church prefers burial. If cremation is still the choice, the Church strongly prefers the presence of the beloved's body for the funeral rites, with cremation happening after the funeral Mass. However, Catholic funeral liturgy does include prayers for circumstances when cremated remains are present.

If Cremation Has Preceded the Funeral Mass

The ashes are to be in an urn, or other "worthy vessel" carried by a loved one in the entrance procession or placed next to the Easter candle before the funeral liturgy begins. The white funeral pall is not used as the body is not present, and prayers refer to "earthly remains."

The church has an ossuary available to place the urn inside and process into church in a dignified and respectful manner.

Care of the Remains

The Church requires the reverent disposition of the earthly remains. The vessel is to be transported with care and brought to a final resting place marked by a plaque or gravestone that loved ones can visit and where they can pray. Keeping the ashes in one's home or sprinkling them over land, sea, or in a memory garden, are not considered respectful of the dead.

Providing for Prayer at the Final Resting Place

The Rite of Committal is an important part of funeral rites. If there is a delay between the Funeral Liturgy and the bringing of the cremains to the cemetery, mausoleum, or a columbarium, the Rite of Committal is still prescribed. Either a priest, deacon or a lay minister may lead the Rite of Committal.

Consolation

As members of the body of Christ, when one suffers, we all suffer. Therefore, we are all called on as a community to care for the dying, to console, and to participate actively in each segment of the funeral rites. Those who mourn need our prayers, our presence, our acts of kindness and our willingness to listen