Planning a Catholic Funeral

St. Patrick Catholic Church · Portland, Oregon

A Guide for Families

1. A Word Before We Begin

The death of someone you love is a tender and disorienting time. Please know that you are not alone, and that this parish is honored to walk these days with you. The Church teaches that in death "life is changed, not ended," and the funeral rites we celebrate together are the means by which we entrust your loved one to the mercy of God and pray for his or her peace.

This guide explains what a Catholic funeral involves, how one is planned at St. Patrick's, and what decisions your family will be asked to make. It may be read at your own pace. A companion checklist sets out the same steps in order, so that you may see at a glance what is yours to decide and what the parish attends to on your behalf.

Planning begins with a brief Funeral Inquiry Form on the parish website, described in Section 6. From that point, a member of our parish staff will guide your family through every practical decision. Should anything in these pages be unclear, or should you simply wish to speak with someone, please telephone the parish office.

If Your Loved One Is Still Living

Please telephone the parish at once rather than using the inquiry form. If your loved one is actively dying, call (503) 222-4086 and press 6 to reach a priest directly, at any hour.

The Last Rites are the Church's sacraments for the dying: Confession, if the person is able; the Anointing of the Sick, which brings the strength and peace of Christ to one who is gravely ill; and Holy Communion given as *Viaticum* — "food for the journey" — together with the Apostolic Pardon, the Church's final blessing. They prepare a soul to meet God, and they are among the greatest consolations the Church can offer. Please do not wait until the very end to ask for them.

Before Anything Is Finalized with the Funeral Home

Please contact the parish first — the inquiry form or a telephone call is sufficient. The most common difficulty we encounter is a date and hour, promised by a funeral home, at which the parish is unable to celebrate the funeral.

2. How to Reach Us

To begin	The Funeral Inquiry Form at **stpatrickpdx.org/funerals**
Parish Office	Your single point of contact for all planning · (503) 222-4086 · office@stpatrickpdx.org · Tuesday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (closed 12–1)
Ms. Melissa Hart	Coordinator of Sacred Music · melissa.hart@stpatrickpdx.org
Fr. Timothy Furlow	Pastor — prayer and pastoral care; planning questions are directed to the parish office · father.timothy@stpatrickpdx.org
Address	1623 NW 19th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97209

Please note: *Inquiry forms are answered within forty-eight hours of being received by the office. The office is closed Saturday through Monday; a form submitted on those days is received on Tuesday and answered by Wednesday.*

3. What a Catholic Funeral Is

A Catholic funeral is not a single event but a sequence of three rites. Your family may celebrate all three or only those suited to your circumstances.

- **The Vigil** (sometimes called the wake) is a time of prayer on the evening or the day before the funeral, held at the funeral home, in the family home, or at the church. It includes Scripture, prayer, and often the Rosary. Vigils have become uncommon; most families today proceed directly to the Funeral Mass. Should you wish to hold one, the parish is glad to assist, and it is a fitting occasion for family and friends to share memories.
- **The Funeral Liturgy**, most commonly a Funeral Mass, is the central celebration. The body or the cremated remains are received at the church; the Scriptures are proclaimed, the Eucharist (Holy Communion) is offered for the soul of the deceased, and he or she is commended to God. When a Mass is not possible, a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass is celebrated — Scripture, prayers, and a homily (the sermon), but without the Eucharist.
- **The Rite of Committal** is the final rite at the cemetery or place of interment, when the body or cremated remains are laid to rest. Family and friends may share extended remembrances here. Arrangements with the cemetery are made by the family, usually through the funeral home, rather than by the parish.

4. Who Will Celebrate

Fr. Timothy ordinarily celebrates funerals at St. Patrick's. A family may, however, invite any priest — a friend, a former pastor, a relative — to celebrate the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy here. A deacon may celebrate the Vigil, a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass, and the Rite of Committal, though not the Mass itself. Simply tell us the name of the desired celebrating cleric.

If the priest serves outside the Archdiocese of Portland, his diocese or religious order must send a letter of good standing to the Chancellor of the Archdiocese — the Archbishop's office that keeps the records of clergy — stating who he is, confirming that he is in good standing, and giving the date,

time, place, and purpose of his ministry here. We will assist with this. The earlier the parish knows, the better.

5. Who May Have a Catholic Funeral

Every baptized Catholic has a right to a Catholic funeral. This includes those who were not regular in the practice of the faith, those who were estranged from the Church, and those who died by suicide. Catechumens — those preparing for Baptism — are counted among the faithful and receive the same rites.

Children who died before Baptism, whose parents had intended to baptize them, may also be given Catholic funeral rites; please simply ask.

Baptized members of other Christian communities may in some circumstances receive Catholic funeral rites at the family's request. Please mention this to the parish office, and we will bring it to Fr. Timothy.

6. The Steps

1. **Complete the Funeral Inquiry Form.** Visit stpatrickpdx.org/funerals and select the button marked "Funeral Inquiry Form." It takes only a few minutes and gives the parish what it needs to begin. *If an online form is difficult for you, telephone the parish office at (503) 222-4086 and a staff member will complete it with you.*
2. **We will telephone you.** Within forty-eight hours of the form's being received (see the note in Section 2), a member of our parish staff will telephone you and will guide you through every practical decision: the date, the form of the funeral, the readings, the music, the celebrant, the reception, and the paperwork. That person is your single point of contact from this point forward. Nothing need be decided before you speak with them.
3. **Meet with Fr. Timothy, if you wish.** Fr. Timothy is glad to meet with any family — to pray, to talk, and to offer the Church's consolation in a difficult time. This meeting is entirely optional, and it does not concern logistics. Ask the parish office, and it will be arranged.
4. **Confirm with the funeral home.** The funeral home will coordinate with us on the timing, the transport of the body or cremated remains, and the Rite of Committal.
5. **Walk through the church, if it would help.** Any family may have a walkthrough of the church — and of the parish hall, if it is to be used — before the day of the funeral. We will arrange it on request, whenever it would be helpful to your family.
6. **Sign the Facilities Use Agreement**, a brief form concerning the use of the church and hall, and submit the musician's fee and the hall deposit if they apply. We will send these by email.
7. **On the day of the funeral, arrive about thirty minutes early.** The priest or deacon will greet you and pray with you before the liturgy begins.

7. Choices Your Family Will Make

Readings and Prayers

The Church provides a rich selection of Scripture readings and prayers for funerals. St. Patrick's uses the booklet *Through Death to Life* by Joseph Champlin, which sets out every option clearly. We will give you a copy and help you choose — typically one reading from the Old Testament (or, during the Easter season, from the Book of Revelation), a Psalm, one reading from the New Testament, and the Gospel. If your loved one had favorite passages of Scripture or a particular devotion, please tell us.

Music

Should your family desire music for the funeral, the parish will provide it through our Coordinator of Sacred Music, **Ms. Melissa Hart**, who will help you select the music and will provide it for the liturgy. **The musician's fee of $150 is required.** It is a professional fee, and it is separate from the parish offering described in Section 9. You may instead arrange musicians of your own. In every case, **all music must be approved by the parish before it is used in the liturgy.**

Only sacred music is used at a Catholic funeral. Secular music — classical, popular, or patriotic, even a favorite of your loved one — is not permitted in the liturgy. It is welcome at the reception or at the graveside.

Words of Remembrance

The Archdiocese of Portland does not permit eulogies of any kind at a Catholic Funeral Liturgy. Distinct from a eulogy, the Church's funeral rite allows a pastor, at his discretion, to permit a single family member or friend to offer brief *words of remembrance*. At St. Patrick's, Fr. Timothy may grant this permission case by case, under the Archdiocese's conditions: one speaker; no more than five minutes; a written text concerning only the deceased's Catholic faith, which may not suggest that he or she is already in heaven, since the Church continues to pray for the dead. The words are given after Communion and before the Final Commendation, from a place other than the pulpit. **A digital copy of the text must be submitted to the parish office no less than three days before the funeral**, so that it may be reviewed; please understand that permission is not automatic.

Fuller remembrance belongs where there is more time, more freedom, and less pressure upon the speaker:

- At the reception afterward
- At the graveside, before or after the Rite of Committal
- At the Vigil, if one is held

The homily itself is not a eulogy. It proclaims God's mercy and the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection as they were present in the life and death of your loved one. If you would like the homilist (the priest or deacon who preaches) to mention something specific about your loved one, it must concern his or her Catholic faith — how it was lived and what it meant — and it must reach the parish office **at least one day before the funeral**. A few written sentences are sufficient.

Family Roles in the Liturgy

Some families wish to take part in the liturgy directly; others prefer simply to be present and to grieve. Both are entirely welcome, and nothing here is expected of you.

- **Pallbearers.** Family members or friends may carry the casket. Give us their names, and we will explain where they are to stand and when to arrive.
- **The readings.** The parish provides readers, so that your family need not find anyone. If a family member or friend would like to proclaim one of the readings or the intercessions (the prayers for the Church, the world, and the dead), he or she is welcome to do so; please tell us. Anyone who reads at Mass must be a Catholic in good standing with the Church — that is, a practicing Catholic who is able to receive Holy Communion: baptized, confirmed, and, if married, married in the Church. We recognize that this can be a delicate question within a family, and it is one more reason the parish is glad to provide readers.
- **The Gospel and the homily** are proclaimed by the priest or deacon.
- **There is no offertory procession at St. Patrick's** — the custom in some parishes of family members bringing forward the bread and wine — so no one need be assigned to it.
- **Reserved seating.** The front pews are reserved for the immediate family. Please let us know approximately how many people that includes.

In the Church

A funeral gathers many people who may seldom be in a Catholic church. It is helpful to tell your guests a few things in advance:

- Please dress modestly, as befits a sacred place.
- Please do not bring food or drink into the church.
- Please keep silence in the church — before the funeral, during it, and afterward — as befits a sacred place. Greetings, conversation, and condolences belong outside the church or at the reception. Please silence telephones.

The Program

Should your family wish to have a printed program for the liturgy, its preparation and printing are the family's responsibility; the parish does not prepare programs.

Flowers and Symbols

Live flowers are welcome — up to two arrangements upon the high altar. During Lent, flowers are not placed at the altar; We will explain what is possible. Your florist should arrive no earlier than one hour before the Mass, with arrangements already complete, and **must check with the parish staff member on duty before placing anything.** Nothing may be placed upon the altar cloth of the high altar, upon the lower altar, or upon the communion rail. After the funeral, please take the flowers home with you; they are yours to keep.

A pall — a white cloth recalling the white garment of Baptism — is placed over the casket, and a Bible, Book of the Gospels, or cross may be placed upon it. The Paschal candle — the tall Easter

candle, a sign of the risen Christ — stands nearby. When cremated remains are present in place of a casket, the pall is not used; the urn rests upon a dignified stand.

During the Mass, only Christian symbols rest on or near the casket. National flags, military insignia, and the emblems of fraternal organizations are removed at the entrance to the church and may be placed on the casket again afterward. This is a long-standing practice of the Church, meant to keep the focus upon your loved one as a Christian first. It is helpful to ask one person in advance to attend to this.

8. Cremation

The Church permits cremation, but prefers that, whenever possible, the body be present for the funeral liturgy and cremation take place afterward. When cremation has already taken place, the cremated remains may be present for the full course of the funeral rites.

We will discuss one important matter with you: cremated remains are to be buried or entombed in a cemetery, mausoleum, or columbarium (a wall of niches for urns). They may not be scattered, divided among family members, kept at home, or made into jewelry or keepsakes. This is not a matter of bureaucracy. It expresses our belief that the body, even reduced to ashes, was the temple of the Holy Spirit and awaits the resurrection. We are glad to answer any questions.

A Note on "Terramation"

You may hear of "terramation," known in Oregon law as natural organic reduction — the contained, accelerated conversion of a body to soil. In 2023 the United States bishops' Committee on Doctrine concluded that human composting and a related method called alkaline hydrolysis (sometimes marketed as "aquamation" or "water cremation") do not show the respect the Church asks be shown to bodily remains and do not give visible witness to our Christian hope in the resurrection. The concern with human composting is that the body and the plant material become one mass of compost, leaving nothing that can still be identified as your loved one's remains to be placed in a casket or urn in a sacred place for prayer and remembrance. Neither method is permitted for the funeral of a Catholic. We will gladly help you plan a burial or cremation that honors your loved one, and we welcome your questions about the options you are considering.

9. Offerings

The sacraments are never sold, and no offering is a condition of a Catholic funeral. What families give is an offering toward the use of the church and the parish's costs.

- **Suggested offering to the parish: $300.** It is suggested, never required, and may be given at any time. Offerings to the parish are made payable to St. Patrick Catholic Church.
- **A stipend to the priest or deacon** who celebrates is customary, though not required. It is given directly to the celebrant.

Two items are of a different kind:

- **Music.** When the parish provides the music, the musician's fee of $150 is required (see Section 7).

- **Parish hall.** When the hall is used for a reception, a cleaning deposit of $200 is collected and returned when the hall is left clean.

10. What Happens at the Funeral Mass

About an hour before the Mass, the doors are unlocked and your family is welcome to gather in the church. Some families pray the Rosary together during this time; it concludes at least fifteen minutes before the Mass begins. The church is kept in silence during this hour, so that those who arrive early may pray.

When the Mass begins, the casket or urn is received at the door of the church and sprinkled with holy water, and the pall is placed over the casket. Your loved one is then carried in procession to the front of the church, with the family following. The Mass proceeds in its usual structure — Scripture, homily, Eucharist — in a form proper to a funeral, with prayers for the soul of the deceased.

After Communion, the Final Commendation is celebrated: a moment of farewell, with incense and holy water, in which we ask the saints and angels to welcome our brother or sister into paradise. The procession then leaves the church for the Rite of Committal.

11. Reception in the Parish Hall

Your family is welcome to host a reception in the parish hall after the Mass. The hall is available for two hours following the liturgy; We will confirm the hours with you. It has tables, chairs, restrooms, a sound system, and a projector. The kitchen is available with some restrictions; the oven may not be used. Please bring your own tablecloths and serving items. Alcohol may not be served or sold. We will explain what is expected in cleaning the hall afterward.

12. Access and Parking

The church is wheelchair accessible. A lift connects the levels; it is meant for one person at a time, though it can carry two if necessary.

Most of your guests will be able to park in the parish lot. A portion of the lot is leased during weekday hours, so if it fills, metered street parking is available nearby. We will help you communicate this to your guests.

13. A Final Word

Please do not hesitate to telephone the parish office for anything, whether a small question or simply the wish to talk. Grief does not end with the funeral, and neither does the parish's care; please call upon us in the weeks and months that follow. We are honored to pray with you for your beloved, and we will do everything we can to make these rites a source of peace.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam