



Guidelines to Assist in the planning of a Funeral San Rafael Parish

Dear Friends:

Please accept our sincerest condolences and promise of prayer at this very difficult time of the loss of your loved one. Although death is natural and anticipated it is never easy to accept even when expected. Our faith in Jesus Christ and His promise of resurrection and eternal life (John 6:40; John 6:51; John 11:25-26) certainly makes the grief easier to bear. We Christians are, after all, a people of hope and our membership in the communion of saints helps bear us up in this sad time.

San Rafael Parish is a rather large parish in the Diocese of San Diego serving more than 3,000 registered families. It is currently served by two priests; the Pastor - Monsignor Dennis Mikulanis and the Associate Pastor, Fr. Craig Haider - and the Pastoral Associate, Deacon Ward Thompson.

It is the usual practice of San Rafael Parish to accommodate our families' requests for funerals as best we can. However, this is not always possible. When a family comes to us for assistance in planning a funeral, we will offer some preliminary assistance. However, no dates or times can be finalized for a funeral Mass without coordinating with a local mortuary. This simply assures that there is no conflict in schedules which makes the funeral planning easier on everyone. One of our parish secretaries is usually the first contact you will make with us. She will normally take all pertinent information in the event that a priest or deacon is not immediately available to talk with you on the phone. When you go to the funeral home to make arrangements, the counselor will most likely call the parish while you are there to coordinate the day and time for the funeral. If cremation is planned and no funeral home is employed, then the family can make the necessary day and time arrangements with the parish.

VIGIL SERVICE: We are happy to provide a Vigil Service for the deceased the evening before the funeral for the friends and relatives of the deceased who are not able to attend the funeral. The Vigil Service is that which is found in the *Rite of Christian Funerals* of the Roman Catholic Church which consists of prayers and readings from the Scriptures. If a family wishes to recite the rosary, this can be done before or after the scheduled Vigil Service. However, the priest or deacon does not stay for the recitation of the rosary. We do not recite the rosary, or a few decades of it, immediately prior to the Funeral Mass. The Vigil Service, though usually held in the mortuary chapel, may also be held in the parish church, depending on family wishes, estimated size of the crowd and church availability.

MUSIC: San Rafael Parish is pleased to provide a “**Resurrection Choir**” composed of parishioners who make it their ministry to sing at funerals if so requested. Our parish musicians, principally our parish organist, are contracted to have first access to all funerals at San Rafael. Again, our parish secretaries will assist you in making all necessary arrangements for music at the funeral. The parish provides a list of acceptable hymns for the funeral. No music other than that approved by the parish is played before, during or after the Mass in the church (i.e., popular songs, current hits, sentimental favorites). It is more appropriate to play such music at a reception following the funeral. The **organist stipend** for a funeral is \$150.00, payable to the parish musician who plays. This is usually taken care of when making arrangements with the funeral home. If no funeral home is employed, please give the stipend to the sacristan prior to the funeral. No other organist or pianist, other than one of our parish musicians, is permitted to play music for the funeral. *There are no exceptions to this rule.* However, if a family member is a guitarist, harpist or other accompanist, the family may request that person to play at the funeral. If permitted, the music selected must be approved by the Parish Music Director or the Pastor.

At a funeral we always use the **Funeral Pall** to cover the casket, which is placed on the casket at the entrance of the church. In cases where the American Flag is used to cover the casket of a veteran, the flag is to be taken off before the pall is placed at the beginning of the funeral, and put back on after the funeral when the pall is removed at the door of the church just prior to taking the casket to the hearse. Flowers or home-made coverings are removed prior to the funeral and replaced before the casket is placed in the hearse.

In a Catholic Church it is customary to genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament as a sign of reverence and respect to the Lord’s presence in the Eucharist. The tabernacle which holds the Blessed Sacrament is located in a special reservation chapel on the East side of the church. Consequently, it is not necessary to genuflect in the center aisle when the Funeral Directors bring the casket in or take the casket out of the church.

EULOGY: A eulogy is oftentimes requested at a funeral. The appropriate time for sharing of thoughts and memories is at the Vigil Service the evening before, not at the Funeral Mass. **If there is no Vigil Service, a brief eulogy may be delivered *prior* to the funeral.** ONE person may speak NO LONGER than ten minutes prior to the beginning of Mass. For example, if the funeral is scheduled for 10:00 a.m., the eulogy begins at 10:00 a.m. and lasts no more than ten minutes. Mass then begins promptly at 10:10 a.m. Not only does this help those attending the funeral to have a deeper appreciation for the deceased, but years of experience have proven that this is the most sensitive and sympathetic way to provide a lasting remembrance for all present. Furthermore, it provides a more intimate connection with the deceased for those present and helps them in their prayer during Mass. Again, memories and thoughts of the deceased are to be shared at the Vigil Service or, in the absence of the Vigil Service, by one person for no more than ten minutes prior to the start of the Mass. There are no exceptions to this rule.

In **composing a eulogy** it is extremely helpful to have it written down. To rely on spur of the moment thoughts and stories usually leads to being “tongue-tied” and disconnected comments. When delivering a eulogy, please focus on the following:

- The Christian life and witness of the deceased;
- How this person lived out his/her commitment to Christ and the Church;
- The deceased’s fidelity to God, family, Church and, if a veteran, to the nation;
- One lesson those gathered for the funeral can learn from the life of the deceased.

READINGS: Our lives as a people are governed by the Word of God. Consequently, **the Sacred Scriptures** are proclaimed during the Funeral Mass and cannot be substituted by poems, readings or reflections from other religions or secular sources. As is customary, an Old Testament, Psalm Response, New Testament and Gospel Reading are proclaimed. Oftentimes a recited Responsorial Psalm is replaced by a sung response led by the cantor. A list of suggested Scripture readings is attached. Family members or friends are welcome to be the lectors at the funeral. Only the deacon or the priest proclaims the Gospel and preaches the homily.

FLOWERS: It is customary for family, relatives and friends to send flowers to the bereaved as a token of respect and sympathy. If the flowers are sent to the mortuary, the Funeral Directors will bring the flowers to the church for the funeral. After the funeral they will take the flowers to the cemetery for the graveside services. If the family wishes, one or two arrangements may be left in the church except during Lent when the church is usually devoid of flowers of any kind. Other than the one or two arrangements left behind, all other flowers are taken to the cemetery.

STIPEND: The funeral stipend (donation to the Church) is always a touchy question. The normal stipend for the church for a funeral is \$200.00, and is separate from that given to the organist. This money is offered as a gift to the parish at the time of a funeral to continue its ministry to the community. It is a great help to us if the funeral home makes the financial arrangements with the families. However, if a funeral home is not employed, the donation should be given to the parish prior to the start of the funeral. If the family is in financial straits the stipend can be waived.

ON SITE HELP: Our parish Sacristan, Jackie Kramer, is almost always available to help set up and take down after a funeral Mass. Jackie can answer any questions you might have on the day of the funeral.

RECEPTION: If the family desires, the parish will be happy to help provide a **reception** in the Parish Center **following the funeral**. One of our parishioners, Mary Comaratta (858.524.6556) will be happy to speak with the family and make necessary arrangements. **No alcoholic beverages are allowed at the reception; no exceptions.** The normal stipend for a funeral reception is \$50.00. In addition, the family reimburses Mrs. Comaratta directly for the refreshments purchased. Checks should be made out to "Mary Comaratta."

We hope this letter helps you in your planning of the funeral for your loved one. Death is always difficult but our faith is our strength. The staff and parishioners of San Rafael Parish are here to help you in this trying time and, together, we take strength from the Sacred Scriptures where we read: "When the corruptible frame takes on incorruptibility and the mortal immortality, then will the saying of Scripture be fulfilled: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

Sincerely,



Rev. Msgr. Dennis L. Mikulanis, S.T.D.
Pastor