

## **Funeral liturgy outside the Mass**

The *Order of Christian Funerals* provides for a Funeral Liturgy Outside the Mass – in other words, a funeral other than a Requiem Mass. The Funeral Liturgy outside the Mass may be presided over by a priest, deacon or properly trained lay person mandated by the Archbishop.

There are two major reasons in the Order for a funeral outside the Mass: “when in some places or circumstances it is not possible to celebrate the funeral Mass before the committal, for example, if a priest is not available”: or, “when for pastoral reasons the pastor and the family judge that the funeral liturgy outside the Mass is a more suitable form of the celebration”.

With respect to the second reason, the primary pastoral reason is that the deceased, and perhaps their spouse if they survive them are likely to be the only participating Catholics at the funeral – the funeral liturgy outside the Mass puts the family at ease because it resembles the usual funeral people are used to, while retaining Catholic symbols and prayers.

Increasingly, dioceses and parishes are having to look at just how and when Requiem Masses are made available. As the numbers of priests reduce, so too will the availability of requiem Masses need to reduce. In one parish in Canada, requiem Mass is available only for deceased individuals who are or have been active, participating Catholics. In another parish in Germany, Lay Pastoral Leaders preside at all funerals, with a requiem Mass offered once a month for those who have died in the previous month. While the Wellington Archdiocese is not yet at this point, my observation is that funeral directors sometimes have to search far and wide to find an available priest.

Many Catholic funerals already take place outside the Mass, and seemingly they are usually presided over by a priest. There are several reasons for this: funeral directors do not know, and families have not been informed that a lay person may preside; there is an assumption that ‘Father will lead’; and priests make themselves available, sometimes travelling well outside their parish to preside at the funeral service of someone they never knew.

These might be rectified by informing funeral directors and families seeking a funeral service outside the Mass that a lay presider is available, rather than phoning all over town looking for a priest. Priests might also refer requests to preside at a funeral service outside the Mass to a mandated lay person.

There is no doubt that funerals provide an important pastoral opportunity to connect and evangelise. Where a funeral liturgy outside the Mass is the preferred service, mandated lay presiders are well placed to provide that pastoral connection.

In our own parish, Robyn Radomski, Marie Paurini and Joe Green are mandated by Cardinal John Dew to preside at funeral liturgies outside the Mass.