



# Bellarmino Chapel Funeral Planning Guide

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Walking Through Loss with Faith and Love



Dear Friends,

The loss of a loved one, or the anticipation of the end of life, naturally evokes a range of responses, reflections, and emotions. Since you are reading this booklet, you are taking courageous steps to walk into your acute experience of grief as you plan for the death of a loved one, or perhaps to begin considering your own.

We offer this guide to assist you with the funeral planning process and to provide space for reflection and remembrance of your loved one. We trust that it is also a resource to accompany you on this path as you notice God's presence in the midst of your sorrow, to nurture trust in God's mercy, and to discover the consolation God desires to reveal to you.

We encourage family and friends to participate in this celebration to make this liturgy personal and memorable. Our priests and pastoral care team are here with and for you—listening, providing sacramental support, and helping you carefully navigate the steps of planning and celebrating the sacred rituals surrounding the dying, death, and burial of your loved one, or imagining your own.

Be assured that the Bellarmine community holds you in prayer that you may find the Light and Peace of the Risen Christ throughout this difficult moment of bereavement.

Sincerely, in Christ,

The Pastoral Team at Bellarmine Chapel

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## Introduction

### **Walking Through Loss with Faith and Love**

For Christians, death is a sacred passage—a journey from this life into eternal life with God. As St. Paul reminds the faithful, in Christ's resurrection there is the promise of life beyond death (1 Thessalonians 4:13–17). In this spirit, the Church gathers to commend loved ones to God, offering comfort, community, and the deep hope of the Gospel. The faithful come together in prayer, entrusting those who have died into God's loving embrace. These moments are filled with both sorrow and grace—a time to remember, give thanks, and hold fast to the promise of Resurrection.

### **About This Guide**

This guide provides detailed descriptions of each element of a Catholic funeral, planning worksheets to walk through the service, suggested Scripture readings, sample Prayers of the Faithful, and music recommendations. These resources are designed to help families create a personalized, prayerful, and faith-filled celebration.

Through thoughtful reflection and preparation, the funeral planning process itself can become a time of remembrance, consolation, and trust in God's care. Shaping the celebration of the funeral serves as a tangible reminder of the promise that we will be reunited with those who have gone before us.

## **Preparing with Faith: Accompaniment in Life, Death, and Eternal Life**

Life's final moments and preparations take many forms—sometimes unfolding gradually, sometimes arriving suddenly, each offering an opportunity for reflection, intention, and prayer. In every circumstance, the Church seeks to accompany individuals and families with compassion, wisdom, and hope rooted in Christ. The following scenarios highlight common moments that are opportunities for funeral planning and pastoral care, providing both practical guidance and spiritual support.

### **A. When a Healthy Person Chooses to Pre-Plan Their Funeral**

A healthy and active person may feel a desire to pre-plan their funeral as an act of faith, gratitude, and stewardship. This preparation offers clarity and peace of mind, eases the burden on loved ones, and ensures that liturgical, musical, and pastoral wishes are honored. It also invites reflection on God's abiding presence throughout life, fostering trust and surrender.

Pre-planning can be seen as an exercise in discernment—a prayerful consideration of one's life, relationships, and ultimate hope in Christ. It affirms belief in the Resurrection and the Communion of Saints, situating death within the horizon of eternal life. Engaging in this process while healthy creates space for gratitude, reconciliation, and intentional living, helping one to “find God in all things,” even in preparing for life's final transition.

## **B. When a Loved One Is Seriously Ill**

During a time of serious illness, families often wonder how best to prepare—both practically and spiritually—for what may lie ahead. While the focus remains on care and presence, this period can also include thoughtful conversations and gentle planning rooted in faith. Engaging the Bellarmine staff at this stage allows pastoral care to unfold, bringing guidance and support to both the person who is ill and their loved ones.

Inviting a priest to visit fosters consolation through prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments, often called the Last Rites, which include Reconciliation, Holy Communion, and the Anointing of the Sick. The final reception of Holy Communion, Viaticum, offers special spiritual nourishment for the journey toward eternal life. If Reconciliation or Communion is not possible, the Anointing of the Sick may still be celebrated. These sacraments, intended for the living, bring comfort, hope, and the tangible presence of Christ, reminding all that God accompanies every stage of life and every moment of grace.

## **C. When a Loved One Has Died**

After a loved one has entered their new life in Christ, please contact Bellarmine Parish as soon as possible (contact information is provided at the end of this guide). This initial step allows the Pastoral Care staff to coordinate the date and time of the funeral, confirm a presider, and schedule a planning meeting for the service.

Typically, families contact their preferred funeral home for guidance with arrangements beyond the liturgy. Funeral homes assist with practical details, such as burial preparations, transportation, and obituaries, so that families can focus on prayer, reflection, and support for one another.

## **D. Parish Support for Funeral Planning**

Bellarmino Parish offers holistic pastoral care to help families plan and celebrate the life of their loved one. The funeral fee covers preparation and coordination of the Visitation and funeral Mass, the presence of a Presider, a funeral coordinator, one pianist and one cantor, secured use of the chapel and narthex, and the design and printing of a worship aid to support the congregation's prayerful participation.

In addition, dedicated bereavement volunteers assist on funeral days by preparing the narthex, welcoming guests, distributing worship aids, and supporting liturgical roles, including serving as acolytes. Through their attentive presence and quiet care, these volunteers offer comfort to those who mourn and help create a welcoming, prayerful atmosphere rooted in the faith and life of the parish community.

Other options, such as livestreaming the Mass or adding musicians, can be arranged with the Pastoral Care staff to ensure the service reflects the family's needs while honoring God's presence in the community's prayer.

# The Catholic Funeral

A Catholic funeral is a sacred journey of prayer, remembrance, and hope. Rooted in our faith in Christ's death and resurrection, it helps families honor a life, support one another, and entrust the deceased to God's mercy. The funeral may include three main moments—1) The Visitation, 2) The Funeral Liturgy, and 3) The Rite of Committal—each offering meaningful ways to pray, reflect, and find consolation. Families and communities can choose how to shape these moments in a way that best honors their loved one and their faith.

## 1. The Visitation

Also known as the Vigil of the Deceased, the Visitation is often held at a funeral home or in the Bellarmine Chapel narthex *before the Funeral Mass*. It is a time for family, friends, and the community to gather, pray, and share memories.

At Bellarmine, the Visitation usually takes place in the hour before the liturgy, with the space prepared in a manner that honors your loved one with reverence and care. Additional elements, such as a podium for a guest book, easels for picture collages, or a TV to project video, are available to support prayerful remembrance. The presider or funeral coordinator can also lead prayer, including praying the Rosary, if desired.

## 2. Celebrating the Mass

The Funeral Mass is the central act of the Catholic funeral. In this sacred celebration, the Church proclaims the hope of the Resurrection and honors Christ's victory over death. Through Scripture, Eucharist, and communal prayer, we commend the deceased to God and draw strength from our faith. This liturgy invites reflection on how God has been at work in the life of the deceased and offers consolation to those who mourn. Masses of Christian Burial and Memorial Masses are celebrated according to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, which guides the Church in praying for the deceased and comforting the grieving community.

At Bellarmine Chapel, the funeral liturgy may be celebrated in one of two ways:

- **Mass of Christian Burial:** A full Mass with the presence of the body or cremated remains, providing the community with prayer, Scripture, and Eucharist in honor of the deceased.
- **Memorial Mass:** A full Mass when the body or cremated remains are not present, allowing loved ones and the community to gather in prayerful remembrance through prayer, Scripture, and the Eucharist.

## The Funeral Mass typically includes three main elements:

### 1. Introductory Rites

Placement of the Pall\*  
Sprinkling with Holy Water  
Opening Hymn  
Procession of the Casket to the Altar\*  
Procession of Cremains (optional)  
Greeting  
Opening Prayer  
Words of Remembrance

### 2. Liturgy of the Word

First Reading  
Responsorial Psalm  
Second Reading  
Gospel  
Homily  
Prayers of the Faithful  
(Petitions)

### 3. Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of the Gifts  
Preparation Hymn  
The Eucharistic Prayer  
The Lord's Prayer  
Communion Hymn  
Final Commendation  
Invitation to Prayer  
Incensing of the Cremains/Casket  
Closing Hymn  
Exit processional  
Removal of the Pall \*

*(\*Items marked with an asterisk may differ when either the body or cremated remains are present.)*

## Symbols of Our Faith

The Funeral Mass is rich with symbols that express the depth of our Catholic faith and the hope of the Resurrection. Each sign and ritual is a reminder that in life and in death, we belong to Christ.

- **The Paschal (Easter) Candle:** First lit at the Easter Vigil, the Paschal Candle stands near the casket or cremains as a sign of the Risen Christ, whose light conquers all darkness. The same flame is used at Baptisms, connecting our beginning in Christ with our final homecoming. It reminds us that in death, as in life, we walk in the light of resurrection.
- **Holy Water:** As the body or cremains enter the church, the priest gently sprinkles it with Holy Water, recalling the waters of Baptism that welcomed the deceased into the Christian community. It is a sign of cleansing, belonging, and new life in Christ.
- **The Funeral Pall:** This white cloth, draped over the casket, echoes the baptismal garment that once clothed the deceased. It speaks of the dignity of every person baptized into Christ and reminds us that before God, we are all equal, beloved, and called by name.
- **Incense:** The fragrant incense, rising like prayer, is a final gesture of reverence. It blesses the body or cremains, honors its sacredness, and signifies our offering of the soul to God. Its scent invites us to remember the beauty of a virtuous life and the mystery of what lies beyond.

## The Funeral Procession

The funeral procession marks a sacred journey. It begins as the priest comes from outside the church and enters the sacred space, and then the family follows, accompanying their loved one from the world into a place of prayer—the place of *Kairos*, where they enter into God's time. As they move toward the altar, the procession itself becomes a movement of transformation from farewell toward prayer, thanksgiving, and hope.

The procession also acknowledges the great distance their loved one has traveled—from a life on Earth toward the fullness of life with God. Their life was a gift, where they gave and received, loved and were loved. Echoing the Jesuit Suscipe, “Take, Lord, and receive,” the family and community now entrust their loved one once again to the God who gave them life and now receives them into eternity.

### **The Words of Remembrance and Homily**

Words of remembrance and personal tributes are deeply meaningful and are best offered by those who knew the deceased most intimately—family members, close friends, confidants, and mentors. At Bellarmine, families are invited to share words of remembrance before the Liturgy of the Word. Placed here, these reflections honor the life that has been lived and acknowledge how Christ has been present within that story, through relationships, love, struggle, and grace.

By hearing these words first, the assembly is then prepared to listen more deeply to the Scriptures, allowing God’s Word to speak into a life already named and cherished, and to reveal how that life now rests within the larger story of Christ’s death and resurrection.

The homily is offered by the priest or deacon and flows directly from the Scripture readings that have been proclaimed. Rather than serving as a eulogy, the homily seeks to proclaim the Christian hope that comes from Christ’s death and resurrection. In this moment of loss, the Church turns first to God’s Word, trusting that it speaks into our grief with honesty and compassion. The life of the deceased may be reflected upon, but always in light of the Gospel and God’s promise of eternal life.

### **Sacred Music for the Funeral Mass**

Music plays an important role in the Church’s prayer at the time of death. When words are difficult to find, music allows the assembly to pray together, giving voice to grief, trust, and hope. Through song, the community is united as one body, entrusting the deceased and those who mourn to God’s loving care. The chapel fee includes one Musician (pianist) and one Cantor.

### **Planning the Mass**

To assist those planning the Funeral or Memorial Mass, **Bellarmino offers several resources** (see the **APPENDIX**). These include a funeral planning worksheet for noting readings, participants, and music selections; a list of suggested Scripture passages and hymns; and sample Prayers of the Faithful. These tools help support prayerful preparation, ensure the liturgy reflects the life and faith of the deceased, and foster a meaningful celebration of Christ’s victory over death.

### **3. The Rite of Committal**

At the final resting place, such as a cemetery, family, friends, and community may gather in a sacred farewell. This moment can express trust in Christ's promise of new life as the body is returned to the earth and reflects the communion between the Church on earth and the Church eternal. Burial in consecrated ground, when possible, offers a visible sign of baptismal belonging and the continuation of life in Christ.

Arrangements for burial are made by the funeral home, while a Bellarmine priest or member of the Pastoral Care team can lead prayers at the cemetery. Families or planners are invited to indicate their wishes with the Pastoral Care team, including any military honors for veterans. These prayers and rituals provide comfort, honor the life of the deceased, and accompany all who mourn with compassion and faith.

### **Other Parish Prayer Services or Gatherings**

Even if a Mass is not held, whether due to the wishes of the loved one, a funeral taking place elsewhere, or other circumstances, families are welcome to gather with the parish to celebrate and remember. This can include a visitation or prayer service, praying the Rosary, or a private parish blessing, providing space for prayer, reflection, and communal support.

### **Requesting Mass Intentions**

In Catholic tradition, requesting a Mass intention is a way to honor a loved one by having the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered for them, most often for the repose of their soul. This practice reflects the Church's belief in the power of the Eucharist as the highest form of prayer and intercession.

When a full Funeral Mass is not possible, because of timing, distance, family circumstances, or other limitations, requesting a Mass intention allows the deceased to be commended to God's mercy within the Church's liturgical prayer, providing a meaningful and enduring spiritual remembrance. Requests may be made at any time and are often offered on the anniversary of a loved one's birth, death, or another significant date.

## The Role of Loved Ones in the Funeral Liturgy

The funeral liturgy invites those who knew and loved the deceased to participate in the Church's prayer. Family members, friends, and others, including those from other denominations, who have shared in the person's life, are welcome to participate in the celebration. During the liturgy planning process, roles will be discerned by the planner and the family.

The following list highlights the various ways loved ones may participate:

- **Being a pallbearer** – Carrying or escorting the casket or cremains with care, honoring the deceased and supporting the family.
- **Sharing in the folding of the pall** – Helping to unfold the pall onto the casket at the beginning of the Mass, symbolizing the dignity of the baptized.
- **Leading prayer and/or the Rosary during Visitation**
- **Offering Words of Remembrance** – Speaking briefly during the service to honor and reflect on the life of faith of the deceased.
- **Reading from Scripture** – Proclaiming passages from the Bible to share God's Word with the assembly.
- **Offering the Prayers of the Faithful (petitions)** – Leading the community in intercessions for the deceased, family, and the world.
- **Presenting the gifts at the Altar** – Bringing the bread, wine, and other offerings forward during the offertory.
- **Participating in the ritual of incensing the body or cremated remains** – Assisting with the ritual gesture of incense, a sign of honor and prayer rising to God.
- **Serving as a cantor, musician, or singer** – Helping to lead the assembly in song and music to enhance prayer and reflection.
- **Assisting as a trained Acolyte** – Supporting the Presider in the liturgical actions, helping the Mass run smoothly.
- **Assisting as a trained Eucharistic Minister** – Helping distribute Holy Communion to those gathered at the Mass.

Although none are required, joining in the liturgy in these ways honors the deceased and helps all who gather to experience the hope, consolation, and care that flow from coming together in prayer and community.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Regarding the Funeral Service and Burial

- ***Can cremation be a faithful response to the mystery of resurrection?***

Yes. In the Christian tradition, burial of the body reflects the way Jesus himself was laid to rest—a powerful witness to our belief in the Resurrection. At the same time, many faithful choose cremation with hearts rooted in that same hope and trust in God's promise of eternal life. When cremation is chosen, the Church holds that the remains of our loved ones should be treated with the same reverence as a body, placed in a sacred and final resting place such as a grave or mausoleum.

- ***Can non-Catholics receive Communion at a Catholic Mass?***

While the Eucharist is a sacred sign of full communion within the Catholic Church, we joyfully welcome all to pray and worship with us. Those who are not Catholic, or who are not receiving Communion for any reason, are warmly invited to come forward during the Communion procession to receive a blessing, simply by crossing their arms over their chest. We believe Christ's presence touches every heart that comes in faith.

- ***May a family invite another priest to take part in the funeral Mass?***

We welcome priests who were important in your loved one's life to be the primary presider or to concelebrate the funeral liturgy. If a visiting priest is from outside the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, we simply ask that he follow the protocol of requesting permission from the archbishop and contact our staff for coordination. Our community values the presence of those who have shared the journey of faith with the deceased.

- ***Can I choose readings and/or music beyond what is recommended in this guide?***

We recommend following the liturgical guidelines: During a Catholic Funeral Mass, the Scriptures proclaimed are drawn from the Bible, using the Church's Lectionary. In moments of loss, the Church invites us to listen together to God's Word, which speaks of mercy, faithfulness, and the hope of Resurrection. While other writings may hold deep personal meaning, the liturgy makes space first for Scripture, trusting that God's Word has the grace to comfort and sustain us in ways beyond our own words. Readings from other sources could be included on the back of the worship aid, or be shared during the visitation or reception.

Music at a Catholic funeral serves the prayer of the community. The Church encourages music whose words and spirit reflect our Christian belief in mercy, love, and new life in Christ. Music within the Mass gently supports the liturgy's purpose as an act of worship and communal prayer; songs that are especially personal or are of a secular nature are often shared at other moments of remembrance beyond the Mass.

- ***Can a family member donate their body to science?***

Yes. The Church regards the donation of one's body or organs as a generous and selfless gift—an act of compassion that can serve life and knowledge. If possible, a

Funeral Mass is celebrated with the body present. If not, a Memorial Mass may be offered at the time of death or at a later time, to give thanks for the person's life and to commend them to God with love and reverence.

- ***Can cremated remains be scattered or kept at home?***

Because we believe in the resurrection of the body and the sacred dignity of every person, the Church directs that cremated remains be laid to rest in a dedicated and final place, such as a grave or columbarium. This honors both the body's holiness and our shared hope in eternal life. For this reason, keeping ashes at home or scattering them is not permitted, even when done with good intentions.

- ***Can non-practicing Catholics receive a Catholic funeral?***

Yes. In Baptism, we are marked as God's beloved children—equal in dignity and forever held in divine love. Even if someone has been away from active participation in the Church, we entrust them to God's mercy with hope and prayer. The Church offers funeral rites as a sign of that hope, praying with their loved ones that the deceased may be welcomed into the fullness of life in Christ.

- ***Can there be a funeral rite for an unbaptized child?***

Yes. The Church holds every child in deep love, trust, and hope. When a child dies before Baptism, the Church offers funeral rites as a way to entrust that child to God's boundless mercy and to surround grieving families with comfort and prayer. In such moments, we affirm our belief in a God who is always tender and near to the brokenhearted.

## **Regarding a Service at Bellarmine Chapel**

- ***Is Bellarmine Chapel accessible for those with mobility needs?***

Bellarmino Chapel and narthex are fully accessible to all guests. If members of the funeral procession or attendees have mobility needs, we can rearrange seating to accommodate wheelchairs or other mobility devices within the family and friends' section. Please inform the Pastoral Care team of any specific accessibility requirements so we can ensure a comfortable and welcoming environment for all who come to honor and remember their loved one.

- ***Are there any concerns regarding parking during funerals at Bellarmine?***

The Pastoral Care Team works closely with Xavier University to coordinate arrangements to reserve parking spaces for funeral services. Designated spaces for funeral vehicles (hearse, limos) and for vehicles displaying a valid disability parking permit are available in the circle in front of the chapel. Other funeral attendees are able to park in unmarked, lined spots within the campus parking lots.

- ***Are flowers welcome at the funeral service?***

Bellarmino Chapel welcomes flowers for decorating the narthex and chapel for the funeral service. Any flowers sent as gifts will also be respectfully displayed in these areas. Guests are encouraged to take flowers home after the service; any flowers that

are not taken home will be lovingly placed in front of our statue of Mary as a continued offering of prayer and remembrance. Families and guests are invited to coordinate these arrangements with the Pastoral Care team.

- ***Is the Chapel Narthex available for post-Mass receptions?***

While we warmly welcome all to celebrate the life of your loved one with us, please note that the Bellarmine Chapel narthex is not available for post-Mass receptions due to space and other logistical constraints. We encourage families to consider alternative nearby venues for gatherings after the service, where friends and family can come together in fellowship and remembrance.

- ***Can donations be made in memory of a loved one?***

Many people choose to honor a loved one by inviting donations in their memory. Gifts may be directed to a meaningful charity, such as a hospital, care facility, or other nonprofit, allowing the deceased's life and values to continue making a difference. Donations may also be made to Bellarmine Parish, which can use these gifts to support ongoing ministry, pastoral care, and parish life. Such contributions provide comfort to those remembering the deceased and create a lasting legacy of faith and service.

## **Grief Resources**

Our Pastoral Care Team is in a time of prayerful discernment in this season of our parish life about how we might best accompany those who are grieving. As this ministry continues to take shape, we invite you to explore this collection of local grief support resources (link here: <https://resources.catholicaoc.org/offices/respect-life-ministries/issues/bereavement>) thoughtfully compiled by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and this podcast (link here: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1932279>), created by a spiritual director who is rooted in Ignatian spirituality. For more resources, including the opportunity to meet with one of our grief volunteers, please contact our pastoral care team at [pastoralcare@bellarminechapel.org](mailto:pastoralcare@bellarminechapel.org).

## **Digital link to APPENDIX files**

Please scan the QR code below to access the APPENDIX, which contains the following documents:

- *The Funeral Planning Worksheet*
- *Suggested Scripture Readings*
- *Suggested Music*
- *Sample Prayers of the Faithful*



[APPENDIX](#)



[Pastoral Care Webpage](#)

## Pastoral Care Contact Information

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|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Parish Office   | <b>Phone:</b> 513-745-3398<br><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:office@bellarminechapel.org">office@bellarminechapel.org</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Pastoral Care   | <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:pastoralcare@bellarminechapel.org">pastoralcare@bellarminechapel.org</a><br><br><b>Jane Myers, Director of Parish Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Phone:</b> (513) 745-3317</li><li>• <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:myers@bellarminechapel.org">myers@bellarminechapel.org</a></li></ul><br><b>Christine Shea, Pastoral Ministry Assistant</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Phone:</b> (513) 427-6332</li><li>• <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:shea@bellarminechapel.org">shea@bellarminechapel.org</a></li></ul> |
| Parochial Vicar | <b>(For urgent sacramental needs only)</b><br><b>Rev. Patrick Fairbanks, S.J.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. <b>Phone:</b> (513) 745-2950</li><li>5. <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:fairbanks@bellarminechapel.org">fairbanks@bellarminechapel.org</a></li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

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### References

**Funeral Planning Sheets**, *St. Xavier Parish, Cincinnati*

Marchal, M. (1987). **Parish Funerals**. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications.

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**Mass of Christian Burial Resource for Planning**, *The Community of the Good Shepherd; August, 2023*



# Bellarmino Chapel

## Our Mission

*Bellarmino Chapel is a Catholic faith community that strives to live out the teachings and example of Jesus Christ in the spiritual tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola. We seek to be a parish where the Holy Spirit transforms lives in new and creative ways.*

*Nourished at the table of the Eucharist, we are sent on a mission to make disciples, serve those in need, work for justice, and welcome all with love.*

## Parish Family Vision Statement

*Being transformed in the Body of Christ, to bear hope and healing, in the Ignatian tradition.*